

**Towards a public-organization conversational framework of reputational  
influence: A grounded theory study**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Reputation is posited as a narrative and communicative construct that is developed through conversations with publics (Aula, 2011) and among publics (Mahon, 2002; Mahon & Wartick, 2003). However, to date research in the field of reputation has been mostly business and management focused and defined. The absence of a fully explicated definition (with an emphasis on reputation) in public relations theory and research limits theory building in public relations. The aim of this study is to propose a substantive model of reputation from a public relations perspective by examining how online conversations impact organizational reputation in four social media (discussion sites, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) conversations about four organizations (Apple, BP, Nokia and Toyota). It analyzes in detail how conversations between publics affect an organization's reputation. A grounded theory approach was employed which allowed for better understanding of how concepts of reputation are socially constructed through issues, values, and concerned conversations between publics about their organization. The findings suggest that the central tenet of an organization's reputation is the management of public relationships which can lead to positive, strong and resilient reputations. Further, the cultivation of relationships with publics through social media conversations is important to the longevity and reputation of an organization. This study proposes the Publics Conversational Model of Reputational Influence which blends three important concepts to the scholarship, which are: a) public relationship, b) reputation as a sum of perceptions that is derived from stories and conversations and inherently comparative and c) publics and their formation in online conversations. Building on the fundamental premise that quality relationships are the key—precursor of a favorable reputation (Fombrun, 1996), the model proposes the concept of publics—organization relationships (POR). It explains the process of reputation formation, its landscape and key constructs.

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## **ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no materials previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning”

Wan Norbani Wan Noordin: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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# CHAPTER 1

## Overview

### 1.0 Introduction

This introductory chapter provides the structure that underpins the current research by introducing the aims and objectives and describing the research problem. It explains the research questions that arise from the research problem. The delimitations of the research are considered, and key research contributions to theory and practice are highlighted. Overall, the findings of this research provide insights into the direction of reputation studies in public relations scholarship. Areas for future research are suggested, along with contributions the study makes to the existing literature concerning issues related to the conversations of publics in social media. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis and a summary of each chapter.

### 1.1 Problem orientation—shifting the focus

Contemporary public relationships have located considerable power of influence within the organization, which acts as the center of communication as far as these crucial relationships are concerned. This places the publics at the receiving end, as strategically placed objects. With the development of communication technology, social media have empowered publics with the ability to converse with one another through formal and informal social networking sites. In relation to a specific organization, the expansion of ‘talk’ both about the organization and to the organization opens up the possibility of renegotiating its reputation. One of the basic functions of public relations is reputation management, and yet research in the field of reputation is dominated by business scholars, particularly in the area of strategy and management. This thesis seeks to explore, empirically, the dynamics of public relationships by focusing on the role of publics in shaping an organization’s reputation. It suggests that the publics have a vital role to play in the organization–public relationship and reputation landscape; thus, they are no longer merely strategic targets.

Innovative development in communication technology has afforded both organizations and their publics the freedom to communicate with and about each other. This has

contributed to an increased amount of research focusing on social media and public relations, which have suggested that social media are the conduit for relationship building. Of importance to the present research is that relationship building on social media has been highlighted in past studies as one of the promoters of reputation.

The research is an inductive study that employs a grounded theory approach (which is explained in more depth in chapter 3) in which a theory is constructed through data. Specifically, this is a constructivist grounded theory study that draws on the concept of reputation as the sum of perceptions from internal and external publics. The study aims to socially construct organizational reputations through an analysis of conversations, interactions, transactions, exchanges and linkages between various publics on social media. What do their conversations tell ‘listeners’ about the organizations’ reputations? Thus, the study is concerned with explicating and analyzing the role that online conversations play in influencing reputation.

Business management scholars such as Fombrun and Shanley (1990), Fombrun (1996) and Berens and van Riel (2004) have dominated the study of reputation and have made explicit the concept of reputation as an asset to the organization while identifying variables of reputation that, in the end, would contribute to better financial gains. Other management scholars specializing in strategy research, such as Deephouse (2000), Prabhu and Stewart (2001), and Rindova (1997), have analyzed reputation as an asset of the organization that can be managed and can contribute to the organization’s competitive advantage in the market place of products and services. A consequence of this thinking has been that the primary focus of these scholars has been to quantify the value of reputation to the organization, and rankings and awards, such as those conferred by *Forbes*, *Fortune*, or the *Wall Street Journal*, depend on existing measurement of specific variables. For example, in *Fortune Magazine*, the listing criteria of the USA’s admired companies, consisting of eight variables which are used to judge which companies are most admired, are gathered from specifically selected publics. These variables are: quality of management, ability of the company to attract and keep talented people, innovation, environmental and social responsibility, smart use of corporate assets, the company’s value as an investment, quality of its products and services, as well as financial strength (Schreiber, 2002).

However, the greater part of past research among management and business scholars (Fombrun & Pan 2006; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; van Riel & Fombrun 2002; Wiedman & Buxel, 2005) has been more concerned with exploring the positive correlation between financial performance and reputation which, as a result, is likely to attract publics to form relationships with the organizations. Thus, the argument in these studies is focused on how a good reputation would lead to relationship formation rather than how a good relationship would determine a good reputation. Consequently, the focus has been on measuring reputation against financial performance, or the 'bottom line', rather than measuring enduring organization–public relationships. This phenomenon is worthy of note, because it emphasizes the value of reputation that is placed on relationships with publics.

From another perspective, public relations is often defined as 'reputation management' by practitioners and academics, and is believed to be one of the bases of public relations practice (L'Etang, 2008). However, most definitions and empirical research of reputation come from fields other than public relations, and although many scholars and practitioners from various specializations, such as Fombrun (1996), Grunig and Hung (2002) and MacMillan, Money, Downing and Hillenbrand (2005), agree that reputation management is equated to relationship management, a useful definition is still lacking (with the exception of L'Etang, 2008). The absence of a fully explicated definition (with an emphasis on reputation) in public relations theory and research has limited theory building in public relations. Reputation research with an emphasis on public relations is a step forward in having a focused approach, especially since the emphasis will be on the communication with publics.

In the past decade, different aspects of reputation research have emerged in which the quality of relationships and relational outcomes were discussed. This has given rise to relationship–focused definitions of reputation. The present research adopts a definition in which reputation is discussed as a set of interpretations in the form of stories, anecdotes and other discursive elements that publics make among themselves about organizations (Aula & Mantere, 2008), and where these conversations form relationships, and their reflections also mirror organizations' reputations (Bruning, Dials & Shirka, 2008; Carroll & Combs 2003; Yang & Grunig, 2003; Kioussis, Popescu & Mitrook, 2007).

Therefore, the underlying themes that structure and connect the foundation of this study are threefold. First, reputation is seen as a *sum of perceptions from internal and external publics*. Thus, reputation is a reflection of a set of images that the publics formulate from the organization's identities, actions and activities. Second, the concept of *organization–public relations (OPR)* represents the link between an organization and its publics through patterns of interaction, transaction and conversation (Broom, Casey & Richie, 2000), where OPR emphasizes the communication between an organization and its publics, and where the desired outcome of public relations is an enhanced OPR (Center & Jackson, 1995). Third, *publics and their conversations* are agents for relationship building and ultimately shape a reputation. They are therefore sources of reputation formation, where reputation is posited as a narrative and communicative construct that is developed through conversations with publics (Aula, 2011), and among publics (Mahon, 2002; Mahon & Wartick, 2003). The emphasis is not only on conversations between publics, and of publics with organizations but that the role of publics is seen as an aware and active one; they are central to these conversations, narrations and networking that could impact reputation and the management thereof.

The research explores empirically the concept of reputation from a public relations view. Essentially, this study sets out to describe reputation and its constructs, as shown through an analysis of social media conversations among publics. This research supports the underlying notion that publics have an active role to play in organization–public relationships (OPR). An increasing amount of research on social media usage and public relations points towards social media as a conduit for relationship building. For this reason, conversations on social media are the source of data for this study.

The main purpose of this research is to propose a substantive model of reputation from a public relations perspective in order to expand the public relations and reputation management scholarship. As a result, this study employs a grounded theory approach as the latter is most commonly used to propose a new theory, especially where little is known or to provide a fresh perspective on existing knowledge (Goulding, 2002). Grounded theory is a method of inquiry that allows for greater understanding of how concepts of reputation are socially constructed through issues, values, and concerned conversations between publics about their organization.

## **1.2 Background to the research problem**

This section provides an outline of the research problem, justifies the importance of this study, and examines the context for the research problem. The study focuses on key aspects of reputation and public relations research. Primarily, it is designed to explicate reputation in public relationships and to expand the role of publics in public relations research, to show how their conversations can potentially influence an organization's reputation, and then to suggest and explain the determinants of reputation from the values emerging and the issues that are believed to be important by the publics. It also contributes and develops public relationship and reputation research on social media from a public relations' perspective. Hence, this thesis combines three elements of emerging research topics: reputation, relationship building on social media, and the role of publics.

While public relations scholars initially explored reputation from the viewpoint of public affairs, they have increasingly focused on the relational aspects between organizations and publics (Bronn, 2007; Caruana, 1997; Hutton, Goodman, Alexander, & Genest, 2001; Markwick & Fill, 1997). After all, the core of public relations is communication for the purpose of building relationships, and public relations activities build and maintain such relationships between the organization and its publics. These relationships, also referred to as organization–public relationships (OPRs), are a series of interactions, transactions, exchanges and linkages between an organization and its publics (Broom, Casey & Richie, 2000; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Over the years, different aspects of reputation research have emerged in which the quality of relationships and relational outcomes were discussed, but to date little has been done to connect public relationships concepts and study with reputation. Even less work has been done to develop a deeper theoretical understanding.

This study focuses on OPRs as seen from the publics' perspectives, and will therefore examine the conversations of publics about organizations. Because social media has enabled these conversations to take place freely and unencumbered, the analysis focuses on social media conversations. Thus, the research explores the interactions with, and exchanges and linkages between publics and their organizations through the analysis of conversations on social media.

There is an extensive literature on social media and public relations functions (for example, Cho & Hong, 2009; Eyrych, Padman & Sweetser 2008; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005; Waters & Jamal, 2011) and there is also a significant expansion in analyzing social media and outcomes of reputation (for example, Booth & Matic, 2011; Park & Lee, 2007; Schultz, Utz, Goritz, 2011). But more studies are needed to explore social media as a function of relationship cultivation, especially exploring conversations within and beyond the confines of an organization's social media platforms (McAllister, 2012). More research that furthers theoretical and empirical development of the interaction between publics is needed because these areas of research are lacking, as Neville and Menguc (2006) point out. These concepts (that is, OPR and publics) and the interaction between them are important to further the study of reputation in public relations.

Recent studies in reputation have spread beyond the realms of business to the areas of communication technology and relationships among publics (Aula, 2011). Social media are important in reputation studies because they are not only channels for the dissemination of information from an organization to its publics but, as highlighted by Aula (2010), they are places where an ongoing process of assessment of the organization occurs. Social media have the effect of presenting a subjective truth (as a result of searching for information about an organization, creating interpretations and discussions on an organization) which, once understood and shared with others, becomes a collective truth. This collective picture of an organization will be about the organization and what it should be (Aula, 2010). Aula (2010) cautions organizations that if they do not respond to undesirable opinions, these will become difficult to correct. He suggests that when using social media, an organization cannot just look good but must also *be* good. Thus, online reputation management has become very important to organizations as they are becoming increasingly more concerned about what is being said about them online. Practitioners are cautious when it comes to online communication because they need to be skillful, sensitive and ethical in their use of social media if they want to build strong relationships that can overcome reputational problems in the future (Balnaves & Mahoney, 2009).

Studies such as these indicate that public relations scholarship has been moving towards explicating conversations in connection to relationship building, especially via social

media. In these studies, social media conversations have been connected with relationship building, which has been shown to impact an organization's reputation. This suggests that conversations between publics can also impact an organization's reputation.

The importance of the present study lies in the fact that it answers the call for more empirical research concerning the link between online communication and reputation management (Aula, 2011). Specifically, more research is needed on social networking (Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009) and social media usage that contributes to the scholarship of public relations (McAllister, 2012). Previous researchers have recommended that contributions should be made to explore conversations within and beyond the confines of an organization's social media platforms (McAllister, 2012) and further theoretical and empirical development of the interaction between publics is needed because these areas of research are lacking (Neville & Menguc, 2006). This is especially so in the study of reputation resulting from organization–public relationships (OPR) and those that focus on assessing online conversations and the publics' communications, as well as how reputational and conversational constructs of an organization inform about the latter's reputation.

Therefore, relationship is both an antecedent and a consequence of reputation. It is an antecedent because a good reputation will attract the publics to want to form relationships with the organization by purchasing its products and services, investing and working with it. This relationship can, however, also be a result of an existing reputation, and therefore promoting, managing or enhancing current or future relationships with publics is important in reputation management. This study aims to identify and analyze the role of public conversations in informing the constructs that inform and shape an organization's reputation.

This research is timely, as research in public relations is moving towards identifying the role of relationship management in organizational outcomes (Ni, 2012), such as reputation (Yang, 2007). There is a gap, however, in this trend; there is a disconnect between relationship management and the identification of publics in the theory and research of public relations (Ni, 2012). In addition, Duhe (2012) found in her analysis of 30 years of past research across four public relations journals (from 1981–2011) that

most of new media research was focused on application and perception rather than on proposing theoretical frameworks for relationship building (11%). Hence, this thesis is significant not only because it aims to explicate the publics' conversation on social media, identify components that the publics deem important for the reputation of an organization and thereby identify the conversational publics based on their characteristics, but also because it concludes with a proposed model that could potentially explain the importance of cultivating publics–organization relationships (as opposed to organization–public relationships) for reputation promotion and management through social media and constant conversations.

Underlying this study is a grounded theory approach that adopts a systematic yet flexible set of procedures for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to develop and inductively derive a theory about a phenomenon that emerges from the data rather than being imposed onto the data (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In social research, using a grounded theory approach, scholars normally begin with an area of study and allow what is relevant to that area to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the current research, the area of study is the phenomenon of reputation in social media.

The major significance of this study is that it connects three key areas of study: reputation, public relations, and social media. In particular, it addresses a gap in the body of knowledge that was identified at the beginning of the study; namely, the lack of research into reputation as it emerges in the online or social media environment. Thus, it contributes to the development of reputation research from the public relations perspective, and from the publics' point of view. Ultimately, the purpose of this research is to propose a substantive theory in public relations and reputation by identifying the components and values that emerged from the analyses of publics' conversations on social media. It also adds to the social media and public relations area of study and research.

### **1.3 Research questions and key outcomes of this study**

The key outcomes of this research provide the determinants of reputation derived from the publics' conversation. These determinants are used to formulate the substantive model. This model proposes that the reputation landscape involves three concepts: reputation, organization–public relationship, and the role of publics and their emergent

characteristics on social media. Through this research and the proposed model, this study contributes to the bodies of knowledge in public relations and communication, social media and reputation. In particular, by examining existing conversations focused on four multinational organizations, the study contributes empirically to theory building in public relations scholarship. However, not only scholars can benefit from this study; public relations practitioners and organizations can also benefit because the research explicates the importance of social media to communication and public relations activities.

Therefore, the objectives for this study are as follows:

- 1) To analyze and identify the emerging themes that surfaced from the analysis of online conversations*

The approach taken in this research is to analyze themes that emerge from the conversations. These themes are proposed to be determinants of reputation, consisting of elements and values as conversed by the publics. Definitive aspects of reputation are 'things' spoken about, discussed or mentioned (Aula & Mantere, 2008). For the research, analyzing conversations on social media involved analyzing something written, discussed or mentioned. In line with grounded theory, themes and patterns relating to an organization's image and reputation that emerged from the data was recorded, analyzed and proposed.

- 2) To determine and analyze the publics that participated in the conversations.*

Reputation is developed based on the perceptions of internal and external publics. It is held and constantly re-enacted by a variety of stakeholders (Aula & Mantere, 2008). In this research, the term "publics" is used in the place of "stakeholders", based on the assumption that in social media anonymity is the rule rather than the exception. As such, it would be challenging to identify stakeholder groups (those who might have a "stake" in the organization) unless the individuals themselves make it known. Publics, on the other hand, can be defined and described by the conversations revolving around issues, values and concerns that are made public on social media.

- 3) *To describe reputational constructs based on the analyzed issues, concerns and perceptions of the publics.*

From the themes that emerge from the analysis of issues and concerns, reputational constructs and values are proposed and described. These constructs are then considered in the formation of the model.

- 4) *To determine the importance of each social medium based on the online conversations.*

This objective is considered important for this study because of the different social media platforms used. There are four social media platforms used for this study, each with different characteristics and capabilities. These include discussion sites, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. By comparing and contrasting these media, the importance and function of each becomes apparent.

- 5) *To propose a theoretical explanation of an organization's reputation and online conversations by analyzing the links between the two concepts.*

A key objective of grounded theory and this study is to provide a theoretical explanation that may inform future research on reputation management and public relations. A model is proposed as a result of further analysis of the themes that emerged from this research.

In order to achieve the broad objectives of this study, a number of specific research questions were formulated to guide the research. These research questions are as follows:

- RQ1: What are the discursive themes that emerge from the online conversations under analysis?
- RQ2: Who are the publics that participate in the conversations analyzed?
- RQ3: What is the significance of each social medium as it contributes to an organization's reputation?
- RQ4: What are the key elements of the reputational constructs for each organization based on the overall perceptions and reactions communicated by their publics in online conversations?
- RQ5: How do online stakeholders and publics' conversations shape an organization's reputation?

In line with the requirements of the grounded theory approach, the research questions evolved alongside the flow of the study and the data collection process. They started out

as general terms that reflected the topic and issues being researched, but once the data collection was completed, it became obvious that there was a need to refine the research questions to reflect the gathered data. As a result, the questions became more specific and targeted. The changes in research questions were made to better reflect the types of questions needed to comprehend the problem (Creswell, 2007, Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in greater detail.

#### **1.4 Research methodology: Sequence and justification**

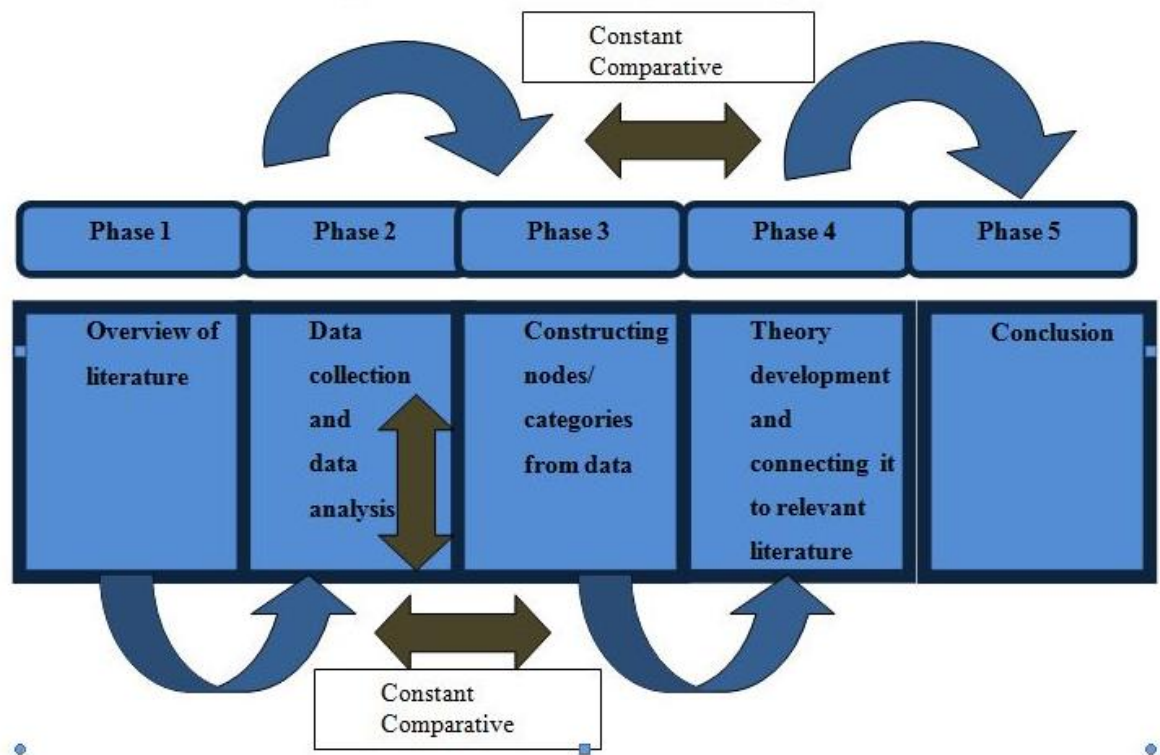
This study employs grounded theory as a method of enquiry. One of the underlying themes of grounded theory is the importance of theory grounded in reality that has been systematically obtained through social research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goulding, 2002). Grounded theory methods are not prescriptions or packages but a set of principles and practices that emphasize flexible guidelines rather than rules, recipes and requirements (Charmaz, 2006). The grounded theory method encourages researchers to interact persistently with their data, while remaining constantly involved with their emerging analyses (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

##### **1.4.1 Grounded theory**

Historically, data collection for grounded theory research was done through in-depth interviews, but the development of new perspectives on grounded theory, such as the constructivist approach, has allowed for greater flexibility and the ability to gather mass data from secondary sources. As there is limited knowledge on how reputation is constructed by publics and, particularly, through conversations on social media, grounded theory was selected as the most suitable approach to analyze and conceptualize online reputation. Grounded theory allows for a greater understanding of how reputation's concepts are socially constructed through issues, values, and concerned conversations between publics about their organization on social media. Online conversations are the focus of this analysis. Substantial amounts of data was collected and transferred to NVivo software (version 9) for better data management and analysis. Data collection and analysis proceeded simultaneously and each informed and streamlined the other (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Goulding, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Constant comparative analysis was applied at each level of analysis, and themes were generated as they emerged from the data. Guidelines in the form of the research

objectives and questions were used to remain within the scope of the study. Themes that emerged were specific to the context of each organization studied, but some were more general and related to all four organizations (the process is illustrated in Figure 1.1).

**Figure 1.1 Grounded Theory research process**



#### **1.4.2 Methods of gathering data and data analysis**

Innovative technologies have provided new tools for data collection such as social media. Unobtrusive data (See section 3.1.9) were used in this grounded theory research. The combination of unobtrusive data in a grounded theory research is considered relatively new because in a typical grounded theory in-depth interviews were traditionally used to collect data.

The research uses a combination of four social media for sources of data. These are discussion sites (which include micro and macro blogs), Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. This unobtrusive data was obtained during the second to the third quarter of the year (April to September 2010) from well-known organizations (Apple, BP, Toyota and Nokia) using a purposive sampling method and a few inclusion criteria.

All data was collected and analyzed in the interpretive and thematic tradition. The research follows Charmaz' (2006) guidelines on data analysis in terms of constructing analytic codes and categories through the constant comparative approach, a key process in grounded theory study. The themes that emerged were then conceptualized into a proposed model.

The data reveal the reputation determinants that the publics deem important. Some of these determinants support past research by other scholars, such as quality products and services. Other determinants extend the reputational landscape by proposing more dimensions to reputation, such as the linkage between organization and industry reputation.

### **1.5 Scope, limitations and delimitations**

As with any research, no matter how carefully designed, this study has limitations. First, it is limited by time, as the study covers a specific timeframe from April to September 2010 and therefore represents only a snapshot in time. Second, the study focuses on four business organizations (Apple, BP, Nokia, and Toyota), each with different functions and organizational foci, which limits some of the generalizability of the research. It cannot be assumed, for example, that all for-profit organizations behave similarly. Nor can it be assumed, however, that the results are representative of specific industries. This study is also limited in its sampling approach; the sampling techniques for choosing the four organizations were purposive, and the sampling population (the participants of online conversations) were divided according to their participation, and were topic-specific for each organization, rather than arising from a predetermined set of sampling criteria.

As already noted, this research focuses on the public conversations and discussions on four social media (discussion sites, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter). Identification of common themes were derived from the data analyzed and used for theory development in the latter stage of the report. The significance of this study lies in the identification and furthering of our understanding of how reputation is constructed. This understanding underlies the development of the *Publics Conversational Model of Reputational Influence*, a substantive theory of reputation. Theory development is thus derived from the conceptual analysis of patterned relationships (Charmaz, 2006).

## **1.6 Potential contributions to knowledge**

It is hoped that this thesis will not only make a theoretical contribution but also a contribution to the management of communication with publics and organizational reputation. The theoretical inputs include a contribution in a form of a new model which extends the organization-public relationship (OPR) concept and discovers the public–organization relationship (POR). As a consequence, the concept of publics, their characteristics and communication with organizations in reputation management is extended. It also proposes a link between public relations, reputation and social media studies grounded in public relations scholarship, and provides an emphasis on discursive themes as reputational constructs, offering social media as conduits for relationship building.

In terms of practice, it highlights the importance of understanding the conversations between publics and how these affect an organization’s reputation. Moreover, it recognizes social media’s function as feedback and information channels, not only for the use of managers to provide organizational messages to the publics, but also for the publics to select and discuss topics they deem crucial for an organization to consider, evaluate and act upon, which managers can tap into and analyze. Most importantly, this study highlights that the publics decide the agenda of communication with the organization they want to converse with, as well as what they want to communicate about. The data and the model reveal, among other things, that an organization’s reputation is not independent but is influenced by its industry and its CEO’s reputation, for example.

Methodologically, this study provides an empirical example of how an unobtrusive grounded study analysis is possible using data derived from social media. Thus, it expands the ways of deriving secondary data for a grounded theory approach, providing further pathways of application beyond conducting research. The research also shows that social media is a good source for obtaining large amounts of unobtrusive data, making it ideal for grounded theory research.

## **1.7 Outline of the thesis**

This thesis consists of nine chapters. It follows a constructivist grounded theory strategy where, generally, the literature review is done after the analysis of data and is not just about reviewing the literature but more about the identification and explanation of concepts and categories. Constructivist grounded theory allows flexibility to provide an overview of the concepts as a starting point for the researcher to begin his or her analysis.

Therefore, the research includes a brief review of important concepts to the study in Chapter 2 to set the background for the direction of the thesis. Chapter 2 presents a limited literature review of concepts and topics that are important to the research. It provides a discussion of relationship-building as a cornerstone of reputation management, explicates the concept of publics, their formation and changes in their role in organization–publics relationship, and lastly, discusses the role of social media in the reflections of images, identity and reputation.

Chapter 3 explains the grounded theory orientation of the study. It describes the many origins of grounded theory and emphasizes the constructivist orientation. It lays out the processes involved in exercising a grounded theory approach, with the main process being constant comparison at each level. It also describes the gathering of unobtrusive data and thematic analysis processes.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 describe the results of the analyses for Apple, BP, Nokia, and Toyota, respectively. These chapters highlight the findings from the analysis, divided into several themes and specific to each research question.

Chapter 8 combines and discusses the findings from the four previous chapters. It relates the findings to past research and identifies the discursive themes from the analysis presented in chapters 4 to 7. These themes are then used to formulate the model. The last section describes the formation of the proposed model or substantive theory and how it was constructed.

Chapter 9 outlines the implications of the study for research and practice. It summarizes the discussion and concludes the thesis by addressing the initial objectives and the

research questions, as well as the limitations and contributions it makes. The chapter concludes with some suggestions for possible future research and recommendations for the practice of reputation management.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

The introduction to this research has explained the theoretical background of the study and the major research gaps that it set out to fill, thereby highlighting the study's importance and significance. The purpose of the study is to shift the central axis of communication between an organization and its publics towards empowering publics and acknowledging their role in constructing the organization's reputation. This is particularly relevant in the social media, which has seen the empowerment of publics and changes in the role they play in organization–public relationship activities and the reputation process.

This study, titled *Towards a public–organization conversational framework of reputational influence: A grounded theory study* contributes to the study of reputation and endeavors to understand and explain the modernization of the publics' role and the organization–publics relationship concept.

## **1.9 Defining terms**

### **1.9.1 New media technology versus social media**

The term “new media” is a vague and yet conveniently broad concept that academics have used since the advent of the Internet. The unifying term of “new media” actually represents a wide range of changes in media production, distribution and use particularly in technological, textual, conventional and cultural changes (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant & Kelly, 2009). On the other hand, Van Dijk (2006) provides a more technical explanation, defining new media as a combination of transmission links and artificial memories filled with text, data, images and sounds that can be installed in separate devices, either online or offline. Others have defined new media as blogs, RSS Feeds, Google Books, podcasts, vidcasts, online video (YouTube, blimptv, etc.) social networks, search engines, affiliate programs, viral marketing, second life, online games, virtual trade shows, online communities, e–books, and kiosks, just to name some of the

better known platforms (Price, 2007; Sponder, 2007). Andone et al., (2007) associate new media technologies with computers, Internet, mobile phones (communication) and text/instant messaging, which may be covered by the term “cloud” computing.

The new media are said to incorporate communications systems, delivery platforms, hardware and software, as well as the content they generate from the cultural systems, social provisions and societies surrounding the development and usage of a technology (Flew 2005). New media are also defined as digital technologies that enable interactivity and self-sufficient distribution of information (Seo, Kim & Yang, 2009). As such, new media technology is a broad concept that encompasses the convergence of multiple media that predominantly bridge time and space, promote interactivity, eliminate gatekeepers, and provide a level playing field between suppliers of information and users. These activities have given birth to societal, cultural and other technological systems that continue to grow and multiply.

Social media on the other hand is a new term that has been coined to account for the increasing potentiality for horizontal interaction among users of new media. They are characterized by the development of conversations between writers and readers within their social channel (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). In Web 2.0 terms, this would be an Internet based application that emphasizes user-generated contents. Sites such as Twitter (live journal), blogs, discussion sites and Facebook represent examples of social media. They not only allow individuals to post a variety of information on them, but also the ability to link it to their friends. Hence, the name “social networking applications” have been used to describe social media (Komito & Bates 2009). Social networking sites range from Facebook to Flickr (tagged photos) to wikis (a website configured to support entries from different users; no previous demonstration of expertise is needed to participate, and a “bad” entry is supposed to be reviewed and corrected by the online community continuously and in real time). Media sharing systems allow users to share multiple forms of information such as videos (YouTube), photographs (Flickr), documents (DocStoc) and presentations (SlideShare) with evaluations and feedback mechanisms attached (Bonson & Flores, 2010). Online social networks have given the power of voice to users to disseminate information instantly and to a large group of people by means of the “mashup” philosophy (Bonson & Flores,

2010). The opportunity to dialogue in this modern day *agora* is ubiquitous now, as online social networks are becoming a commonly chosen communication channel.

For the purpose of this study, “new media technology” will be used to define the broad concept as defined above, and “social media” will be used in the search for answers to the research questions of this study.

### **1.9.2 Dialogue versus conversations**

The concept of dialogue has been closely associated with public relations theory and practice. There are numerous earlier studies that have explored and tested the idea of dialogue in relation to public relations (for example, Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent & Taylor, 2002; McAllister & Taylor, 2007; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). The focus of dialogue in public relations research has been centered on the exchange of information between the organization and its publics, and vice versa (Bruning, Dials & Shirka, 2008). In their seminal paper on dialogic approaches, Kent and Taylor (2002) contend that it is difficult to incorporate genuine dialogue in public relations, as the real definition of dialogue suggests that it normally starts with the willingness to continue a conversation, not so much for the purpose of swaying opinions, but more for the participants to understand each other to reach mutually satisfying positions.

The term “conversation” has sometimes been used interchangeably with the term “dialogue” (Baker, 2009; Johnson, 2009). Conversation is more broadly defined (Bjelland & Chapman, 2008) and yet suggests a similar meaning. Conversations refer to discussions or communication between two or more people or entities. In line with the main objective and focus of this study, namely to explain reputational constructs in online conversations rather than explaining dialogical constructs in public relations, and to avoid becoming involved in the debate over definitions of what constitutes dialogue, the term “conversation” is used throughout.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Setting the scene: Limited literature review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In a grounded theory study, the researcher is to enter the field with no prior biases, assumptions, or preconceived notions. Although it might appear counter-intuitive, suspending the formal literature review until *after* the data collection and analysis has been completed, is a recognized approach to limiting preconceived ideas and biases held by the researcher (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Most researchers will have their own specialized background that will provide a perspective from which to research the phenomenon as without this grounding in existing knowledge, pattern recognition would be limited to the obvious and superficial, depriving the researcher of the conceptual advantage from which to commence theorizing (Goulding, 2002). Consequently, this chapter will provide a brief review of concepts important to the study. It will introduce and discuss the concept of reputation and its development from past and current studies to set the framework of the study. This is in line with the constructivist approach of grounded theory that allows for some review of literature to be carried out before the research begins (Charmaz, 2006). This chapter will discuss relationship building as a cornerstone of reputation management, explicate how publics are formed and their role in reputation management, and identify how social media have empowered the publics to interpret reputation through conversations, discussions and networking.

#### **2.2 Explicating the concept of reputation**

Public relations is often defined as “reputation management’ by practitioners and academics, and is believed to be one of the bases of public relations practice (L’Etang, 2008). However, most definitions of reputation come from fields other than public relations. Although many scholars and practitioners, such as Fombrun (1996), Grunig and Hung (2002) and MacMillan, Money, Downing and Hillenbrand (2005) agree that reputation management equates to relationship management, a useful definition is still lacking, with the exception of L’Etang (2008). The absence of a fully explicated definition, with an emphasis on reputation in public relations, limits theory building in

public relations. An emphasis in public relations is a step forward to having a focused approach to more reputation research in public relations scholarship.

‘Reputation’ is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “The beliefs or opinions that are generally held about someone or something” (1989). Similarly, corporate reputation scholar, Fombrun, coined his much-cited definition from the American Heritage Dictionary: “It is the overall estimation in which a company is held by its constituents” (1996, p.37). He posits that reputation is the emotional reaction of publics to the organization’s name. It is a function of complex interrelationships and exchanges between and among stakeholders and publics and in order to acquire a positive, enduring and resilient reputation, organizations need to invest in building and maintaining good relationships with their publics (Fombrun, 1996; Mahon, 2002). Aula and Mantere (2008) add that reputation is also a dynamic concept with two main attributes: it changes over time and it bridges different temporal perspectives. In other words, reputation does not only change over time but it is an evaluative judgment that is shared between different publics that is temporally stable.

Furthermore, reputation can be perceived as the sum of images from various stakeholders and publics of the organization and reputation, which can be converted into competitive advantage in that this advantage can lead to the publics’ support or it can act as a shield that protects the organization during crises (Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & Pan, 2006; Fombrun & van Riel, 2004). The sum of images originate not only from an organization’s performance and behavior but also from its communication activities (Doorley & Garcia, 2007), and can therefore be seen as symbolic interactions.

Other recent definitions relate reputation to the esteem associated with the organization (Simoes & Dibb, 2008) that can pave the way for acceptance and approval by stakeholders. Esteem here refers to a high regard or respect that is associated with good reputation. Scholars, when defining reputation, emphasize competitive advantage by demonstrating differences from other similar organizations (Watson & Kitchen, 2008).

Besides associating reputation with image and esteem, other scholars such as Post and Griffin (1997) view reputation as a reflection of opinions, attitudes and beliefs held by

internal and external publics such as employees, customers, suppliers, media and others (Post & Griffin, 1997). These images and relationship exchanges can lead to the publics' favorable predisposition to an organization that enables it to attract quality applicants, investors and customers, lower its costs, increase its prices and create competitive barriers that will ultimately increase its profits and stock prices (Deephouse, 1997; Fombrun, 1996; Mahon, 2002; Walker, 2010). As such, positive reputations facilitate and expedite the business of successful organizations while conversely, negative reputation can damage and destroy individuals and organizations (Gibson, Gonzales & Castanon, 2006). This study draws from the concept of reputation as a *sum of perceptions from internal and external publics*.

## **2.2.1 Reputation and its components**

### ***2.2.1.1 Corporate image, identity and reputation***

Corporate reputation has been linked to a range of related, but different, concepts such as identity and image. There are multiple perspectives when it comes to defining and relating these concepts. Although the concepts are not the same, researchers often use them interchangeably (L'Etang, 2008; Simoes & Dibb, 2008; Srivoravilai & Melewar, 2008; Vella & Melewar, 2008). This study adopts the stance that corporate identity, corporate image and corporate reputation are concepts that vary in meaning but that identity and image are crucial components when describing reputation. Although related, corporate image and reputation represent different and yet overlapping aspects of an organization. Reputation consists of symbolic meanings (stories, anecdotes etc.) whilst image is more of how 'things' appear (Aula & Mantere, 2008).

Corporate image is a general evaluation and is grounded in the external environment, comprising a set of beliefs and feelings the publics hold about an organization (Dowling, 2002; Markwill & Fill, 1997; Schultz, Ervolder & Hulten, 1997; Simoes & Dibb, 2008; Walker, 2010) which can either mirror or distort the organization's identity (Fombrun, 1996). An organization's image varies depending on the publics, as it relates to their experiences, beliefs, emotions, knowledge, relations and the impressions they have of an organization (Vella & Melewar, 2008). Thus, images are *reflections* of an organization that are continually shifting and adjusting whereas, in comparison, reputation is relatively stable and derived over time from multiple images

(Rindova, 1997). Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004) further argue that an image or sets of images are “a reflection of the organization’s identity and its corporate brand” (p.45). Dowling (2008) asserts that organizations have multiple images and reputations and that they are both stakeholder-based constructs (Dowling, 2008). Thus, reputation represents a set of images that the publics formulate from an organization’s identities, actions and activities.

Organizational identity is the set of values and principles that internal publics associate with an organization (Fombrun, 1996; Markwill & Fill, 1997; Walker, 2010). Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994) suggest that internal members define organizational identity as what is distinctive, central and enduring about the organization. Dowling (2002) looks at it from the organization’s point of view and defines identity as the ways and means that an organization expresses and identifies itself to publics through its attributes, symbols, nomenclature, and behaviors (Dowling, 2008), or as Mersham, Theunissen and Peart (2009) state, its ‘personality’. Similarly, Alessandri (2008) asserts that identity is the strategically planned and determined part of an organization’s *self-presentation*. This self-presentation is then received by stakeholders and publics as images that can contribute and inform the reputation of an organization (Watson & Kitchen, 2008). Consequently, corporate identity that is consistent and positive will lead the way to achieving positive images among internal stakeholders, sustaining a competitive advantage and achieving a favorable reputation (Vella & Melewar, 2008). Therefore, even though images, identity and reputation are sometimes used interchangeably, images are actually reflections of an organization’s identity (Rindova, 1997; Mersham et al., 2009), with reputation being bestowed through the perceptions and interactions of others (Watson & Kitchen, 2008). The linkage is perhaps best described by Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004), who defined reputation as “the collective representation of multiple constituencies’ images of a company built up over time and based on a company’s identity programs, its performance and how constituencies have perceived its behaviour” (p.369), thus connecting all three concepts.

This study will focus upon a concept of reputation that is interpretative and socially constructed with and among the publics. It will analyze the concept of reputation through the publics’ interactions, perceptions, concerns and the issues they raised in

their conversations, especially since public expression of opinion through information sharing and networks of communication can affect reputation, suggesting that reputation is formed through subjective impressions *outside* the organization (L'Etang, 2008)

### **2.3 Publics and reputation**

Public relations as an activity depends on relationships between multiple publics. These publics may or may not have a stake in the organization and may have different values and habits (Parkinson & Ekachai, 2006). This study recognizes the difference between the two terms although a public can also be a stakeholder (see Gregory, 2010). Gregory (2010) describes publics as stakeholders who have a particular relationship with the organization. These stakeholder groups form around issues, opportunities, and activities, and are categorized into broad groups that describe the *nature of the stake*; for example, employees and shareholders. Conversely, publics can be extracted from various groups as they come together around an issue which means that stakeholders can be inactive but when they become active because of an issue, they become a public (Gregory, 2010). In that sense, publics are more independent in their relationship with the organizations in comparison to stakeholders (Carneiro, Costa & Neto, 2011).

Grunig and Repper (1992) further describe the term *stakeholder* and *public* in their three-stage model of issue development. The first stage is the *stakeholder stage*, which consists of defining a stakeholder as a group of people whose behavior can influence an organization and be impacted by it. The second stage is the *public stage*, where a stakeholder becomes a member of a public when they recognize one or more consequences of an issue, i.e., a problem. They then organize to find solution for it. This stage differentiates a stakeholder from a general member of a public and shows how 'stakeholders' become 'publics'. The third stage is the *issue stage*. This is where the publics organize and create issues out of the problem they have perceived. Hallahan (2000) contends that stakeholders in this context are passive and suggests that where public relations efforts are directed to, all groups be described as publics but there is a need to recognize that they differ in their levels of activity and passivity.

This study will focus on describing the publics that participated in the online conversations concerning issues about the four selected organizations.

Drawing from Dewey's original concepts of public<sup>1</sup> and building on Grunig and Hunt's (1984) segmentation of people into publics according to their behavior and communication about an issue, the situational theory of publics posits that not only does a public form around the issue but that there are four types of publics: nonpublic, latent, aware, and active. Essentially then, the theory postulates how publics recognize, react and find solutions for these issues.

Kruger–Ross and Waters (2013) explained that *latent publics* are likely to process information but are unlikely to be motivated to act upon the situation they face. *Active publics*, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in communication behavior that will raise the awareness levels of other public groups that can elevate their levels of action and behavior. *Aware publics* are those that face and recognize the problem but often face obstacles that prevent them from full involvement. Grunig termed those who do not face the issue in question as a *non–public* (cited in Kruger–Ross & Waters, 2013). Further refinement and segmentation of the publics were made by differentiating between a public and a market. Grunig and Repper (1992) argue that while an organization can choose its markets, publics arise on their own, organize around issues and choose the organization that creates those issues. As such, public relations practitioners communicate with those publics that pose a threat to the organization and its mission (Grunig & Repper, 1992).

However, the segmentation according to general reactions of publics (latent, active, aware) to an issue is said to be pointless in the light of current technological advancement in the communication landscape. With the availability of social media, publics can form rapidly, can behave in a seemingly unruly manner and can be seen as possessing considerable power (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010). Furthermore, Vujnovic (as cited in Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010) explained the mainstream contemporary public relations literature by observing two macro worldviews which

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<sup>1</sup>John Dewey and his book entitled *The public and its problems* were credited with defining the singular and plural concepts of public/s (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010).

influence the perception of the relative importance of publics, namely “the world is good and hence the organization should seek harmony with its publics” as opposed to “the world is evil and thus the organization must be protected from the inherently threatening and potentially harmful publics” (p.120). Vujnovic contended that the second worldview had become a reference for mainstream contemporary public relations, placing the organization in a defensive asymmetrical relationship with its stakeholders (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010).

According to L’Etang (2008), public relations objectifies publics who become objects with whom to communicate, and this affects the balance and perhaps the relationship between the organization and its stakeholder/publics. Similarly, Vujnovic (2005) calls upon organizations to view society as a larger social system in which the organization can co-exist and seek harmony with publics and not as strategic publics that are identified as important to an organization (as cited in Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010). In fact, Kruckeberg and Vujnovic (2010) argue that the power to influence by strategically designing messages for a targeted public has come to an end with the advent of social media. The world of social media has a seemingly infinite flow of information, so much, that people’s sensory systems have shut down and they have resorted to seeking multiple ways in which to satisfy their basic personal desires to be entertained. In this regard, the authors call for an organic concept of public relations that recognizes the complexity of contemporary society and identifies an organization’s responsibility to all members of society (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010). Instead of centering the organization and its interests at the hub, the theory should recognize that each organization is only one part of the overall social system, and that the general public is the beneficiary of this model (Kruckeberg, 2006).

This study attempts to answer the call for a theory that recognizes the complexity of contemporary society, and specifically the online world, by analyzing conversations of the publics and the themes they consider crucial to an organization’s reputation. It is therefore significant in that it recognizes organizations as part of a larger social system but also places the focus on publics, seeing them as active and aware publics rather than strategic (and passive) recipients of messages and attempts at managing reputation.

In this regard, the study will identify and group publics by their reactions and characteristics emerging from their conversations on social media. The latter is of importance because reputation is associated with communication activities and feedback mechanisms, in which strong and positive relationships are the foundation of good reputations. Such relationships can create a defense mechanism for the organization in a crisis (Watson & Kitchen, 2008). On the other hand, negative interactions lead to withdrawals from reputational capital that can impact negatively on an organization's reputation and ultimately may lead to its failure (Watson & Kitchen, 2008). It is therefore not surprising that of late public relations scholars have been interested in the links and synthesis between relationship building and organizational reputation.

In general, reputation management theory explains how a reputation is developed and managed through public–organization relationships, where these relationships are determined through interactions and communications between stakeholders and organizations (Deephhouse, 1997; Fombrun, 1996; Mahon, 2002; Walker, 2010). In these relationships, positive communication and interactions with publics build reputation capital that enables organizations to attract customers, generate more favorable media coverage, and appeal to more investment prospects and improved employee loyalty and job satisfaction (Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Dowling, 2002; Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & van Riel, 2003).

### **2.3.1 Reputation as interpretations that are socially constructed by publics**

Strategy scholars (e.g. Rindova & Kotha, 2001; Deephouse, 2000; Prabhu & Stewart, 2001) explicate reputation as an asset to an organization that can contribute to its competitive advantage in the market place of its products and services. From this point of view, reputation becomes a valuable source of competitive advantage and an intangible asset in which organizations can invest to generate stakeholders' support and protect themselves from downturns (Fombrun & Pan, 2006; Fombrun & Shanley, 1996; Fombrun & van Riel, 2004). Commentators such as these provide a clear link between reputation and corporate strategy, where a reputation is an asset for which organizations compete and which shapes their actions and strategies (Forman & Argenti, 2005). In marketing, scholars have incorporated this approach into their discipline by explicitly

linking reputation to the branding of products and services. Some (such as Forman & Argenti, 2005; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; van de Bosch, Jong & Elving, 2005) explore reputation in the corporate communication field. Rindova and Fombrun (1999), for example, discuss the link between strategy and communication with publics, and contend that communication activities can be planned to mold publics' perception and interpretation of the organization. This approach, however, still places the focus on the organization and neglects to incorporate the role of publics into reputation management.

From the perspective of corporate communication, public relations scholars have pursued similar directions by relating reputation to public relations and public affairs. A number of public relations scholars, for example, have emphasized the importance of building relationships in reputation management (e.g., Bronn, 2007; Grunig & Hung, 2002). According to Ni (2006), relationships can lead to competitive advantage because they are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and hard to substitute, which is in line with how reputation is typically described. Bronn (2007) suggests that it is important for an organization to communicate with its publics so that it can build relationships, adding that the quality of these relationships can influence the different publics' impression of the organization.

Indeed, the communication of an organization with its publics is an important construct in defining reputation (Doorley & Garcia, 2007; Kioussis, Popescu & Mitrook, 2007). Organizations with good reputations have strong communication cultures with their publics and stakeholders; they understand that reputation has great value and that it is an integral part of the organization's operations (Watson & Kitchen, 2008). These communication activities can contribute to reputation when the organization engages with its publics. The relationship through these activities will likely reap support, trust, resources and more customers, the same consequences of reputation management. The relationship and meaning that are created are essential in the formation of reputation. Not only are these context-dependent but as Aula and Mantere (2008) point out, each public has its own subjective interpretations of the organization. Because reputation is a set of interpretations in the forms of stories, anecdotes and other discursive elements that publics make among themselves about organizations (Aula & Mantere, 2008), the term 'publics' is more suitable for this study (see Section 2.3, where the argument about the use of the term 'publics' was

made) especially in the social media arena where anonymity makes it harder to identify those who have a stake in the organization. This study will identify the publics by the characteristics they portray and the issues they discussed.

## **2.4 Organization–public relationships (OPRs) and reputation**

Building upon Fombrun's (1996) concept of quality relationships as the key precursor of favorable reputations, Grunig and Hung (2002) define reputation as: "the distribution of cognitive representations that members of a collectivity hold about an organization, representations that may, but do not always, include evaluative components" (p 308).

In order to achieve a positive, lasting and resilient reputation, organizations need to invest heavily in relationship building and maintenance with their publics (Fombrun, 1996). This statement endorses the core tenet of public relations scholarship; namely, the building and management of relationships with the publics. Public relation(ship) activities are important for managing corporate reputation (Carroll & Combs 2003; Kioussis, Popescu & Mitrook, 2007) and the reputation of an organization is a by-product of such relationship management (Yang & Grunig 2005). Linking organization–public relationships and reputation studies, Kim (2001) suggests there is a positive causal relationship between public relations goals and their impact on reputation. In addition, Bae and Cameron (2006) stress the importance of prior reputation as it can determine the consequences of a corporate giving. Both stakeholder and public communication as well as the reputation of an organization are initiated and designed by the very core goals of having to create and maintain good relationships with all groups of publics.

Research concerning organization–public relationships (OPRs) has evolved from the preliminary investigations by Center and Jackson (1995) that stated that the desired outcomes of public relations should be enhanced OPR. "The proper term for the desired outcomes of public relations practice is public relationships. An organization with effective public relations will attain positive public relationships" (p.2, cited in Broom, Casey & Richey, 2000).

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) argue that public relations, as the term indicates, should focus its scholarship and practice on an organization's relationship with its key publics, be concerned with the dimensions upon which that relationship is built, and determine the impact organization–public relationships have on the organization and its key publics. Broom, Casey and Richey (2000) went on to define OPR as:

Organization–public relationships are represented by the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics. These relationships have properties that are distinct from the identities, attributes, and perception of the individuals and social collectivities in the relationships. Though dynamic in nature, organization–public relationships can be described at a single point in time and tracked over time. (p.18).

Trust, commitment, satisfaction, open communication, control mutuality and other relational outcomes have been the nexus variables for the study of organizational–public relationships (OPR) (Bruning, Dials & Shirka, 2008; Kim, 2001, Ledingham & Bruning 1998; Waters, 2008; Yang & Grunig, 2005). The common aspects used when defining OPRs have always been either the *process* of relationship formation or the *outcomes* of those relationships formed (Yang & Grunig, 2005), and it is the quality of relational outcomes between an organization and its publics that is associated positively with favorable reputation (Yang, 2007). Yang (2007) further suggested that for an organization to cultivate positive relationships with its publics, its relationship management strategy should focus on identifying active publics and managing communications with them. More recently, Huang and Zhang (2013) found two key research clusters in their analysis of OPR research activities. The first one was a focus on relational outcome and the other was a focus on explicating the definitive aspects of OPR from the perspective of the public's attitude toward an organization, hence shifting the focal point from the organization to the publics.

Furthermore, in recent years, OPR activities have been extended to online communication in line with Park and Reber's (2008) suggestion that the technology of the Web offers more advantages and interactive opportunities for organizations. Their findings proposed that organizations used news forums and discussions in their efforts to maintain repetitive interactions that demonstrate their commitment to building successful long-term relationships (Park & Reber, 2008). While relationship building activities between an organization and its publics can be encouraged by the

organization's responsiveness, responsiveness does not necessarily involve interactivity. As explained by Avidar (2013), by means of her Responsive Pyramid, the higher the level of the pyramid, the higher the contribution of a response is to the continuation of an interaction and to OPR building. The highest level contains interactive responses. These responses not only refer to the request but also contain various interactive elements such as conversations and discussions that encourage the continuation of an interaction, as opposed to medium-level reactive responses and low-level, non-reactive responses (Avidar, 2013). Relationships between the organization and its publics are therefore cultivated through interactive, rather than responsive, activities. It is not enough to merely respond to the publics; when building long term relationships, cultivating interaction with publics is key. Such cultivation is important to the longevity of an organization (Waters, 2008) and to its reputation (Yang & Grunig, 2005). The current study examines the concepts required for building relationships in OPR by describing constructs of reputation in publics' online conversations. This also follows Jones (1997) who defined the existence of a virtual community through the presence of 'virtual settlements' that meet four minimum conditions which include interactivity; namely, more than two communicators, a common-public place where members can meet and interact, and sustained membership over time. Jones's proposed conditions suggest that social media are good platforms for interactivity and relevant OPR activities, and therefore an appropriate medium for analysis for the current study.

#### **2.4.1 Social media research and OPR**

Most public relations research into new media started with the identification of the link between traditional media and new media, and the application of that new media in public relations activities. Although public relations scholars and practitioners were late in acquiring the new media technological tools, a decade later it was found that new media tools such as email, intranet, blogs, videoconferencing, podcasts, video sharing and PDAs were often used by public relations practitioners (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008).

Scholars such as Hearn, Foth and Gray (2009) have examined the application of new media in communications activities. While these new media applications can be

incorporated or used in tandem with the traditional technologies, the emphasis has been on new media. Hearn et al. (2009) asserted that the latter will not only help improve existing relationships but could also potentially uncover new ones such as those that are formed online with new publics

Differences have been discovered between the function, use and purpose of new media tools, especially from the dialogic perspective (McAllister, 2012). As the role of new media and social media take center stage, more and more transparently flowing information is made available publicly, and publics can easily enter and access it. Thus, their communication behavior has changed (a change that is triggered by the characteristics of social media) and according to Yang (2007) it is the quality of organizational-public relational outcomes that is associated positively with publics' active communication behaviors.

In defining social media, one needs to consider two other related concepts: Web 2.0 and User Generated Content or UGC (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) contend that Web 2.0 represents the ideological and technological foundation of social media. 'Ideological' here refers to how software developers and end users have started to utilize the World Wide Web as platforms where content and applications are continuously modified by all users in a participative and collaborative way. Technological refers to the basic functionalities such as Adobe Flash, RSS (Really Simple Syndication) and AJAX (Asynchronous Java Script) needed to operate blogs, Wikis and collaborative projects (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Therefore, social media is "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61).

Social network sites are information hubs that create collective experiences (Valenzuela, Arriagada & Scherman, 2012) which 'net natives', publics born in the new millennium and in the era of the internet, also known as 'GenerationGoogle', (Solove, 2007), are naturally drawn to. Social media are platforms that promote conversations between publics, and according to Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012) they have opened up new frontiers for organizations in not only the ability of giving real-time feedback to their publics but in engaging with them in conversations.

The current study will engage in data provided by four main social media: Discussion sites (blogs, microblogs and discussion sites), Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. This study is interested in analyzing online conversations, and these four platforms are considered platforms most of the publics frequent to discuss and converse with others. It is also the intention of this study to gather many aspects of conversation about a particular organization in order to obtain an overall impression of its reputation. These sites promote the coming together of publics from different backgrounds, gender and physical and geographical locations primarily through the function of similar interests (as has been discussed earlier, when distinguishing between ‘stakeholder’ and ‘public’).

Online communities in this sense are defined by their frequent interaction and interconnection through most social media such as Facebook (Gruzd, Wellman & Takhteyev, 2011) and discussion sites.

Organizations regard social media, specifically Twitter and blogs, as efficient communication tools for restoring reputation and preventing boycotts during crises (Schultz, Utz & Goritz, 2011). Schultz et al.’s (2011) findings suggest that publics using Twitter are more likely to share news-related articles than a blog-related post or a tweet. They also found that Twitter users were more likely to share the message than blog users. Booth and Matic (2011) urge organizations to listen and act strategically with influencers such as brand story tellers through social media because these groups can help promote conversations about their brands, and therefore engaging with these influencers can help protect (brand) reputation (Booth & Matic, 2011).

Related studies have also looked into social media and public relations functions (Cho & Hong, 2009; Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser 2008; Seo, Kim and Yang, 2009; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005), but more research is needed. Aula (2011), for example, called for more empirical research concerning the linkage between online communication and reputation management. Specifically, more research is needed on social networking (Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009) in the area of utilization that contributes to the scholarship of public relations (McAllister, 2012). Contributions should be made in exploring conversations within and beyond the confines of an organization’s social media platforms (McAllister, 2012) and further theoretical and

empirical development of the interaction between publics, because these areas of research are lacking (Neville & Menguc, 2006). This is particularly the case for reputation and organization–public relationships as well as research focusing on assessing online conversations, the communications of publics and the impact they may have on reputation. The current research addresses this gap.

#### ***2.4.1.1 Discussion sites: Blogs, microblogs and discussion websites***

This research used Google Search to generate a list of social media. Only those that were labelled popular among users and were most frequently visited were generated by Google. For the discussion sites, Google Search generated a list that consists of blogs, microblogs (other than Twitter) and discussion websites. Compared to traditional websites, blogs can promote more dialogic properties (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007) but if compared to other social media, they are the equivalent to a personal website (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Kaplan and Haenlein, blogs represent the earliest form of social media. When blogs are used as a source for research, especially when studying conversations, they can be limited because responsiveness to blog postings is relatively specific and limited to a handful of individuals (Kent, 2008). To ensure discussions are present, this study used the Google Search ‘discussion’ feature where results have included not only discussion blogs but also other relevant microblogs and discussion sites. As such, discussion sites were used as a reference for blogs and are discussed further in the methodology chapter. This helped in the compilation of more comprehensive and relevant conversations.

#### ***2.4.1.2 Twitter***

Twitter was created in March 2006 (Carlson, 2011) and launched in October the same year (Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012) by a few key people from Odeo, a podcasting company. It is essentially a micro–blogging site that allows users to publish a private or public message in real time in 140 characters or less. The shorter message cap proved to be one of its main attractions, and today organizations are using Twitter as a social media platform to communicate with their stakeholders. Some have taken it further, using Twitter as a way to promote dialogic communication while others use it redundantly, only disseminating advertising and publicity and engaging in one–way communication. Many organizations exploit Twitter for the purposes of disseminating

links and primarily pushing one-way messages rather than encouraging conversations and maximizing publics' involvement (Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Xifra & Grau, 2010). A few organizations, nonprofits, government agencies, and news media use Twitter to disseminate information and promote institutional goals and essential tools during times of disaster or crisis.

#### ***2.4.1.3 Facebook***

Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook in February 2004 as a website exclusively for Harvard University students, providing basic information about each student, similar to a student catalogue (Phillips, 2007). The website took off and Facebook and Zuckerberg have become cultural phenomena. As of August 2013, it had more than 1.15 billion users (Constine, 2013). Nowadays, not only students use Facebook but other groups, too. Organizations use Facebook for promotional and branding activities as well as a distribution channel for new apps or widgets (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Research has shown that Facebook is one of the most popular social media featured on university websites, but 85% of the world's top universities utilized their Facebook account only for one-way communication messages (McAllister, 2012). Facebook, a platform that, according to McAllister's (2012), is intended to promote dialogic communication between an organization and its publics, turned out to silence key publics because no feedback opportunities were provided for the students. The potential dialogic function of Facebook or other social media is arguably stifled by organization-initiated social media platforms when they disable feedback functions or control the discussions. A possible solution for this would be to use public-initiated social media discussions. This study will focus on a series of Facebook pages, mostly initiated by publics, to investigate the role of publics' conversation in reputation.

#### ***2.4.1.4 YouTube***

YouTube was co-founded in 2005 by Steve Chen, Chad Hurley and Jawed Karim, who met and worked at PayPal (Cloud, 2006; Hopkins, 2006). It provides online video sharing services where publics can upload and share videos as well as comment and converse on those videos. It also provides services that allow users to customize their YouTube page according to personal preference. On November 13, 2006, Google Inc. bought YouTube, LLC, and it has been operating as a Google subsidiary ever since

(“Google buys YouTube”, 2006). In 2010, YouTube served over a 100 million videos a day (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), and in 2011 it generated about 137 million users per month, which ranked it the third most used platform in the U.S., behind Google and Facebook (Quantcast, 2011, as cited in Weaver, Zelenkauskaitė & Samson, 2012). Today, many organizations use it to disseminate information to their publics. Organizations such as Procter and Gamble use it for customer relations and promotional activities, while Google and Cisco use it for sharing information and announcements (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

YouTube has the potential to disseminate organizational messages and to act as a promotional channel for an organization’s strategic message. It has also become a source for parody videos, which are used by organizations *and* publics to affect the judgment of others on issues that could potentially damage reputation (Lim & Ki, 2007). Lange (2008) suggests that participation on YouTube through frequent interaction between the video makers and viewers encourages social interaction and relationships, which refutes the idea that media viewing is a passive act. Therefore, YouTube is considered as one of the social media that not only promotes conversation but also provides an avenue for forming relationships that can inform reputation.

Many studies (such as Fischer & Reuber, 2011 (Twitter), Rybalko & Seltzers, 2010 (Twitter), Waters & Jamal, 2011 (Twitter); Park & Lee, 2007 (Discussion sites); Schwarz, 2012 (forums) look at one or two groups of publics and stakeholders. However, by observing and analyzing a selection of social media, as the present research does, the potential for establishing groups of publics’ views is much higher and provides a collective view and representation of components that may inform an organization’s reputation.

Reputation is a narrative and communicative construct that develops through conversations with publics (Aula, 2011), and among publics (Mahon, 2002; Mahon & Wartick, 2003). It is a set of interpretations in the forms of stories, anecdotes and other discursive elements that stakeholders create among themselves about organizations (Aula & Mantere, 2008), and therefore reflect the relationships that are formed through such conversations (Bruning, Dials & Shirka, 2008; Carroll & Combs 2003; Yang & Grunig, 2003; Kioussis, Popescu & Mitrook, 2007), including conversations on social

media (Park & Lee, 2007; Singh, Veron–Jackson, & Cullinane, 2008). There remains a need for more research on relationship outcomes with multiple stakeholders in reputation research (Bronn, 2007).

This study draws on the concept of reputation as a sum of perceptions from internal and external publics, and it will focus on the social construction of reputation through publics' conversations on social media, where it will analyze interactions, transactions, exchanges and linkages between the publics. What do their conversations tell 'listeners' about the organizations' reputations? In that regard, the study is interested in explicating and analyzing the role online conversations play in influencing reputation.

## **2.5 Summary**

This chapter discussed the concepts that are important to this study, such as reputation and its elements, publics, organization–public relationships and social media research in public relations.

The study draws upon the following concepts:

*Reputation* as a sum of perceptions from internal and external publics. Thus, reputation represents a set of images that publics formulate from its identities, actions and activities.

*Organization–public relationship* is revisited to restructure the components in it towards relationship building with reputation and reputation management by recognizing organizations as part of a larger social system, but it also places the focus on publics, seeing them as active and aware publics rather than strategic (and passive) recipients of messages and attempts at managing reputation. The emphasis is placed on communication between publics and with organizations, hence shifting the focus to how publics–centered conversations, narratives and networking could affect reputation and reputation management.

*Publics'* conversations on social media have opened up new frontiers for organizations not only as a means of giving feedback but also in building relationships through engagement with publics in conversations.

Therefore, the key idea that this study will take forward is that the cultivation of relationship building through social media conversation with publics is important to the longevity and reputation of an organization. The next chapter focuses on the methodology chosen for this research, grounded theory, which aims to interpret social media conversations by constructing theory from data.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the application of the grounded theory as the key strategy for this research to interpret online conversations' impact on and role in organizational reputation. It considers the qualitative and philosophical approach adopted for this study, and discusses relevant topics such as data collection strategies and data analysis procedures.

This research involves the analysis of online conversations across four social media for a period of six months in 2010, using a grounded theory approach. As a qualitative research method, the interactive grounded theory approach assumes the researcher possesses the ability to interpret symbols, data, relationships and meanings (Patton, 1990), and in the case of this study, it is this 'interaction' between the researcher and the secondary unobtrusive data results in the interpretation of the conversations between publics about their organizations. The ultimate aim is to—through analysis—to incorporate the interpretation into the construction of a substantive theory about the constructs of reputation in the field of public relations. However, first, the rationale for using grounded theory method and the processes that were used in this study need to be explained.

#### 3.2 Research strategy and orientation

This study is interested in describing *how* online conversations impact organizational reputation. It seeks to conceptualize online conversations between organizations and their publics, and specifically between publics *about* the organization. Thus, the research focuses specifically on publics' communication activities and how these activities influence reputation with the aim of better understanding reputation in the social media environment and building a substantial theory. In doing so, and in filling this gap in current understanding, a grounded theory approach was employed.

Grounded theory is a systematic, inductive and comparative method for conducting inquiry to construct theories from the data being studied (Babbie, 2004; Charmaz,

2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1998). It is a process of *systematically discovering theory* from data through *constant comparative analysis* of that data (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Dey, 1999; Kellehear, 1993). Thus, it is most commonly used to propose a new theory where little is known or provide a fresh new take on existing knowledge (Goulding, 2002), and therefore fits this research perfectly as at the time of commencing this study little was known about reputation in the social media environment.

Grounded theory was first presented by Glaser and Strauss in their seminal book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) where it gained popularity in the 1960s for its rigor, usefulness and its positivistic assumptions (Charmaz, 2006; Goulding, 2002). While grounded theory was originally meant for, and used by, sociologists it was adopted by other disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, nursing, social work, education, management and others (Goulding, 2002). This development has resulted in the blend and separation from the original positivist grounded theory to a constructivist one. Constructivist approach theorists (see Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2009; Corbin, 2009; Dey, 2007; Morse, 2009) believe that it is important to understand that the analysis and interpretation of data is not only discovered in the data but also through how the researcher construes them. This study is influenced by the latter concept of grounded theory as a method of inquiry. Grounded theory allows for a greater understanding of how of how reputation's concepts are *socially constructed* through issues, values, and concerned conversations between publics about their organization.

Morse (2009) points out that each study that uses a grounded theory approach requires some adaptation in in order to meet the needs and direction of the researcher and the research at hand. Subsequently, this study too has undergone some adaptation of the approach, and is therefore no longer classic Glaserian or Straussian grounded theory. Rather, it has adopted the more recent approach as introduced by the second generation of grounded theorists (e.g. Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Corbin, 2009; Dey, 2007) that considers the aforementioned social construction of reputation on social media.

### **3.3 Philosophical framework**

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) 'research methodology' means an approach to thinking about and investigating social phenomena. The nature of the research and

methods of analysis will determine which methodology will be used. It is the intention of the researcher to use qualitative research methods rather than quantitative research because this research aims to describe organizational reputation based on the analysis of online conversations. Adopting a qualitative approach can help derive a better in-depth understanding of the subject matter being studied (Berg, 2007).

A qualitative study can be defined in terms of the data that it produces and the kinds of analysis it adopts. The categories of data that qualitative research analyzes include various kinds of non-numerical data such as written texts, documents, observations of behaviors among others. The type of analysis that it adopts depend on the method of interpretation (Remler& Van Ryzin, 2011). Essentially, qualitative research is a process of inquiry to understand a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting the detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 1994), and it is therefore ideally suited to analyzing conversations on social media. It not only describes observations in predominantly non-numerical terms but most of the approaches found in communication research tend to describe, interpret and explain communication exchanges (Reinard, 2001; Remler& Van Ryzin, 2011).

Current literature in reputation studies is moving towards *operationalizing* not only the concept of reputation but also *understanding* the phenomenon that makes qualitative research more suitable for investigating *how* reputation is formed. Qualitative research aims to capture (such) processes that take place over time because it acknowledges that *meaning* is *emergent* and *provisional* (Daymon& Holloway, 2011).

### **3.4 Philosophical assumptions**

When adopting qualitative methods, certain assumptions are made. This study adopts a constructivist inquiry that comes with several pre-determined assumptions. These assumptions are ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical and methodological (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Creswell, 2003; 2007).

First, the *ontological assumption* focuses on the question: “What is the nature of reality?” and the answer is: reality here is multiple and subjective as seen by the subjects being studied (Baptiste, 2001; Creswell, 2007; Guba& Lincoln, 1989; Lee,

1992). Researchers using this assumption will employ quotes and themes derived from the gathered data, and they provide evidence of different perspectives. Constructivist theory suggests that reality is socially constructed through social practices, interaction and experiences (Butler–Kisber, 2010).

Second, the *epistemological assumption* deals with the idea of getting closer to the subject being studied. Researchers in this sense conduct field studies and will try to get as close as they can to their subjects (Creswell, 2007; Guba& Lincoln, 1989). The constructivist view where suggests that qualitative researchers should understand the meanings, and how their subjects shape and create their roles through their interpretation (Lee, 1992). Researchers accept that there are multiple ways to understand the world and that those ways are always context–dependent (Butler–Kisber, 2010).

Third, the *axiological assumption* “characterises qualitative research” (Creswell, 2007, p.18) as qualitative researchers are keen to make definite the values they bring to their studies. They do this by being open in their discussion of values that shape the narrative and include their understanding with the interpretation of their participants (Creswell, 1994; 2007). Fourth, *arhetorical assumption* focuses on the language of the research whereby a researcher writes in a literary, informal manner using the language of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007).

Last, *amethodological assumption* concentrates on the process of research or its methodology. This study uses an inductive logic from the beginning to the end. This can result in the research questions changing mid–way through the study to better reflect the types of questions needed to comprehend the problem (Creswell, 2007; Guba& Lincoln, 1989) which is one of the strategies used in a constructivist grounded theory approach (Butler–Kisber, 2010; Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005).

This study adopts a grounded theory approach with all of the above pre–determined assumptions. It employs quotes and themes derived from the gathered data that explains reality as socially constructed through social practices, interactions and experiences. The researcher understands its meanings and how her subjects shape and create their roles through her interpretation of the conversations. Furthermore, by applying an

inductive logic as expected, the research questions changed halfway through the research to better accommodate and understand the research problem.

### **3.5 Philosophical paradigms**

Besides applying the aforementioned assumptions, this study further adopts an *interpretive approach* in a *constructivist paradigm*. The constructivist paradigm represents a change from *merely explaining* a phenomenon to *understanding* the phenomenon. The constructivist paradigm took an interpretivist turn in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the writings of philosophers such as Wilhelm Dilthey, Edmund Husserl and Max Weber (Given, 2008). It espouses the importance of seeking understanding of the world one lives in, it studies and analyses multiple participants' meanings which have been socially and historically formed, and it involves an inductive approach to research whereby theory is generated through the interpretation of data or *meanings derived from patterns of data* (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Creswell, 2007; 2009; Given, 2008). The most important principle of the constructivist worldview is that it is seen as an approach to qualitative study (Creswell, 2009), manifesting itself in phenomenological studies and grounded theory (Creswell, 2007). In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries the constructivist paradigm has become more complex, reflecting the varying degrees to which knowledge is socially constructed (Creswell, 2007; Given, 2008).

The remainder of this chapter provides greater insight and understanding for selecting the grounded theory methodology and its application in this study.

### **3.6 The background of grounded theory**

Grounded theory was first introduced by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 but since its introduction, the two authors have parted ways and formed divergent views of the theory (Charmaz, 2006; Heath & Cowley, 2004; Jones & Noble, 2007; Moore, 2009). The divergence mainly occurred in the 1990 work of Strauss and Corbin where there was an emphasis on verification and new analysis techniques (Charmaz, 2006; Heath & Cowley, 2004).

Glaser (1998) stayed true to one of the original foundations of grounded theory which emphasizes constant comparative analysis but explained in more detail the theoretical

sampling, coding and memos whilst Strauss moved toward verification with co-author, Juliet M. Corbin through new technical procedures (Charmaz, 2006; Heath & Cowley, 2004). Glaser (1998) stressed the value of grounded theory as a discovery of what “is there and emerges” (p.4) and suggested that it has its own constant verification process through constant comparison.

The separation between Glaser and Strauss has resulted in two similar and yet different, but more detailed, grounded theory approaches. In their contribution to the development of grounded theory, Corbin and Strauss (2008) laid out in a step-by-step process the techniques required in a grounded theory approach. They listed analytical tools to stimulate the analysis process, which included the use of questioning and making comparisons in preventing premature theory development. They also suggested other means such as finding various meanings of a word and drawing upon personal experience.

Strauss and Corbin’s analytic procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) more systematically prescribe the types of categories that a researcher can use. These were unavailable in the classical grounded theory concept to analyze their data such as causal conditions (the factors that caused the core phenomenon), strategies (reactions to the core phenomenon in the form of action taken), intervening conditions (situational factors that influence the strategies), and consequences (outcomes of implementing the strategies) (Creswell, 2007).

In the Glaserian “classical” grounded theory concept, the central tenet is *emergence*. The researcher enters the field with only a broad interest in the topic in mind, without any preconceived hypotheses from any literature, and remains open and flexible (Heath & Cowley, 2004; Jones & Noble, 2007). Nothing is forced. The research problem and theories will emerge from the data. More focused reading will be undertaken when the theory begins to surface (Heath & Cowley, 2004; Jones & Noble, 2007). In the Straussian perspective, the researcher is encouraged to use his or her experience and acquired knowledge from extant literature to excite theoretical understanding and generate assumptions. The latter has led Glaser to accuse Strauss of *forcing* the data rather than letting it emerge (Heath & Cowley, 2004; Jones & Noble, 2007).

It is important to acknowledge that grounded theory or any other qualitative research cannot be used as a step-by-step guide because every research situation requires adaptation as demanded by the research objectives, research participants and situation (Corbin, 2009; Morse, 2009). Thus, the researcher started this study with a set of research questions and some prior knowledge about the topic through a preliminary literature review as well as her experience. Constructivist views of grounded theory allow for such flexibility. Nevertheless, scholars are cautioned not to mix the two perspectives (Glaserian and Straussian), and are encouraged to determine and to stay true to *one* school of thought when writing their methodology (Health & Cowley, 2004; Jones & Noble, 2007). Even so, Glaser and Strauss never intended the original grounded theory to be used as a rigid structure (Jones & Noble, 2007; Moore, 2009) but promoted a more open discussion that was intended to *stimulate thought* rather than put a stop to thinking and discussion on the topic (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this regard, a growing number of scholars have moved away from Glaser's and Strauss and Corbin's positivism grounded theory to a more constructivist perspective (Charmaz, 2006). It is the latter perspective that is followed in this thesis.

### **3.6.2 Discussion on the practice of grounded theory method**

This study is not classic Glaserian grounded theory nor does it follow a Straussian perspective. Instead, it adopts the more recent approach as introduced by a second generation of grounded theorists, namely the constructivist grounded theory approach (e.g. Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Corbin, 2009; Dey, 2007). Such an approach or perspective "places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants" (Charmaz, 2006; p.130).

After tracing the debates between and the development and implementation of the two perspectives of grounded theory, Jones and Noble (2007) found that in many cases diverging practices occurred. Even though grounded theory was originally created to be a flexible approach, they found these flexibilities to be puzzling and disturbing. Nonetheless, these flexibilities were apparent in many studies.

One of the key flexibilities lay in the execution of grounded theory, which can be strictly emergent or it can allow any combination of 'forcing' elements through

identifying pre-conceived phenomena, research questions, etc. Moreover, the execution can be conceptual or descriptive, and the product can be “an integrative theory that pulls together all categories and sub-categories into an overall scheme” or it can produce a “loosely connected theory embedded in numerous narratives and stories” or it can produce no theory at all (Jones & Noble, 2007, p.98). It can employ either systematic, non-optional techniques or a flexible mix of measures from which researchers can choose (Jones & Noble, 2007).

While it followed a constructivist perspective, this research also adopted ‘forcing’ elements in the form of research questions and a preliminary review of past literature at the beginning of the research with a purpose of setting the scene. It was both descriptive and conceptual: descriptive, as this study is interested in describing facets of reputation and conceptual, as it deals with concepts and new data. A theoretical explanation based on the constructed themes from the data analysis is presented. It also employed a flexible mix of measures as data was derived by unobtrusive means and then copied and pasted onto a MS Word document before being uploaded into qualitative analysis software (NVivo 8) in a process to “clean” the data to be ready for analysis.

This malleability of grounded theory paints a new picture; it can be executed with flexible guidelines and can complement other approaches in qualitative analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin, 2009; Dey, 2007; Morse, 2009). In addition, the methodological guidelines of grounded theory can be used in a variety of epistemological and ontological perspectives. Thus grounded theory becomes a general method with multiple versions.

Charmaz and Bryant (2010) argue that grounded theory is an evolving method as evident in the changes made by “Glaser (e.g.1998; 2003) and Corbin (Corbin and Strauss, 2008)” from their original version (p. 408). They proposed and described a new version of constructivist grounded theory which retains some of the core fundamentals of the method, such as beginning with inductive logic, emphasizing the analytical process, engaging in an iterative process to advance analysis, encouraging innovation and aiming for abstract conceptualization leading theory construction as well as promoting new flexibilities.

A key characteristic and assumption of constructivist grounded theory involves engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process. This is where constructivist grounded theorists take a reflexive stance towards the research process and contemplate how their theories have evolved (Charmaz, 2006). Essentially, constructivist grounded theorists identify and describe facts through the *value* that these hold; to them, facts and values are linked.

The grounded theory approach assumes various layered realities that shift and change under different conditions; it does not erase the existence of subjective origins of method and knowledge but attempts to recognize them by placing subjectivity in its social context and examine it reflexively. It advocates gathering extensive rich data about participants' lives and worlds, and aims at an interpretive understanding and situated knowledge. It views data as being co-constructed with research participants, given its relative and reflexive structure (Charmaz & Bryant, 2010).

Applying any kind of methodology to research means infusing that particular methodology with some aspect of the self, the data and the project. Hence, changing the methodology to suit the relevance of one's research objectives is evident in most grounded theory research. Each study that uses a grounded theory approach requires adaptation in some way as required by the needs and direction of the research and the researcher (Morse, 2009). This core belief is reiterated by the second generation of grounded theorists (see Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2009; Corbin, 2009; Dey, 2007; Morse, 2009) who believe it is important to understand that the analysis and interpretation of data is not only discovered in the data but also through how the researcher construes them.

It is important to reiterate that there is no formulaic way of undertaking grounded theory although there are guidelines (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) that can be used as a reference on how to manage the research data. However, these guidelines do not apply to all studies especially when the data is generated from social media rather than interviews. This study uses social media data and the guidelines for sources of data that are left to be observed as compared to interviews where the researcher can go back and forth to gather more data from the participants. Therefore, moving from the traditional grounded theory to a constructivist one is deemed relevant for the current research as concepts and

theory in this study are constructed by the researcher from the publics that participated in online conversations.

### **3.7 Research questions**

One of the first few steps of starting a grounded theory is about asking appropriate research questions. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that research questions in grounded theory need to represent flexibility and freedom to explore a phenomenon in depth. They contend that even though the initial question may start out broadly, it becomes progressively more focused and narrow as the research progresses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

For this study, the initial research questions comprised of six broad questions that became more specific and narrow as the researched progresses, resulting in five final questions (see Chapter 8 for more explanation on the process of modifying the research questions). Thus, the research questions evolved alongside the flow of the study and the data collection process. They started out as general terms that reflected the topic and the issues being researched but once the data collection was completed, it became obvious that there was a need to improve the research questions to reflect the gathered data. As a result, the questions became more specific and targeted. As previously mentioned, the changes in research questions occur in order to better reflect the types of questions needed to comprehend the problem (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### **3.8 Data collection strategies**

There are two types of texts that can be studied in grounded theory. Elicited texts are texts that are produced by the research participants' in response to the researcher's request. Extant data, on the other hand, results from various documents in which the researcher had no role in shaping. Normally extant data is created for a very different purpose, and is used by researchers to address their particular research questions. Extant data can be in a form of public records, government records, organizational documents, literature, internet discussion and so forth. Both elicited and extant data can either be used as primary or supplementary sources of data (Charmaz, 2006). This study analyzes *extant data* comprising publicly available online conversations. These conversations

were captured and copied into Word documents before analysis. Utilizing such publicly available data is considered as unobtrusive—the researcher used only online archival data that were made available because of conversations in the public domain by organizations’ publics and stakeholders.

### **3.8.1 Unobtrusive measures**

In 1966 Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest published *Unobtrusive Measures: Non-reactive research in the social sciences*, a book based on the well-known study conducted by Elton Mayo between 1927 and 1932. The latter study revealed a phenomenon known as the “Hawthorne effect” which exposed how people’s behavior changes when they are observed (Marrellie, 2007). The book proposed the strategy of “creative measure and cross validation” to more traditional research approaches (Marrellie, 2007, p.43) and thus advocated an unobtrusive approach to studying people’s behavior to ensure that the study reflects reality. In the same vein, this study employs an unobtrusive research strategy.

Essentially, unobtrusive research is a measure to study human traces (Berg, 2001) or social behavior without affecting it (Babbie, 2004). It does not intrude into the lives of the participants being investigated as the unobtrusive approach gathers data left by respondents without them intending to leave data behind in the first place (Berg, 1998) or without involving any direct elicitation of data from the respondents to the study.

Some researchers describe the unobtrusive research strategy as content analysis (see Babbie, 2004) but others, such as Berg (2007) prefer to see it as an interesting and innovative approach for collecting and analyzing data that are simply unreachable through other means except examining human traces.

As explained by Webb et al. (2000), there are three categories of strategies in unobtrusive research, namely physical traces, archives and observation (Marrellie, 2007). *Physical traces* of past behavior are divided into measures of erosion (selective physical wear such as the popularity of museum exhibits is indicated by the differential wear on floor tiles) or accretion (amount or types of material that are collected, e.g., the amount of recycling in a bin before and after a program of ecology education to indicate the program’s effectiveness). *Archives* comprise of data previously produced, collected

or stored by an organization, including, for example, private correspondence and records of past events. *Observation* refers to an unobtrusive process of watching and listening to a subject without their knowledge. This study will utilize the second category of unobtrusive research, namely archives where online archival data will be accessed to select the data needed.

Unobtrusive research has expanded recently since the advent of online and social media. The Internet produces a “blizzard of inventories” (Lee, 2000, p.8) with some generated from social media sites that allow the practice of unobtrusive methods in social research (Hine, 2011). According to Hine (2011), a particular advantage of unobtrusive research is its ability to uncover and explore biases found in other, more reactive research methods. For example, bias in interviews and questionnaires influences how the questions are asked which affects the answers that are received (Lee, 2000) thus generating self-reported behavior instead of *actual* behavior (Kellehear, 1993; Marrelli, 2007).

Unobtrusive methods using online data not only provide a significant alternative to traditional methods but they also provide easy access, are inexpensive and a good source for longitudinal studies (Kellehear, 1993). In this regard, this study will avoid self-reported behavior and the associated bias since (archival) data from Twitter, Facebook, discussion sites and YouTube are readily available for access and analysis.

### **3.8.2 Social media selection**

The selection of social media was motivated by the notion that these online venues (discussion sites, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) provided access to conversations *initiated* and *facilitated* by concerned stakeholders or publics. Discussion sites, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are seen to be social media and are continuing to gain momentum and importance in public relations and communication research (see e.g. Diga & Kelleher, 2009; Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Freberg, 2012). In fact, social media such as blogs, wikis, forums, and social networks have enabled information sharing and discussions among publics (Kelleher & Miller, 2006) and within organizations. They have promoted diversity, individuality and freedom of expression, thus providing additional space for growth in the field of public relations (Avidar, 2009). It is for this

reason that four social media were chosen for this study: discussion sites (which include blogs, forums and microblogs), Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

### **3.8.3 Google search**

It was interesting to note that while other search engines created for social networks were used to collect preliminary data, the majority of these search engines only provided results in real time (i.e., Kurrently, Booshaka, Foupas, Social Mention, and Whostalking). They did not provide the mechanism to search past data and did not have the functions to focus on a certain timeframe. Foupas only searched Facebook, and Social Mention searched only data for the preceding month. Kurrently also produced only limited results. It was evident that these search engines were not meant for academic researchers who would want to search past data posted online, but for those who wanted real-time, instant data.

Consequently, and in line with recommendations by academic researchers, Google was used to search for relevant data also because it is used in much online research using a qualitative and unobtrusive approach (see Hine, 2011; Steuber & Solomon, 2010). It allowed for the gathering of back-dated data and specific websites through its advanced search mode—something the other search engines did not allow.

Indeed, Google Search is listed as one of the most powerful search engines available for social media searches (Campbell, 2010; Levy, 2010) and it is now synonymous with the verb “search” (Levy, 2010). It is also efficient at searching multiple social networks at one time. Although other social network search engines such as Facebook, Twitter and Bing have challenged Google, it remains the leader in returning relevant results (Levy, 2010). Searches were made using Google for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube videos and discussion sites using key words such as “Apple”, “BP”, “Toyota” and “Nokia” (i.e. the organizations’ names) to search for online conversations keeping it deliberately broad as not to limit the search results.

In addition, by using Google’s discussion sites’ search tool, the results provided search results not only for blogs with comments, but also forums and microblogs, which allowed for the generation of better and more representative results. The results displayed all discussions pertaining to the key word being searched.

### **3.8.4 Sampling strategy**

Although there are no strict criteria for sample size in qualitative studies (Patton, 1990), purposive sampling is widely used. Qualitative research often involves purposive or theoretical sampling and focuses on cases (individuals, groups or institutions) rather than variables (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011). Purposive sampling is a technique where the researcher makes judgments of whom to select for the study, where and when to search and obtain informants of the study (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). In order to decide who or what to include or to leave out of the study, Daymon and Holloway (2011) suggest that the decision should be based on *inclusion* and *exclusion criteria*.

This study randomly chose four organizations from well-known rating lists such as Fortune 500, Global Reputation Pulse, Edelman Trust Barometers and Business Week. The selection of the four organizations was made, using inclusion criteria such as (a) being an international organization, (b) having a recognizable brand, (c) having a social media presence, (d) being a for-profit company, and (e) providing an online platform for communication with the publics or participating in online conversations.

The organizations were randomly selected in 2009 to provide sources that can produce extensive data. Despite the diverse nature of the four chosen organizations, the inclusion criteria are uniform thus emphasizing similarities and consequently allowed the researcher to group them as *similar sources of data*. In order to be consistent with the goal of this study, that is, using social media platforms to analyze the publics' conversations, it was important that the organizations selected had to have a presence in social media and at the very least provide platforms if not actively participating in conversations with their publics. It is important to note here that they were *not* chosen based on their industry even though Apple and Nokia may seem as if they belong to the same (telecommunication) industry. Industry was not a criterion for inclusion nor was it a criterion for exclusion. The only relevant criterion was that they should be well-known enough for the publics to discuss and talk about them on social media.

### **3.8.5 Data collection process**

Data was collected concurrently and retrospectively during April until September 2009. This timeframe was chosen under the assumption (and observation) that organizations

will be most active between the second and the third quarter of the financial business year. It was expected that with activity, discussion would also flourish. This expectation was well met. Once the four organizations (Apple, Nokia, Toyota and BP) were selected, the data collection process began. The latter included the gathering of conversations as data in selected online discussion sites (blogs and websites), Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The data was copied and saved into a Word document and analyzed using the qualitative research software NVivo 9. The data was “cleaned” so that it was ready to be analyzed in the research software. Data for Twitter was straightforward because Google Search provided the content and the details of the tweets in the results list. However, for discussion sites, Facebook and YouTube, the list generated by Google only provided the URL or the link to the web pages. Thus, time was needed to go to the website and copy the content into the analyzing software. Additionally, for discussion sites, the majority of the discussions continued for more than a page. Similarly with Facebook, the discussion not only took up more than a page but the link to the comments from public needed to be opened one by one to gather all the data. This was because the view of the page was limited to only the first few words of the comment. In order to see the whole comment, a “read more” link needed to be accessed. The process of opening and finding relevant links, expanding message links in discussion sites and Facebook took a considerable amount of time. While future research may allow for more rapid collection of data, the time-consuming process of gathering the data for this research was deemed necessary for analysis to begin. The sample size for each platform depended on the analysis and when the data was saturated. In total, this study analyzed 17 discussion sites, 17 Facebook pages, 10 YouTube videos and 300 tweets for each organization, generating numerous user entries and a rich gamut of data.

The limitation of using social media data is similar to that of archival studies where the researcher has little control over the available data and may end up having to make do with the material they have because of the limited data that exist (Damon & Holloway, 2010). Contrastingly, social media data come in huge quantities, so the challenges lie in sifting through the data and acquiring those which are relevant to the study.

### **3.9 Data analysis procedures**

#### **3.9.1 Qualitative analysis and process**

Analysis in a qualitative study (such as grounded theory) should start at the very beginning of the research, when researchers delve into their data and read and reread material as they make sense of the data they have gathered (Liamputtong, 2009). Baptiste (2001) argues that notwithstanding the field of practice, disciplinary dedication, research purposes or design, there are four phases to all qualitative data analysis: defining the analysis, classifying data, making links between and among categories of data, and communicating the message/write-up.

A qualitative thematic analysis was used in this research. Thematic analysis or “grounded theoretical analysis” is an approach taken by researchers who wish to be more inductive and who are interested in developing themes or categories from data and this tends to be qualitative (Kellehear, 1993, p.33). Once the data was gathered, the researcher read through the data and carefully examined the data according to their organization and main points. In grounded theory, themes emerge from the narrative of the interview. In this study, they emerged from the saved, documented text of online conversations. Thematic analysis was used to probe the themes that emerged from the conversations. Themes were identified through their intensity, extensiveness and frequency (Rabiee, 2004; Steuber & Solomon, 2009). As per the requirements for grounded theory, data was organized categorically and topically during data analysis and then reviewed repeatedly and continually coded throughout the analysis and research process (Creswell, 2009). The themes that emerged were collected and analyzed.

The purpose of this study is to suggest conceptual relationships between online conversations and organizational reputation by describing an organizations’ reputation as it emerges from the online conversations. Past studies by for example Deephouse (2000), Fombrun and Shanley (1990), Hutton, Goodman, Alexander, and Genest (2001) have shown that reputation is a meaningful concept *only* when it is measured in relation to a specific public or publics and is not generalized across the board (Hutton et al., 2001). This study followed this view and analyzed reputation within a specific context. However, it was constrained by as the anonymity that social media affords participants,

making it difficult to measure reputation relating to a specific public. Instead, this study identified the participation of specific publics *in* the conversations through characteristics that emerged *from* the conversations. This approach allowed for the development of a theoretical explanation of reputation and related social media conversation.

### **3.9.2 Reflexivity**

The themes are identified through patterns of responses that come from multiple viewpoints and comments on the same topic. These themes are then collated into concepts, models and theoretical constructs to make sense of the publics' experiences and that of the researcher. Self-reflection and reflexivity are considered important in a post-modernistic view of grounded theory. Self-reflection is required to understand and acknowledge that the interpretation of the data is also the result of the researcher's influence on the research process.

The analysis of the data and results are formed through the contributions of the data and the existing knowledge of the researcher which act as a filter deciphering data and construing meaning—a fundamental method in the interpretivist and symbolic interactionist approach of qualitative research (Radnor, 2001). The constructivist view is exercised by drawing on past literature and literature from other fields to better inform the study as it can provide a useful guide to analysis provided the researcher keeps an open mind as to their relevance to the data (Dey, 2007).

The researcher imposed a self-reflexive approach in this research process whereby the conversations from all social media were read and re-read before they were coded. They were also compared with other sources to ensure relevance. For example, in the BP crisis, comparisons were made between Twitter, blogs, YouTube and discussion sites to ensure relevance of the topics being discussed, to learn more of the topic and to create themes. Comparisons were also drawn between the organizations to ensure relevance of the same category being created for the other organizations. Sometimes, it was appropriate to create a common category such as stakeholders and questions that promoted conversations that were applicable across all four organizations. At times it was not relevant to create the same category for other organizations. An example of this was the conspiracy theory which was more apparent in BP than the others.

### 3.9.3 The coding and analysis process

Coding the data is another step in the grounded theory approach where data is divided into categories which emerge through analysis. Kruger (1994) presents seven criteria as frameworks for coded data interpretation, namely words, context, internal consistency, frequency and extensiveness of comments, specificity of comments, intensity of comments and big ideas (as cited in Rabiee, 2004). Furthermore, Rabiee (2004) adds that it is imperative to be imaginative and analytical enough to see the links and relationships between the data as a whole. In this study the above mentioned criteria as well as constant comparative techniques were used to construct categories and themes. The researcher looked at the context, consistency, frequency, extensiveness, specificity and intensity of comments and also any significant ideas that could be constructed from the data.

Coding gives the researcher a definition of what is happening in the data as she begins to understand with what it means (Charmaz, 2006; Liamputtong, 2009). Researchers are encouraged to start coding while still collecting data as it will help understanding, allow for follow up of the ambiguous data and help with theoretical sampling (Liamputtong, 2009). Initial or open coding can either be word-by-word, line by line or incident by incident. Focused coding is more conceptual while axial coding defines relations between categories and sub-categories. In this study, the researcher devised *open-coded terms* that categorized data into a series of smaller categories. The process of such categorization starts with collecting, expanding and organizing the data. In this case, the list of URLs from a Google results list were expanded, selected, organized and copied into NVivo in a form ready to be analyzed. Next was the *initial coding*.

Researchers are encouraged to have persistent interaction with their data but simultaneously be involved in their emerging analyses (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Babbie, 2004). As already mentioned, in the current study, data collection was done alongside the analysis process. This is based on the idea that grounded theory builds empirical checks into the analysis process, which lead the researcher to examine all possible theoretical explanations of the findings (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006). In this research, empirical checks were required earlier and later in the analysis stage.

Earlier empirical checks occurred when terms were identified and background information from the data gathered. For example in Twitter, the researcher came across the name ‘TUAW’, which needed to be clarified. It needed to be determined whether this was an individual or an organization. After going back to the data and searching for the required information, the researcher found that TUAW stood for ‘The Unofficial Apple Weblogs’ a social news site that publishes everything about Apple.

Later in the analysis process, empirical checks were required to examine the concepts and compare them to past literature for consistency and relevance as well as for generating new theoretical proposals.

Constructing analytic codes and categories from data is another dominant characteristic of grounded theory as it is not interested in preconceived logically deduced hypotheses (Dey, 2007; Charmaz, 2006). Data in the current study was organized into themes and categories with reference to the phenomenon under study. In this case, reputation and conversation were the focal points of this study. These points became the core categories to which all the data was selected and examined. The researcher read and re-read the conversations in order to unearth thematic aspects that related to the core categories. The researcher also used the constant comparative method.

Grounded theorists often stop and write ideas as they occur. Some of the best ideas may occur to a researcher late in the process and may lure him/her back to the field to gain a deeper view (Charmaz, 2006, p.10). This is done via initial coding which asks questions such as “What does the data suggest?” and “From whose point of view?” (Charmaz, 2006). An important reason for conducting initial coding is to satisfy the “relevance” and “fit” criteria of the study in the empirical world (Charmaz, 2006). Following this process, initial nodes were generated. The initial coding was carried out for all of the data sources, i.e., discussion sites, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Subsequently, for Twitter line-by-line coding was used (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1998). Line-by-line coding was seen as being suitable for Twitter as it only allows 140 characters per tweet. More nodes based on the emergent themes were generated as a result of this coding type.

The second step for discussion sites and Facebook was the paragraph-by-paragraph coding. This was relevant for Facebook and discussion sites because comments usually

come in sentences arranged in paragraphs. After that, an incident-by-incident coding was adopted, which was used to compare one conversation with another particularly in the discussion sites data set where many conversations were analyzed. Charmaz (2006) had stated that coding strategy would depend on the type of data the researcher has. As for YouTube, incident-by-incident coding was employed as each video is seen as one incident.

In the beginning, more nodes were generated than were necessary but the researcher persisted because, according to Liamputtong (2009), it is normal to generate many nodes in the early stages but researchers can 'tidy up' later. This initial coding allowed for the deconstruction of data in the process of making it more meaningful. It is also important to do an ongoing analysis for the purpose of refining the themes; going back and forth between the data and the codes to create more meaningful themes (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Liamputtong, 2009).

Initial coding is performed while the researcher remains open to exploring and discovering theoretical prospects that can be distinguished from the data. In this coding process, the researcher created terms that can label and explain content of conversations and events that occur in the data in reference to the core categories (i.e., reputation and online conversation). This coding practice answers questions such as "What does the data suggest?" and "What is happening?" (Charmaz, 2006, p.47),

After the initial/open coding was done, *axial coding* was carried out to capture the relationships between the themes and divide general themes into something more specific. Axial coding is a type of coding which relates categories to subcategories (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Heath & Cowley, 2004; Liamputtong, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 2008) specifying elements and dimensions of a category and allows the researcher to reassemble the initially coded data and thus provide coherence to the emerging analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007).

After the initial codes were generated, the researcher compared and analyzed, and subsequently compressed the list into more meaningful codes—in line with the research questions of this study. Nodes (categories) that were considered the same were merged into one, for example, "questions to promote conversations" and "questions to promote discussions" were merged into one node. Another example, overly general categories

such as “stakeholders” were analyzed further into sub-categories consisting of “employees, the media, dealers and suppliers, competitors and employees”.

As mentioned, this study analyzed 17 discussion sites, 17 Facebook pages, 10 YouTube videos and 300 tweets for each organization. These numbers were derived once *saturation* was achieved. Saturation is a state where no new nodes were generated from the analysis. It is also a state when all elements of all categories are accounted for (Daymon& Holloway, 2010). This study reached saturation state when the same categories kept appearing. Therefore, the number of Facebook pages, discussion sites and Tweets were derived as above because there were no new categories emerging from the data. Regarding YouTube videos, the researcher started with ten videos as the initial number and did not increase the number because saturation was achieved based on the conversation for each video, which included conversations ranging from three weeks to about two years.

In the next step, all the nodes were tidied up. Conceptual maps helped locate categories and direct movement between them. Situational maps can build structural properties that shape the concept being studied. In this study, the researcher integrated the categories or nodes created with the memos and annotations created in NVivo. It is a process of fitting the categories together to achieve either causal relationships or interpretive understanding (Charmaz, 2006; Urquhart, 2013). This study was interested in the latter interpretative understanding whereby reputation will be conceptually described through the categories that publics and stakeholders communicated in their conversations. By doing so, the concept of reputation can be understood from the perspectives of inter-publics communication activities in social media.

#### **3.9.4 Constant comparative process**

As required by grounded theory (see section 3.2), a constant comparative process was undertaken throughout the research when creating more relevant themes from the data. The researcher compared the themes from one social media with another for a particular organization and between organizations for advancing theory development.

Memo writing is an element of grounded theory that helps in identifying context and elaboration for categories. It also defines relationships and gaps between categories.

Memos were created for each organization in this study and where necessary for each social medium. This function was used to record the researcher's initial reactions to discovery of themes in the data. The next process was creating sampling information for the purpose of theory construction, not population representatives (Charmaz, 2006). As there was no direct contact with the participants of the conversations, this function was used to identify and describe the conversations analyzed, for example the topic of the conversations, the description of the videos, the list of all the social media used etc.

While a literature review was not adopted—a flexibility allowed by following a constructivist approach (see 3.4)—the researcher completed a preliminary introduction in setting the scene for the research topic and later on, used past literature to compare and contrast new conceptual findings. From this point, the researcher could see the relationships and inter-relationships of concepts to formulate a theory.

### **3.10 Reconstructing theory**

There are two major types of theory that would come out from a grounded theory research and they are *substantive* and *formal*. Glaser and Strauss differentiated the two. Substantive theory is constructed for an immediate field of study and does not attempt to explain outside of this field. In fact, a formal theory can be generalized across a range of situations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goulding, 2002).

Theorizing involves stopping and pondering the existing concepts or nodes. It is a process of rethinking and returning to fundamentals as it requires, probing into experience and being able to deduce the content studied by taking it apart and asking new questions (Charmaz, 2006). This is done by renewing emphasis on actions and processes rather than individuals. The categories of this study were theorized in this way. The results of this process produced a more compact list of categories that were more connected to the reputation concept. This study had more than a hundred categories due to the richness of the data. Grounded theory requires categories or coding to be created as the data informs the researcher where it needs to be specific, but coding or categories in Nvivo analysis software, requires the creation of general terms as the matrix query allows the researcher to extract complex and specific data at the end of the coding. The researcher applied the grounded theory approach where codes were specific to ideas the data informed as the matrix query is quite limited in a sense that the

software was created with participant-generated data in mind and the structure fits that dimension of qualitative research. The objective of this study is to propose a substantive theory where it is relevant and is constructed for the field of public relations.

### **3.11 Summary**

This chapter discussed the methodology used for this research. Overall, this study adopted a constructivist grounded theory approach to answer the research questions, which allows for greater flexibility than more conventional and traditional forms of grounded theory approaches. The aim is to develop new theories or modify existing ones. In this case, the research aimed to propose a substantive theory about reputation formulation in social media by focusing on the publics rather than the organization. To this end, this chapter has explained the data collection strategies, analysis process and limitations of the methods. The next four chapters are to present the findings for each of the organizations chosen for this research: Apple, BP, Nokia and Toyota.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Analysis of results for Apple**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the analysis, divided into sections such as sources of data, social media application, emerging themes, organizations–public relations strategy and categories of emerging publics.

#### **4.2 Data sources**

The following table 4.1 and figure 4.1 show the data sources for Apple from all the four social media used. This study looked at four social media: discussion sites, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. In total, 17 discussion sites, 17 Facebook pages, 10 YouTube video discussions and some 300 tweets were analyzed. Discussion sites for Apple were mostly from specialized forums that focus on Apple's products and services. Two discussions came from Apple's own discussion sites. Most of the Facebook pages analyzed were from Apple's vendors and suppliers except for two that were fan-generated. The rest were those created based on topics that were related to Apple. YouTube videos analyzed were mostly uploaded by individuals and organizations that included Apple in the video or uploaded Apple advertisements. There was one video uploaded by Apple that made it into the search list. As for Twitter, the tweets were generated by organizations consisting of traditional media (print and broadcast) and online media (those that have sprouted since the advent of social media) followed by contributions by individuals and a few from Apple which were tweets made from a Twitter account of their late CEO Steve Jobs.

#### **4.3 Social media applications**

The application of social media differs between organizations. The use of social media here was derived from the participation of the organization in each social medium as well as comments made by the publics.

**Table 4.1 Apple's data sources**

Discussion Sites	Facebook	YouTube
After some intrigue_Apple releases Safari 5 - The Download Blog	Adlib-Apple's secret ipad web farmework- www.facebook.com_notes_done21_adlib-apples	Apple design history-uploaded by Matthew Pearce
Android peeing on Apple and smashing it with a baseball bat Hero_ G2 Touch Themes and Apps-forum xda developers	Apple - Real incentives- www.facebook.com/pages/Apple-Real-Incentives/45541247080	Apple dismissed Jobs ninja story-uploaded by NMAWorldEdition
Apple battery charger- www.geekzone.co.nz/forums.asp?forumid=47&topicid=65044	Apple Computers-www.facebook.com/pages/Apple-Computers/10852134251350	Apple iPhone 4 Design video-uploaded by unknown
Apple Mail missing plugin-Mac OS X Hints-hints.macworld.com	Apple II series- www.facebook.com/pages/Apple-II-series/126083440768189	Apple Iphone 4 face time commercial-uploaded by srca2009
Apple Mighty Mouse Unofficial Driver for WINDOWS-Neowin Forums- www.neowin.net/.../486205-apple-mighty-mouse-unofficial-driver-for- windows	Apple Peel 520- www.facebook.com/pages/Apple-Peel-520/124964047553216	Apple iWatch Spot-uploaded by www-adr-studio-it
Apple power Mac G5 red lights-PC world forums	Apple records- www.facebook.com/pages/Apple-Records/112216762127012	iPhone 4 drop test- Apple Bumper case- Uploaded by ThatSnazzyiPhoneGuy
Apple stock split-the Mac Observer- www.macobserver.com/tmo/forums/.../79296/ - United States	Apple upcoming product-leaked- www.facebook.com/pages/Apple-Upcoming.../116972984994930	iPhone 4 official video by Apple.WWDC2010-uploaded by iplay360
Apple support discussion-Customer reports has unrecommended the iphone 4-discussions-apple-com	Clemson Apple Store-www.facebook.com/pages/Clemson-Apple-Store/149418602633	New Apple friend bar gives customer someone to talk at about anything Apple-uploaded by The Onion(they produce parody videos)

Cash-Check-or iPhone-Apple's NFC Plans Take Shape-modmyi.com	Facetime-Apple Iphone 4 HD - www.facebook.com/pages/FaceTime-Apple...4.../138196602862825	The Apple Museum - 30 years in 2 minutes-uploaded by Frensleven
Get exposed to Apple's i World-Tech18-com-tech18.com/ <b>apple</b> -iworld.html – India	Free Apple iPad Giveaway- www.facebook.com_notes_iluvgiveaways	The secret mission of the Terminator - uploaded byukorzing
How do I convert FLAC to Apple Lossless - Head-Fi.org Community	Get an Apple logo next to mobile uploads_posts like blackberry users get - www.facebook.com/pages/Get-an-Apple.../116633578351270	
iPod Touch is stuck on the Apple logo - MacRumors Forums	How Apple would explain sexuality to kids-very clever-Media artist project by DragonHo - How apple would explain sexuality to kids-very clever   www.facebook.com/pages/How-apple-would.../384199646809	
Itunes Error 42408 after 9.03 upgrade-discussions-apple-com	I love Apple- www.facebook.com/pages/I-Love-Apple-/107658515937707	
New Ipods, Apple Tv, Itunes- six things Apple got wrong-macmost.com	If you like Apple Join!!!!- www.facebook.com/pages/If-you-like-Apple-Join/202588797324	
Returning Apple Macbook to factory settings-nzgeek.org	IStore-Apple authorised reseller-Dhaka- www.facebook.com/pages/iStore-Apple-Authorised.../18205393061	
Review-Netflix Player vs Apple TV - AppleInsider.com	What Apple's FaceTime Means to us www.facebook.com_notes_oovoo_w.hat-apples	
The new Apple TV and AirPlay-www-inmethod-com	Will Apple Erection of profits surpass Microsoft's- www.facebook.com_notes_goosposs	

#### 4.3.1 Discussion site

Apple as an organization displayed a preference for using its own discussion site namely [www.discussions.apple.com](http://www.discussions.apple.com) but it did not actively participate in its own discussion site but rather provided for a space for its publics to discuss its products and services. There were moderators in charge of managing the Apple discussions site, and the conversations revolved around issues of Apple products. Often, solutions to issues came from publics that participated in the discussion. As a rule, Apple moderators did not participate in the conversations; they were there to monitor the flow of the conversations and would only offer help when it involved issues concerning the technicality of the site. However, it was found that when dealing with unfavorable posts, Apple moderators chose to censor the posts rather than provide an explanation. At least six posts were deleted in the discussion concerning the Consumer Report about the iPhone 4 (Luoma, 2010; AppleinsiderStaff, 2010; Diaz, 2010; McGlaun, 2010). The analysis discovered that the publics were concerned about their comments being deleted but they were not surprised.

*I am on my 2nd iPhone started with 3G and I couldn't be happier but it has to be our decision*

*in b4 404*

*I am having this problem as well. It's very frustrating, especially since my signal isn't the greatest in my house to begin with..*

*If you dont have it yet iwouldnt buy it.*

*[http://www.engadget.com/2010/07/12/consumer-reports-confirms-iphone-4-antenna-pr oblems-and-so-do/](http://www.engadget.com/2010/07/12/consumer-reports-confirms-iphone-4-antenna-problems-and-so-do/)*

*Is this enough to make it not worth buying, any advice from people who already have it?*

*I would wait for a redesign from Apple.*

*ive had my new iphone 4 for about a week and no problems at all even if i cover the whole phone with my two hands best phone ever !*

*Consumer reports have contradicted themselves! Not good at all. You should do more testing before you publish a said report and then publish it again totally different*

*Millions of subscribers are counting on you!*

*lol*

*This thread being deleted in 5, 4, 3, 2....*

*I'm surprised this thread has lasted as long as it already has!*

*It has lasted this long because the Apple employee that has been deleting them has gone home for the day. Cya tomorrow for more deleted posts!*

*I don't understand why apple would delete it? it doesn't break any of their forum rules, its not gossip, its not a rumor. Its an article released by one of the most well respected non-profit Consumer protection companies of the planet. Consumer reports has been around since Steve Jobs was in Diapers. There is no reason to delete this discussion. Is there ?*

*Maybe because it's not asking a technical support question or answering a technical support question? If you want to rant, go elsewhere.*

*I've got a question for you. A technical question. Can you fix the flawed iPhone 4?*

Some reacted to the notion that Apple had been monitoring online conversations and editing the forums to keep the publics from talking about the product issue. They reminded Apple that consumers had the right to the truth and deserved to be heard.

*I must say that some of the recent actions have left a really bad taste in my mouth. Censoring these forums is, of course, your right. However, I think it speaks volumes as to the kind of company Apple is. Please don't make me come to regret my Apple purchases.(merge it with the deletig of comments)*

*Admit that you have a problem with the iPhone 4 and FIX IT!*

#### **4.3.2 Twitter**

Apple tweets came mostly from media organizations such as TUAW, MacRumors and Engadget as reflected in Figure 4.1. These media organizations tweeted most on Apple *products and services*. Individual tweets made up about 38% of tweets about Apple and they relayed mostly *news* about Apple. Very few talked about Apple products, services, action and activities in Twitter. The remaining 1% of tweets represented tweets from Steve Job's twitter account about Apple's product and services as well as Apple's reactions to news media content

*Apple accessories are getting out of control... I just saw a belt clip for the Mac Pro.*

*Hey journalists, Apple has put up with bad press for a month now. Go pick on AT&T again. Three years is hardly enough.*

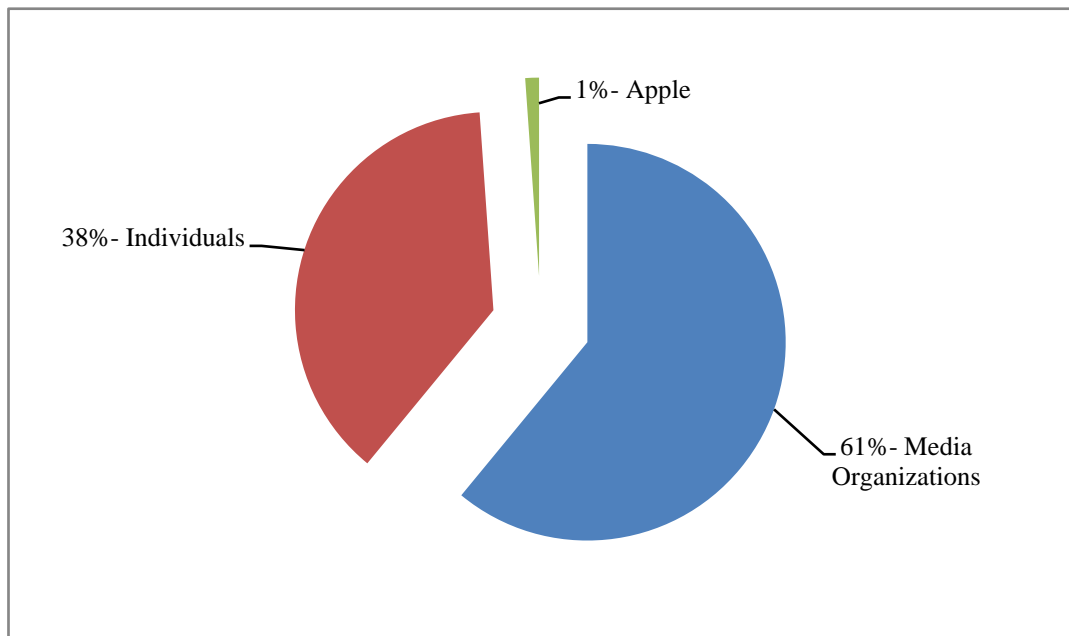
*Applebless you. ...Applebless you.*

*Board meetings at Apple start two hours early because we're always ahead of our time.*

*Four months from now Apple will completely redefine the personal computer. This changes everything.*

*Go pick on AT&T again*

**Figure 4.1 Apple: Twitter contributors**



Media organizations especially TUAW, which is an abbreviation of The Unofficial Apple Website (TUAW), generated the most tweets about Apple products and services but it also generated tweets on Apple's strategies, actions and activities.

*Apple says goodbye to design firm that helped develop some Apple products*

*What will Apple announce at Friday's press conference?*

*Apple releases iBooks 1.1.1 <http://bit.ly/bGb0UC>*

*Apple offers free case as iPhone 4 fix <http://bit.ly/acd9lT>*

*Apple's Magic Trackpad approved by FCC <http://bit.ly/9CHD6B>*

Individuals who tweeted about Apple were mostly relaying news updates about Apple directly through a retweet rather than personal comments about Apple. This type of contribution contributed to about 38% (figure 4.1) of the tweets.

*Apple now controls 89% of mobile developers' mindshare: Of 3000 mobile app projects begun in the past 90 day... <http://bit.ly/dverGY> \$AAPL.*

*Apple to hold a press conference about the iPhone 4's issues this Friday. What will they say or do? <http://bit.ly/9zmHds>.*

*Apple Pulls Attenuation Videos From Its Site. <http://r2.ly/4jpm>.*

*A local Apple store was burglarized for over 10k of merch. Police remain hopeful they can find and return both computers.*

*no surprise in Apple-Gizmodo case. Apple up to eyeballs in siccing cops on this... <http://bit.ly/a2xGwa>.*

*Welcome Back, Steve: Apple CEO Jobs Will Appear Onstage at D8: <http://bit.ly/bpMTgH>.*

*Apple's Net Rises 78% on Strong Sales of Computers and Mobile Devices. <http://r2.ly/zrr7>*

Few of the individuals' tweets comprised experiences about Apple's products and services as well as their reactions to Apple's strategies and activities.

*Apple insisted that if we wanted to be part of the keynote, I couldn't show my work at Quakecon, so I declined.*

*nowi'ma big apple fan, but am i the only one who thinks the new iphone is not that amazing? especially compared to the evo...*

*Sad that Apple pulled Camera+ for this sweet easter egg: <http://bit.ly/caKV4b> Have the app installed? Click: [camplus://enablevolumesnap](http://camplus://enablevolumesnap).*

*You must buy Apple's defective product by Sept 30 to qualify for the free fix for the defect. Freakin' brilliant marketing.*

*Apple's Airport Extreme, is Extreme all right.. "Extremely Disappointing" <http://goo.gl/1PUs>.*

*The Apple-Microsoft market cap raise is really nothing more than financial porn. A bit of symbolism, but not worth more than a paragraph.*

*Wow! Apple Passes Microsoft as Most Valuable Tech Company*  
<http://bit.ly/aS7N22>.

#### **4.3.3 YouTube**

On YouTube, the majority of contributions were made by Apple fans and fans of Apple's competitors. Most of the videos came from individuals and groups who uploaded videos reflecting their like or dislike of Apple and its products and services. Others were advertisements of Apple products that were uploaded by individuals or Apple itself. At the time of the study, Apple only uploaded *one* of its latest product advertisements during the six-month period. The discussion of each of the videos was dominated by individuals and Apple did not participate in any of the discussions.

Individuals mostly used YouTube to comment about the Apple products featured in the video. Some compared it with other product brands while others provided suggestions to Apple about its products and services.

*"...We're bringing video calling to the world.." Hmm, didn't Nokia release its first frontal camera phone (the N70) that could do video calling back in '05? Now 5 years later, Apple's bringing it to the world, huh.*

*"...It's all about connecting people.."Lmao, nice use of Nokia's actual slogan.*

*Like it overall but the previous shape is more slick then the new thickness of the phone reminds me of the N96*

*i switched to a htc from a 3gs..... glad i did....these are great phones but the desire still does more than this.*

*i'm not an iPhone fan, but wow they really did got better. But i will keep my HD2 for now and maybe go with windows phone 7.*

*Wow - Apple just invented Skype !!*

*I dont understand the big thing whit video-call, or "face-time" in europe we have had this for 4 Years now....*

*lol "face time" fails its over wifi? The HTC EVO 4G has video calling already over its 4G network. Anyway when you hold the iPhone 4 it loses bars.*

Other comments made on YouTube were mostly directed to the video uploader and those made about the processes and components of making the video. This was especially true in most videos featuring Apple, as the comments were mainly about the concept, content and making of the videos and its components.

*The Military dad part is so sad! Great commercial=)*

*This is fake, old people can't use technology.*

*I thought the deaf guy was Matt Damon at first.*

*matt..damon? :o*

*The (deaf) gal at the end with the Matt Damon look-alike looks like our own YouTube Happyslip! Could it be her?*

*the deaf man is ryan lane, idk who the girl is*

*Scott Forstall is one scary lookin fucker! He's like a cross between Willem Dafoe and Iggy Pop!*

*the camera tracking in this is wonderful, and while there are "some" irregularities with the shadows and the brightness of the terminator it's also on screen for almost four minutes giving us plenty of time to examine it. Even with that working against it great job. Fun little story, and the use of the music in the background--clever.*

*This video has been selected by the channel as one of best Animation videos on YouTube and was added to the channel's playlist accordingly. Thanks for sharing.*

One of the interesting elements of the comments under the YouTube videos was that the people commonly asked about the background song featured in a video such as the one in Apple product advertisements and in those videos that were created with Apple products. There were many similar questions asking for the name of the song featured in those videos.

*Does anybody know the name of this song??*

*When You're Smiling (The Whole World Smiles With You) - Louis Armstrong*

*louisarmstrong man how great a song to put to this ad. makes me want to cry and i don't cry*

*great song.loving louis armstrong on the track...*

*what song is it? orwich artist is singing?*

*I'm just digging the great Louis Armstrong at his peak. A very cool little commercial. Pity they missed the trumpet solo though!*

*whats the name of the song playing in the background?*

*New soul - Yaelnaim*

*the song is "new soul" by YealNaim. it's a beautiful song isn't it?*

*New soul by Yael Naim*

*what is the song in the background? at0:32?*

Others questioned the making of the video and its relevance to Apple products' functions and attributes. Most of the time, these comments were emotional.

*This is bull!! if you look at the people in the commercial, they are obviously thousands of miles away from each other which FaceTime doesn't not work over 3G. They are not using wifi.....so the commercial is misleading.*

*guy at 0:12 is holding the phone up vertically.. close up of his hand at 0:10 is showing that he's holding it horizontally. wtf apple?? seriously..*

*According to Steve Jobs, "everyone [in this commercial] is holding the phone wrong." Basically, everyone's call in this commercial would have dropped as they did not have the rubberband case and holding the phone as shown in this commercial results in losing reception and dropped calls.*

*This is really poor marketing.*

Some questioned the video's components and the message perceived to be transmitted through the video. In all the occasions analyzed, the conversation turned negative and rather sensitive when this happened.

*What wrong? Do Asian women only love Caucasian men? You got to be kidding. Why would Apple do this throughout their print and electronic advertising? This is stereotypical as Asian males are likely to purchase more Apple product than Asian women. I love Apple and own a lot of the*

*company's shares, so I think I have a right to complain about this marketing.*

*what the hell are u talking about this is a commercial about people and how they used the new apple product in their lives impreety sure their is nothing stereotypical about this*

*I never seen Asian male on Apple ad....*

*Apple sure loves pairing white guys with asian chicks*

*Apple's Ad company reallysh\*tted on the Asian male. While the ad may not be 100% racist, it shows a lack of understanding of the real world. It also subliminally promotes a mantra that Asian girls should only seek white males. I don't like the ad b/c they could have easily featured an Asian couple. How did this get approved? What were you thinking Apple & whatever Ad company?*

*Very creative...the musical choice lacked interest. I thought the theme was quiet hilarious and in good taste, Apple, it's almost laughable in this day and age the lack of good technology LOL. And it was certainly not Gay. Gay is an inappropriate term to use in the year 2010 anyone with an intellectual back ground would know that. It's wrong to use such slander, please be courteous when posting racial and cultural terms.*

#### **4.3.4 Facebook**

There were no pages from Facebook by the Apple organization that made it to the search list. Most Facebook pages that made the search list were those from Apple fans, vendors and suppliers who posted news and replies that were specific to a region or country and relative to their store's products and services. Some of the comments were:

*Thank u very much, i am so grateful that this istore (bd) is really helpful to us and appreciate friendly behaviour.*

*Do still have ones that fit my computer? Mine is nasty.*

*Not yours Amber. Too old.*

*How long does this offer last?*

*itdoesnt matter where I buy it? i can buy it online or by email right?*

*Hayley sorry for the lat reply but it ends Sept 7 2010 and Yi you can buy it online or in the store either qualifies.*

On the Facebook pages created by Apple fans, not only positive things about Apple were discussed but also negative ones such as the iPhone 4 issue. There were fans that supported the products even though they were not happy with Apple's actions, and there were those who were not fans of Apple products.

*I own an iPhone 4 and I love it*

*That's what the members of the group say, but what we hear is 'I own an iPhone 4 and \*SSSSKKRRRR\*'*

*Thats what i heard! i heard they suuuck.*

*Thats only possibly if you purposely intend to make the phone lose signal, general use is fine.*

*I have a left handed friend who would be quite happy to disagree there.*

*dont be such a bunch of retards i am left handed works fine get the case no problems*

*Unfortunately if you try use your iphone 4 for facebook you'll never see this...*

*So how much extra did you have to pay to get your phone that should have worked in the first place to actually do it's primary function?*

*A note for USA people: in Europe we have been able to send MMS, do video-call, copy&paste, turn-by-turn directions, swap battery and use SIM from different carriers for YEARS. Apple is not introducing anything new, it's just that american people was used to think that a phone is voice and text only.*

#### **4.4 Themes that emerged**

This section describes the findings that have been derived from online conversations involving the publics about Apple. The online conversations analyzed for Apple have resulted in one central theme: Apple products. The two key themes that emerged from the data are explained as:

- Drawing attention to strengths and weaknesses of Apple products
- Management of a product issue.

#### **4.4.1 Theme one: Drawing attention to the strengths and weaknesses of AppleProducts**

Most participants conveyed their approval of Apple products through their overall experience while others who encountered problems or issues with any of the products made them known through complaints and feedback.

*“I am on my 2nd iPhone started with 3G and I couldn't be happier but it has to be your decision”*

*I could go buy an ipad so the price isn't my issue it's the fact it's nothing new nothing incredible and it would be a complete waste of my money.....I have an iPhone I'll stick with it I don't need a 10 inch screen that does what an iPod touch does how do u know apple is running out of ideas? When they remake one of their devices making it bigger and saying it'srevolutionary.*

*You know, it's a pity Apple makes such great technology...and then fixes it so THEY control everything you can do on it. This is why I'm going with Android for mobile devices--it may not be as sexy as Apple OSes, but it's OPEN.*

*Civ works ok with ipod touch, but the battery's lifetime is too short. How long can you play with Ipad?*

Comments and questions about Apple products dominated most of the online conversations in all the social media. Questions such as “What elements of Apple products were discussed?” and “How many people talked about it?” prompted a second level of analysis which resulted in differentiating the comments and questions about Apple products and services. These differentiations were categorized into four sub-themes, namely 1) product features and performance, 2) advocates versus antagonists, and 3) evaluations, reviews and feedback, 4) in comparison to other companies' products.

##### **4.4.1.1 Product, features and performance**

The most frequently mentioned Apple products were iPhone, iPad, Mac computers and iPod, in that order. The iPhone 4 was mentioned more times than the others due to the antenna issue, which will be explained in the next topical heading (see 4.4.2. Theme Two– Management of a product issue). As for the iPod, individuals tended to compare the iPod touch to the iPad. At the time, iPad was the newest Apple product

and most publics expressed mixed feelings about the iPad when it was first introduced. A handful of comments were leaning towards the unfavorable. Initially, most of the comments about the iPad were promotional. Most of the comments made about the Mac were in comparison to a PC. Those who owned a Mac were happy with its overall performance.

*Saying the ipad is just an oversized iPod touch is like saying that a seining pool is an oversized bathtub. It adds so many new purposes by being bigger, and if your problem is with the data plan, then just get the wifi version!*

*I could go buy an ipad so the price isn't my issue it's the fact it's nothing new nothing incredible and it would be a complete waste of my money.... Anyone that wants an ipad is a complete retard did I mention the lack of flash player?*

*Bundles announced! \$30 Credit with iPad purchase + FREE Printer!*

*iOS 4.2 for the iPad being released in November for*

*iPad sucks...i want a new iPhone!*

*i own a Dv-7 (1285dx) and just bought the latest macbook pro 13inch 2.5ghz edition and even though on paper mac is weaker it is still more responsive, full hd screen, solid uni-body design instead of heap of plastic, it won me over right away.*

*PC > Mac Can't argue.*

*MAC's Rule, PC's suck*

The participants were specific in mentioning any product features and performance of a product with which they were satisfied, and they were just as descriptive about the features that they did not like.

*"[...] the technology it provides, e.g., overall system and internet speed (3G or WiFi), screen clarity, vibrancy, and sharpness, app variety and system software, email integration, and the list goes on and on and on. This phone hauls \*\*\*, and with all the apps it has, it's a winner[...]"*

*I'm fine with iPad 2 wifi it's lighter.*

*Sad that Apple pulled Camera+ for this sweet easter egg:  
<http://bit.ly/caKV4b> Have the app installed? Click:  
<camplus://enablevolumesnap>.*

*Does nobody ever realise that Apple are BEHIND on releasing technology, but when they finally RELEASE the "new" feature, they make it look like they invented it and they are the ones giving you something new?*

*Apple products are actually not that great, they are great, but not THAT great =]*

*It's all marketing... their marketing sells and all the Apple fans are just following blindly without thinking for themselves..it's almost a scam the way it is.*

Apple users criticized its mobile phone design, stating that it was the original design with a minor tweak. Most users suggested that Apple products lacked design innovation.

*That's my point, Apple have NOT moved on at all! What, you mean they have gone from light gray to dark gray with a daring splash of black? Frankly Apple products show the worst GUI design of all systems and a total lack of creative evolution or intelligence. Most of their products look like bathroom or kitchen appliances. You see, justt because they say they are stylish doesn't mean everyone on the design industry or public agrees, btw, I'm a professional designer and design many products you may already use*

*...but its the most dog ugly browser on the market. Apples obsession with inflicting its own sense of design on their products has left it making GUI's that haven't change much since the 90's and frankly it shows! They bore me senseless, endless miles of gray peppered by the occasional candy floss overly glossy effect icons. It looked good in the 90's now it just looks increasingly old and out of date...*

*I really hope they change those volume buttons, they look horrendous.*

*i pad is great innovation but it lacks many features....it doesn't have any usb SLOT ....IT COULD BE A BIG PROBLEM ...*

One feature that most Apple users agreed on was that the products are overpriced. Price was often mentioned in the conversations although the issue was mostly related to currency conversion and the price difference between countries.

*I don't think anyone can deny the quality of the iPhone and the iPod Touch (although they do have their drawbacks) the problem is Apple gear is always ridiculously overpriced. Especially their home computers and laptops. And don't get me started on the iPad.*

*Why is the 3gs so expensive in London? and its only \$99 or \$199 in USA.*

*iphone will be same price as always , even if it costs 0 it will cost ~600dol. cause of at t ... I heard their susbscription is over, I hope they will give us cheaper plan*

*The iPhone 3GS (32GB) is \$299 , But here in Dubai they were selling it for 3499 Dirhams which means \$949....*

*So this iPhone 4 will either be \$949 or more here in Dubai....*

#### **4.4.1.2 Evaluations, reviews and feedback**

There were many product-related evaluations and feedback highlighted in the conversations. Most were constructive feedback from Apple users. Some were comments made about Apple strategies and business decisions.

*Wow. Good move! Apple buys Siri. <http://bit.ly/ctrEb6> The battle for control of the web heats up! Competition is great. @web2summit.*

*I'd rather Apple beat Adobe on merit, not anticompetitive legal maneuvers made possible by their ethically questionable gatekeeper position.*

*All the programs Apple makes, when you switch between menus, when you put your cursor on the following menu, it drops down automatically. But in Safari the Apple programmers haven't figured that out yet for bookmarks. Everybody else has been able to do it.*

*Firefox programmers have been able to do it. Google programmers have figured it out. Very disappointing because other than that I like Safari. But this issue is a big problem.*

*Apple Should Enable 24-Hour Trials for All Paid Apps  
<http://gizmodo.com/5605938/>*

*However, my main reason for sticking with Safari are 1) spell-checking everywhere! and 2) how beautifully it renders pages. When I use other browsers now, they just seem crude. Kind of like going from a modern word processor back to DOS Wordperfect or something (well, maybe not quite that extreme. :) ).*

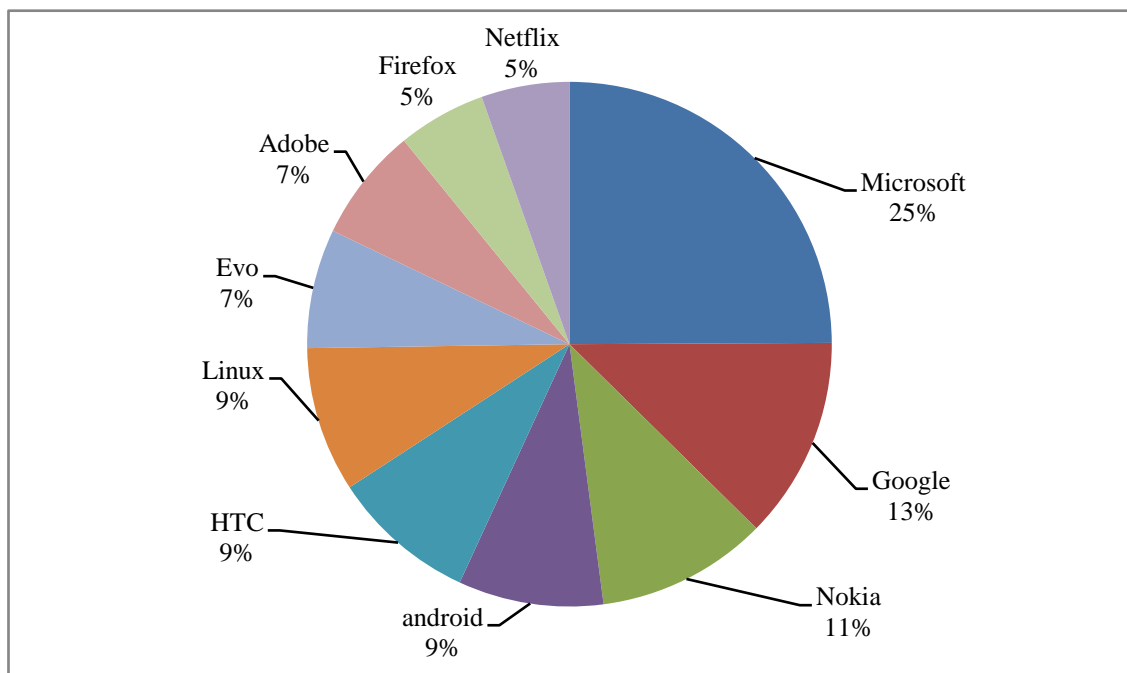
*I must complain with cnet, not enough Apple coverage, it really needs to cover everything Apple in more depth*

*If a product is that different, at least give it a new name. Also, Ping, sigh, I thought the same thing. Do we need such a social media group that is only a portion of things out there that already exist and work better.*

#### **4.4.1.3 Association with other organizations, their products and features**

There were many comparisons made between Apple and other brands and organizations, and some were focused on specific hardware and software. Apple was compared mostly with Microsoft and specifically in regards to its Mac computer brand. Figure 4.2 shows that Google and Nokia were also frequently mentioned in connection with Apple. Nokia was compared to Apple's iPhone while Google was mentioned more in terms of its operating system.

**Figure 4.2 Brands, organizations, hardware and software most frequently mentioned in relation to Apple**



The battle between Apple and Microsoft was propagated by their *advocates*. The publics expressed freely their preference for either brand via comparisons of the operating systems as well as their satisfaction in terms of the functional and aesthetic aspects.

*Windows = most popular platform with the widest selection of excellent software. Platform has improved greatly with Windows 7.*

*OS X = Shiny! Very crippled platform for computer illiterates. Run by a megalomaniac. Worst bang-for-buck ratio on the planet and with more security holes than Windows. True story.*

*The windows version is like that because apple users don't like Windows so they're going to make you suffer to use their software.*

*come on we all know windows sucks and is fully of virus and blue screens. i had windows all my life until I got fed up with the crap . macbook all the way.*

*Apple is the new Microsoft.*

*apple just the thing can eat ^^ Windows is the thing u need ^^*

In the case of Google, users and participants of the conversations compared it with Apple in terms of operating systems. As for android, new product releases, features and financial standing were the basis for comparison.

*Apple Prepping Cheap, Cloud-Based Apple TV For War With Google*

*Android overtakes Apple in US smartphone*

*Android is better. And I can compare. I have an android phone and an iPod touch.*

*Android And **Apple** Were The Big Winners In Q1, Says Analyst*  
<http://cnt.to/kzH>.

***Apple** Strikes Back At Google, Turns Logo Into Playable Frogger*  
<http://tnw.to/16Cjh> by @chadcat

Apple was compared to Nokia when it introduced its 2010 iPhone 4 with new features such as FaceTime or video chat, which were criticized by many participants in the conversations especially when Apple claimed that those features were new. Many participants felt that Apple was late in introducing the FaceTime feature that was introduced much earlier by many other mobile phones brands, but Apple advocates disagreed.

*"We're bringing video calling to the world"...Hmm, didn't Nokia release its first frontal camera phone (the N70) that could do video calling back in '05? Now 5 years later, Apple's bringing it to the world, huh.*

*Here is something good with Apple though. They don't simply do what others have done or are doing. They do it better.*

*Pfft my cheap arse Nokia can make video calls WITHOUT wii fi, but I must admit the new iphone looks pretty sexy*

*Whenever someone starts invoking communists, it is a dead giveaway of low IQ. I don't care if you buy it or not. What I was commenting on was the fact that Apple engineers, people who should know better, are in the*

*video acting like Apple invented all new tech. Video calls have been on Nokia phones for quite some time. So have threaded e-mails. Ditto with HD video capture. The phone is nice but most of it has been done already. Apple is good at integration not innovation.*

*I dont understand the big thing whit video-call, or "face-time" in europe we have had this for 4 Years now....*

*But do a little research you would know that it was available in Europe more then 8 years ago and you didn't need wifi to do it.*

*So Apple is only at least 8 Years behind :-)*

#### **4.4.2 Theme two: Management of a product issue**

##### ***4.4.2.1 Background of the product issue***

After the release of Apple iPhone 4 on June 24, 2010, a series of reports surfaced about iPhone 4 losing signal when held by the antenna band. The next day, Apple Insider reported that iOS 4.0.1 would fix the death grip and the late CEO of Apple, Steve Jobs replied by saying that the users were holding the phone wrong (Ionescu, 2010). On July 2, Apple issued an open letter and acknowledged a problem with iPhone 4 display signal bars, and promised a software update within a few weeks (Ionescu, 2010). Antenna experts agreed with Apple that the issue was exaggerated and that the solution that would help attenuate the death grip was Apple's own bumper case.

On July 12, Consumer Reports confirmed the antenna problems and un-recommended the product which sparked numerous discussions on the social media and a last minute press briefing by Apple on 16<sup>th</sup> of July (Hiner, 2010). The consumer report resulted in an uproar of discussions about the issue on Apple's discussion site. Apple's reaction was to delete Consumer Reports/iPhone 4 threads from its support forums. That led to more comments made about the issue and a day before the press briefing, U.S. Senator Schumer wrote an open letter to Apple requesting a free iPhone fix for consumers. On July 16, Apple's *mea culpa* of the antenna-gate issue resulted in a free bumper case for all iPhone 4 customers until September 30, 2010 (Ionescu, 2010; Hiner, 2010).

It appeared then, that the issue was about a defective antenna on iPhone 4 that resulted in calls being dropped when the phone's antenna was blocked. Not everyone who bought the phone experienced the antenna issue but those who did make their complaints heard

while others still defended Apple. The issue is described under three sub-themes, namely complaints, solutions and reactions to the solutions.

#### **4.4.2.2 Complaints**

The complaints came not only from the users but also from third party reviewers such as Consumer Report and the Economist which un-recommended iPhone 4 due to its antenna issue. Most Apple fans criticized the reports but others endorsed them. Some shared their unpleasant experience with the new product.

*I love Apple products but they have dropped the ball on this one and can always make amends. Consumer Reports are no Apple haters...their computers always rank in the top of every category they are in.*

*Here's another article from "The Economist," which very clearly and comprehensively explains the hardware defect in the iPhone 4. (SOURCE: <http://www.economist.com/node/21008277>) The antenna problem is nothing that can be fixed via software. Period.*

*That being said, however - and, having read both the "Consumer Reports" and "The Economist" articles - if you have or are considering purchasing an iPhone 4, your phone will TOTALLY rock and be awesome(!) in an area that consistently gets a strong signal (i.e., 4-5 bars). If you're in an area with three bars or less, I do not recommend the phone (especially if it's your only phone), as touching the antenna (case or not) will weaken its processing of cell tower signals enough to where your reception will drop. Case in point, at work, I'm 5 bars nonstop, no matter how I hold the phone; at home, I can only make and hold calls if I'm out on the balcony.*

*I purchased the iPhone through Best Buy (pre-order) and received it the day it launched, I returned the phone 3 days later because of the reception issue. I think the phone itself is awesome however I absolutely could not use the phone from my house (iPhone 3G works perfectly) without it dropping every call I made or received. Yes, I was aware of the antenna issue and avoided touching the lower-left side of the phone but that made no difference, it would just drop every call.*

*With my iPhone 4 I didn't need to wait 3-4 weeks for Consumer Reports to tell me the phone was flawed, I could tell every time I tried to use it. I'm appalled that Steve Jobs and Apple have tried denying this problem for so long, they seriously screwed up here and now they need to man up and fix all the defective phones that went out to the public. Unless they admit and fix this problem I will never purchase another Apple product, there are to many good companies out there making other phones/computers that stand by their product, Unlike Apple.*

*Ryan, the iPhone 4 does have an antenna issue, even apple acknowledged the issue. I have experienced the problem on the very same iPhone 4 that I'm using to write this. The iPhone is a great phone but it certainly is NOT the best one out there.*

*when you hold the iPhone 4 a certain way, the signal drops down to 0. that's death grip. all because they wanted to make the antenna the body*

*now i'm a big apple fan, but am i the only one who thinks the new iphone is not that amazing? especially compared to the evo...*

*Two, Apple usually exceeds our expectations and throws in an extra 'wow' factor no one is even aware of. 'Wow' never happened. I kept saying, "But what about?" My soul was looking for fireworks LOL. My mistake*

#### **4.4.2.3 Solutions**

Apple's CEO at the time, the late Steve Jobs denied the severity of the antenna issue. Apple's initial solution was to show the public how they should hold the phone and to point out that the problem is quite common as other manufacturers experience it too. Some of the public provided their own conclusion of the issue and how to solve it.

*Focusing on this antenna "issue: is one thing, using this device is another. I use the phone in all its ways and its great. Why all the hysteries? In the rare instance I'm in a poor signal strength area, I don't touch the 1cm sq lower left. Big deal.*

*When I hold the phone on either hand sometimes I lose a bar or two and most times its not affected at all in my case it all depends on my signal strength in my area. You can't make technology perfect there are going to be that percentage of defect's that Apple is going to have to handle like in any company. But people and consumer report can't say this is in all manufactured iPhone 4's because it's clearly not the case.*

*Personally, I believe the underlying cause is due to people being in areas that have a poor signal to begin with. Luckily, where I live, AT&T is pretty good.*

*Apple admits iPhone 4 drops more calls per 100 than iPhone 3GS (AppleInsider) <http://techme.me/=nkV>.*

*Apple CEO Steve Jobs overruled internal concerns about the iPhone 4's antenna reception <http://on.wsj.com/cGbTqn>.*

*Apple's Bumper case alleviates the iPhone 4 signal-loss problem <http://bit.ly/9qx9DH>.*

*Analyst says Apple has a hardware fix for iPhone 4 to better insulate the antenna: <http://bit.ly/as5tkD>.*

*Apple has a YouTube channel where it demonstrates other phones antenna issues: DroidX <http://ping.fm/HqYjI>.*

#### **4.4.2.4 Reactions to the solutions**

There was uproar of publics' comments about Apple's solutions, even the advocates appeared shaken as some did not agree, but most defended Apple and hoped that Apple would provide the best solution for all.

*Fear not for the death grip problem: Apple tells us that if you place it on a velvet cushion in a pillar of light while worshipping then signal will remain constant :)*

*Apple is lying and it is infuriating. All three of our iPhone 4's drop calls when touched on black strip at bottom. Data goes to zero too.*

*I'm no engineer, but....yeah, it's a hardware problem. The software update they've promised is mostly hot air. They've promised that it will be available in "a few weeks". Look, the software change to make is tiny. It's the kind of change that could be engineered in a day if Apple wanted it to be. The "few weeks" is really a chance for them to try to figure something out. It's a delaying tactic. I'd keep an eye on your 30-day return date, if I were you. I'm keeping an eye on mine (July 24).*

*Wow. Apple says, in essence: "If you lose bars, you're holding the iPhone the wrong way!" <http://bit.ly/cOuWm1>.*

*Apple exec in charge of iPhone hardware leaving company in wake of iPhone4 antenna problems <http://bit.ly/9jbr08>.*

*I love mine. I'm still hoping that Apple does the right thing but in the meantime I have a bumper and I'm happy.*

*Apple, you're holding it wrong! <http://bit.ly/ce8rG4> (pic)*

*and all the rumors of death grip are fucking lies. all 3 antennas in the iphone 4 are connected to the stainless steel frame and trim.. even if u covered the fone completely ud be fine. look it up on youtube n watch the video. its like a half hr n talks about the new glass the stainless steel n the new A4 processer chip. theiphone is changing the wayvpeople look at phones n anyone tht says other wise can bite me.*

*How funny that everyone in the video is holding the phone wrong! LoL!*

## 4.5 Emerged publics

Based on the analysis of the data for Apple, the following categories of publics emerged (see table 4.2):

**Table 4.2 Apple: Categories of emerged publics<sup>2</sup>**

Categories of publics/ organizations	Apple
Advocates/fans/supporters	✓
Antagonists	✓
Employees	
Shareholders	✓
Speculators	
Voice of reason	✓
Sarcastic/Cynical	✓
Resourceful	✓
Skeptical	
International	✓
Media/Intermediaries	✓

### 4.5.1 Apple advocates

The advocates are publics who will *promote Apple products freely and willingly* by expressing their positive experiences with Apple and its products. They admire and are followers and owners of Apple products. These publics will defend Apple in time of crisis and will fend off any negative criticism about Apple products; they are *very loyal*. Most are dramatic but others can be quite diplomatic. Apple product advocates were considered ‘different’, ‘fanatics’, ‘defensive’, or ‘yuppies’ by others. This is

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<sup>2</sup>The shaded area reflected the publics that emerged across all four organizations.

because some of these advocates have been loyal fans of Apple since they first started. Apple advocates dominated most of the conversations analyzed.

*iloooooooooove my macbook pro....*

*love my iphone*

*I've got a MacBook Air!*

*Well down under just got theirs released yesterday and I queued for hours in the cold to get hold of one....I think it was well worth it, I love it. No dramas with reception : )*

*It's fact. The Apple experience is so much better than the alternatives. #expcuser.*

*what about the 2nd gen ipod which paved the way for modern mp3s. idont sit around all day and suck apples dick but they have came up with some of the most important ideas and products in the past 10 years.. just look at how windows 7 is a carbon copy of mac OSX.*

*Don't Blame Apple for Its Music Monopoly. Blame the Big Labels. <http://mee.bo/aqTFDD>.*

*Then don't fucking install it stupid. If you don't like it, use another media player. Either that or get a real computer. Let me guess, you're too stupid to run linux, and too poor to run mac? Typical moron who hates mac for no reason.*

*Ummm...they were not doing this in the 90's. Try a little research next time. Besides, is eye candy that big of deal. When Apple first released OS X, most users scoffed at the idea of "pretty colors" and "eye candy". Now you and some others want it back? Late to the party it would seem, as Apple moved on from that a few years ago.*

*So for me, it's clearly a Kaspersky problem. I don't know why Raythebear seems very interested in trying to show it's an Apple-only problem and no problem with Kaspersky.*

#### **4.5.2 Apple shareholders**

Some of the product advocates were *shareholders* who supported Apple because they owned Apple shares. Their concerns and issues were different from those of the advocates. They discussed Apple's share split, management decisions and promotional activities that they felt could affect the share price. They were also concerned about rumors and the pre-release of products and software as that could influence the share

price. Members of this public were very proud owners of Apple shares and made themselves known as shareholders.

*Apple is on record stating that they wouldn't be interested in a split unless Apple broached \$400 a share. My conjecture is Apple's thesis is that the high cost of entry stabilizes Apple's market cap and share price. The underlying thesis is that nobody likes to see the value of their portfolio whipsawed—not investors and not Apple employees.*

*I'm not advocating a split (though I'm sure it sounds that way), I just don't see current levels as having prevented us all from being wipsawed, anyhow.*

*I was unaware of management's comment regarding split at \$400. Thanks*

*One strong argument, and I am not saying this is Apple's reasoning, is that a high stock price keeps AAPL out of the Dow Jones Averages. The DJI is a price weighted index; at current prices AAPL would have 10x more weight than many of the current components. And if there is anybody out there who is wondering whether being in the DJI might be good for the stock price, the answer is an emphatic, no.*

*The AAPL stock price is already too much influenced by indexes. We don't need more of it. It would be worth a nice boost to the P/E if we could somehow get out of the NASDAQ and the S&P500; indexes.*

#### **4.5.3 Angry publics**

Angry publics came from two groups. The first group were advocates who, when let down by Apple, either turned into *angry and disappointed publics*, or became *angry publics defending Apple* when faced with harsh comments about Apple from others

The second group was a public that did not like Apple in the first place, so when faced by an action or decision with which they did not agree, they expressed their anger openly.

Angry publics from both groups came mostly from YouTube conversations, followed by a few from Twitter and discussion sites. These angry public used Twitter to express their frustration about Apple's products, services and its late CEO. On YouTube, angry public directed their discontent not only towards Apple, its products and services but also to other users. Advocates turned into angry and disappointed public when they felt that they were being let down by Apple, and they then directed their anger and

disappointment towards Apple.

*Totally fed up with Apple today: iOS4 won't download and iPhoto won't sync the 300 photos I took on the road recently*

*You've mirrored my feelings exactly though I believe I came to them faster. At the end of the event, like Peggy Lee's song, I asked, "Is that all there is?" Perhaps it was my own fault on two fronts. One, being streamed live, it made me believe something huge was about to happen or else why would Apple feel it necessary. I was the one inflating the reasons.*

*i want to punch every one of them. . . . wtf.. this is sh!t that's been out forever other than the screen....*

*I dont give a fuck if it has 4g or not cause in canada we dont support 4g so having a 4g phone is fucking useless*

*Go die in a fire Jobs and take your pos iPhone, iTablet, iPad, iPod and all the rest of your iGarbage with you. Asshole.*

On the other hand, Apple advocates—when faced with harsh comments about Apple from others—disapproved of some of the comments made by the angry public and consequently defended Apple.

*I don't understand the haters. If you don't like the phone don't fucking buy it! How pathetic of a life some of you must have trolling youtube to post 4th grade comments about something you have no interest in*

*seriously cant stand these haters, pissing me off!*

*the same hating comments about the ipad, then we see millions of people buying it!*

*and now we r back again with the shitty comments on the new iphone 4, then we r going to see billions of people buying it*

*if u dont like it dont buy it*

*if u dont like it dont comment*

*You have come in here and asserted yourself. You have no profile, no history and want to talk down to and act like you have some kind of superior intellect. Bite me*

*It's pretty obvious you hate white people. So stop being a hypocrite racist, go back to the Middle East, and stop killing innocent people, you hate-filled racist. (oops, did I just make a racist comment??) .... Oh, and next*

*time you turn on your computer or your TV, remember who invented those. THE EVIL WHITE MAN!*

#### **4.5.4 Apple's antagonist**

The antagonists were a public that refused to support Apple and its products and those that liked other brands. They did not like Apple advocates, and would resort to stigmatizing Apple and its advocates. The advocates would be referred to or use stigmatizing terms or negative names to label advocates. A stigma can also exist when there is stereotyping, labeling and the sort that exist simultaneously in a power situation that allows the stigma process to unfold (Link & Phelan, 2001).

These antagonists' felt that the products were overhyped, and that Apple as an organization was arrogant. Most of these publics were critically negative about everything concerning Apple while only a handful of these publics were objective in their criticism.

*Some of you folks sound like sheep. You actually repeat Steve Jobs' press statements as your comments. That's some pretty scary stuff. If you want a company to think for you, then I suggest that company be AstraZeneca. They make some delightful anti-psychotic medicines.*

*At least now I don't have to listen to idiots go "But Macs are made with better parts!"*

*well said. The cult of Apple reminds me of Scientology at times.*

*iphones are crap, people buy apple products cause its shiny and white and "alternative"*

*iPhones r shit*

*cool video, not a fan of macs though tbh*

*God apple are annoying! They act like they have just cured AIDS*

Some of the concerns were about the high price of most of its products. That Apple was seen as overpriced made them unpopular with those that did not wish to spend that amount of money.

*Apple is overpriced, and proprietary. To me, this means its shit. Maybe you like the pretty enclosures they put their PC equipment in, or all the pretty colors in OSX, so do I, but I won't ever pay twice as much for it.*

*Most importantly, if it doesn't do what I need it to do, its shit for me, OSX wont run the majority of my network tools because its proprietary. Thus - shit, for me. Overpriced for everyone.*

*I don't think anyone can deny the quality of the iPhone and the iPod Touch (although they do have their drawbacks) the problem is Apple gear is always ridiculously overpriced. Especially their home computers and laptops. And don't get me started on the iPad.*

Sometimes, experience turned advocates into antagonists. This was generally the case of those who had stopped using Apple products.

*I just can't stand Apple as a company. Even though they still market themselves as a sort of "underdog" company who does everything for the user they are anything but that. They keep apple users so restricted and controlled to THEIR software and hardware it is not even funny. And their attitude is just disgusting and the icing on the proverbial shit-cake.*

*Too little, Too late, I've already switched to Verizon and the Droid Incredible, no way I would ever consider an Iphone on ATT again.*

*Apple free and happy*

#### **4.5.5 Voice of reason**

For Apple, most publics tended to be very forthright with one another, especially when it came to getting help with Apple products.

*Can you give us more information about what you've done already? It's difficult to help if you're vague.*

*There are a ton of other threads regarding any issues with or questions about the phone. Adding another isn't going to help anyone.*

*I guess you keep all of your cash in \$1 bills instead of \$100's as you get to keep 100 times more paper. It has to be a better deal*

*Nice analogy. I'll try to remember that when some other idiot starts telling me about stock splits and how AAPL is too expensive.*

*i'm sticking with lossless! OK I'm sure you're right and that I can't hear the difference. But I'm too old to change. So it's FLAC in the non-Apple world and ALAC for the iPod/iTunes world. You need tagging and compression --that's that.*

*Man, you really think you know what you are talking about. Fundamentally, a stock split changes nothing. Your talk of a 10:1 is just a*

*decimal point, nothing more. The cash is the same percentage of the stock price. You have come in here and asserted yourself. You have no profile, no history and want to talk down to and act like you have some kind of superior intellect. Bite me!*

*Boy, I can't win. When I praise Apple I get called a fanboy. When I criticize them, I get called a whiny little \*\*\*\*\*.*

*As for why I care, well it is my job to teach, report and occasionally comment on what's new. So I'm doing that. If you don't want to hear other people's opinions, then don't read them.*

*I think that a lot of people who make up MacMost's audience would like to hear that I think the new Nano is a product missing two features that were previously in the Nano, at the same price.*

Others were frank about personal preference and with language use while passing judgment about others. These incidents happened between advocates and antagonists and within each group. It was a way to criticize and discredit the other party.

*Actually, I don't think prevaricate was used properly in this context.*

*prevaricate /pri?'vari?'k?t/*

*verb [ intrans. ]*

*speak or act in an evasive way : he seemed to prevaricate when journalists asked pointed questions*

*After prevaricating, by implying he's an editor, cnet reveals the truth - that Rosenblatt is, in fact, a doofus.*

*Seth, your Macbook has a dictionary. I suggest you use it.*

*Learn to spell, Ryan.*

#### **4.5.6 Sarcastic/cynical public**

The analysis also identified a public that used sarcasm and cynical remarks when conversing and getting their message across. These publics were generally were rude and sometimes used vulgar words.

*Then don't fucking install it stupid. If you don't like it, use another media player. Either that or get a real computer. Let me guess, you're too stupid to run linux, and too poor to run mac? Typical moron who hates mac for no reason.*

*sorry to tell you.. there will be more ppl holding 'shit' than holding HTC...)*

*oh wow, apple releasing 5 year old technology, suddenly it's like the second coming of jesus in mobile form*

*Did you hold it the right way?*

*Apple got a patent on "Slide to Unlock." Because, you know, that's never been done before. Christ this system is broken.*

#### **4.5.7 Resourceful public**

There were also resourceful publics who were helpful and were quick to provide information needed by other individuals

*As for the signal bars issue, I can recreate the effect, but only intermittently. But even then (with bars down to 0) my calls still connect. I did recently buy a bumper case, but this was after reading how tech writer Andy Ihnatko dropped his iPhone and broke the glass back. (With the bumper on the signal bar effect does not occur.) My advice? If you live in a moderately decent signal area, you will see improved performance. This, plus the great new features make the iPhone 4 an A+ upgrade. However, if you have poor AT&T service where you live, this phone will likely not improve things for you, and the signal bars issue will only increase your frustration.*

*Try this link?*

<http://www.macosxhints.com/article.p...61104002244385>

The other publics that emerged such as the media, sceptics and international public will be discussed in Chapter 8 to compare and contrast these findings with those of the other organization.

#### **4.6 Summary**

This chapter has explained the findings of the analysis of data for Apple. It has presented sources of data, social media applications, emerging themes, organizations—public relations strategy and categories of emerged publics. The themes surrounding Apple were mostly related to its products and services. There were conversations that focused on the “antenna gate” product issue where advocates and antagonists alike did not agree with Apple’s reaction and solutions to the issue.

Apple provided platforms for discussion but was passively involved in the communication activities. In fact, it was caught deleting unfavorable comments from its discussion sites because of the publics' conversation about the antenna gate issue. Apple was mostly silent in online communication. Its voice was transmitted by advocates who were passionate about Apple products. The next chapter will describe the BP analysis results as per its conversations. The structure of information also covers application of social media, emerged themes and publics. Additionally for BP, the crisis dominated the description of the results.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Results of analysis for BP**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the analysis for BP and is divided into sources of data, social media applications, themes, the organization–public relations strategy and categories of publics that emerged as a result of the analysis. Some of the categories of the emerged publics will be discussed in Chapter 8, as it is more relevant to compare and contrast them with the other organizations rather than presenting them on their own. In addition, the section on themes that emerged will only include themes surrounding the crisis because of the infamous oil spill that BP encountered at the time of the analysis as all conversations analyzed were focused on the crisis and matters relating to it.

#### **5.2 Background of the crisis**

On 20 April 2010, a massive explosion occurred on the Transocean Deepwater Horizon Oil drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico. The rig was owned by Transocean Ltd but licensed to BP. The Deepwater Horizon was under contract with BP to drill an exploratory well. There were 126 people were on board of the rig at the time and 11 were unaccounted for and 15 were injured. After burning for more than two days, another explosion took caused the rig to sink (“Timeline: BP Oil Spill”, 2010; “Timeline: The Gulf of Mexico oil spill”, 2012).

Four days after the first explosion, the U.S. Coast Guard called off the search for the 11 missing Deepwater Horizon workers. Two days later, BP started using remote–controlled robots to activate the blowout preventer—a valve designed to seal off the well in an emergency but failed several times. On April 27, 2010 a federal investigation led by Janet Napolitano (Homeland Security Secretary at the time) and Ken Salazar (Interior Secretary at the time of the crisis) to find out the cause of the explosion (“Timeline: BP Oil Spill”, 2010; “Timeline: The Gulf of Mexico oil spill”, 2012).

On April 29, BP's CEO announced that BP took full responsibility and would pay all legitimate claims and the cost of the cleanup. Eleven days after the first explosion US President Obama announced the banning of any new drilling until the cause of the Deepwater explosion was determined as opposed to his March 31st announcement of expanding offshore drilling in the Gulf, the Atlantic and Arctic. Two weeks after the spill President Obama made his first visit to the Gulf Coast. On May 7, BP's containment dome failed to contain the spill when an icy mix of gas and water blocked the opening through which the oil would have been collected. On May 11th, executives from BP, Transocean and Haliburton (which performed the rig's cement work) appeared in front of U.S. congress for the first time leading to several more hearings and where three organizations placed the blame with each other ("Timeline : BP Oil Spill", 2010; "Timeline: The Gulf of Mexico oil spill", 2012).

BP tried many strategies to contain the spill and stop the leak such as a "junk shot" (shoving debris including golf balls, and rubber tires into the leaking wellhead), "top hat" (a metal dome to be placed over the leak) and "top kill" (plug the well with heavy drilling mud) but all failed. The U.S. Geological Survey estimated that as many as 40,000 barrels of oil per day leaked before a cap was put on the well on 3rd of June which has resulted in BP capturing some 15, 800 barrels of crude per day after that. By 17 June, BP announced that it had set up a U.S. \$20billion escrow fund for damages and claims from the spill. Tony Hayward stepped down as CEO on 1 October and an American, Robert Dudley, succeeded him. More than three months after the explosion, a relief well was built within 1.5 meters of the leaking well bore and was said to be the solution to stop the leak.

"Static kill" operations were also considered successful where mud was used to plug the leak and then seal it with cement. On 3 September, the 300-ton blowout preventer that failed to stop the explosion was removed from the well by BP to be examined in the inquiry into the leak. On 17 September, BP pumped cement to seal the damaged well after it was intercepted by the relief well. On September 19, 2010, the U.S. federal official overseeing the disaster, Coast Guard Administrator Than Allen announced that BP had finally sealed the leaking well permanently ending what was seen as the world's worst environmental disaster. In early 2011, the White House Oil Spill Commission blamed BP and its partners and their series of cost cutting decisions,

which were said to have contributed to the accident. Later that year, U.S. Federal investigators from the Coast Guard and Bureau of Ocean Energy Management blamed BP for the 21 out of the 35 contributing causes of the blow-out that led to the leak and a share in another eight more ("Timeline : BP Oil Spill", 2010; "Timeline: The Gulf of Mexico oil spill", 2012;).

### **5.3 Data sources**

The following table 5.1 and figure 5.1 show the data sources for BP from all the four social media used, namely discussion sites, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. It is worth noting that discussion sites, tweets from Twitter, the videos and Facebook pages were mostly created in reaction to the oil spill crisis in the Gulf of Mexico.

There was only one Facebook page from BP America that made it to the list and one video that was uploaded by BP. All the discussion sites that made it to the search list were created by individuals and organizations on topics related to their reactions to the spill. The tweets were contributed by the media, individuals, BP's parody account and BP itself. The Facebook pages were mostly created to protest against BP except the one created by BP America. The majority of YouTube videos uploaded were parodies made to mock BP and its actions in managing the crisis.

### **5.4 Social Media applications**

As noted in chapter 4, how social media is used differs from one organization to another. The use of social media here was derived from the participation of the organization in each social medium as well as the comments made by the publics.

#### **5.4.1 Discussion sites**

There were no discussion sites initiated by BP that appeared from the search results. All the sites were from individuals and media organizations that promoted discussions about BP and its oil crisis. They commented on BP's reactions to the spills and freely shared their opinions, suggestions and criticisms about the crisis. The majority of comments were made directly towards BP. BP shareholders did participate in some of the discussions and shared their opinions too, mostly in support of BP.

**Table 5.1 BP's data sources**

	Discussion Sites	Facebook	YouTube
	Anyone watching the BP spill feed-abovetopsecret	1000000 people who want to plug the BP oil Spill with SarahPalin- www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=125721827457718	A message from Tony Hayward-Uploaded by BPplc
	BP engineers spill cup of coffee-www.wrongplanet.net	Boycott BP-www.facebook.com/pages/Boycott- <b>BP</b> /119321854760965	BP CEO Tony Hayward- I'd like My Life back-Uploaded by climatebrad
	BP Plc Forum-www_topix_com_forum_com_bp	Boycott Bp and Esso to get cheap fuel-www.facebook.com/pages/Boycott- <b>BP</b> -and...to.../236241388502	BP Spills Coffee-Uploaded by UCBCComedy
	BP-illusion of a false spill-shtf411-com	Boycott bp_ARCO www.facebook.com/pages/Boycott-bpARCO/138332356184294	BP-Bringing people together-Uploaded by TheSecondCityNetwork
	Could BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico result in subsidence of Ocean Floor-ask-metafilter-com	BP blows-www.facebook.com_bpBLOWS	BP's crazy oil spill commercial-Uploaded by barelypolitical
	Microbes may be to thank for BP oil spil cleanup-Green Tech	BP CEO Tony Hayward issues an apology for remarks-www.facebook.com_notes_bp-america_bp-ceo	Rep Joe Barton Apologizes to BP for \$20 Billion Claims Fund-Uploaded by Fugumbe
	The BP Deep Water horizon,Macondo Well Blowout-www.godlikeproductions.com	BP stands for..-www.facebook.com/pages/ <b>BP</b> -stands-for/116186325087276	The BP Blues-www-dirtycajuns-com-Uploaded by dirtycajuns
	Timeline for Obama's response to BP oil spil-www_sodahead_com	BP statement on two Altered images-www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=449886943412	The BP Oil Spill Re-enacted By Cats in 1 minute-Uploaded by tremendousnews
	What does BP stands for-like for the oil spill-Yahoo answers	BP Sucks- www.facebook.com_BP-sucks	The Brig-BP Rich Fish-Uploaded by UCBCComedy
	Whitney Tilson's bull case on BP-www-zerohedge-com	BP_clean up your mess-we won't let you get away with this-www.facebook.com/pages/ <b>BP</b> -clean-	The real reason behind the BP oil spill in the gulf of Mexico-Uploaded by JogBird

		up.../115895225110345	
	Who owns BP-General conspiracies- www.disclose.tv	BP oil flood protest- www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=125460740806359	
	Why social media will never let BP sleep- triplepundit	I HATE BP-www.facebook.com/pages/I-HATE- <b>BP</b> /122677151077101	
	Will the BP oil spill reach Europe-mahalo-com	Protest BP- www.facebook.com/pages/Protest- <b>Bp</b> /116084535100711	
	Would you invest in BP stocks Now- www.stevpavlina.com	Seattle boycott BP- www.facebook.com/pages/SEATTLE... <b>BP</b> /115112635 197939	
	You are the Marketing Director for BP when the environmental disaster hits- www_linkedin_com_answers_marketing-sales	Seize BP campaign-www.facebook.com/seizebp	
	Man behind BP fake twitter account reveals himself-www.urlesque.com/.../man-behind-fake- <b>bp</b> -twitter-account-reveals-himself/	Stop the BP oil Leak in the Gulf- www.facebook.com/pages/Stop-the- <b>BP</b> - Oil.../129778300367300	
	BP heads for Svanberg resignation- www.thelocal.se/27066/20100606/	BP hire out of work fishermen without indemnity clause-www.facebook.com/pages/ <b>BP</b> -HIRE- OUT.../117819278247900	

*Regardless of how cheap BP's stock is, is it immoral to try to profit from owning it, in light of the company's bad behaviour?*

*As noted earlier, BP appears to have an atrocious safety record. In owning the stock, we are not endorsing its behaviour, either before or after the Deepwater Horizon accident. But as value investors,*

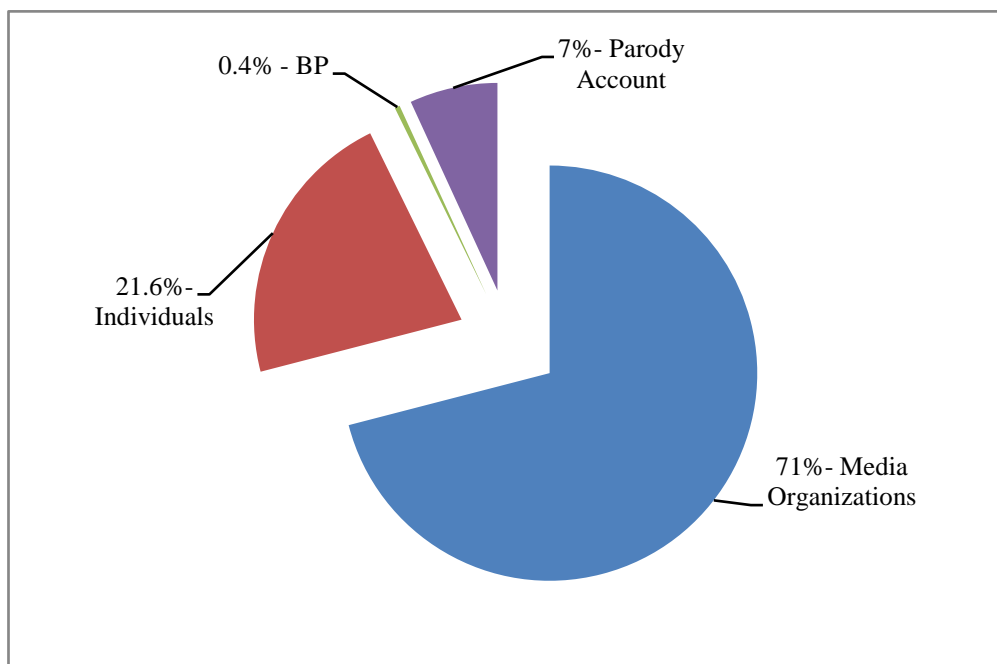
*we sometimes have to hold our noses when we invest because the cheapest stocks are often the ones of companies that have behaved badly or are otherwise tainted. Example include McDonald's, which many believe bears responsibility for the obesity epidemic in this country (see *Fast Food Nation* and *Super Size Me* ), and Goldman Sachs, which many blame for the global financial crisis (see *The Great American Bubble Machine*).*

*That said, we would have a problem owning stock in a company if we believed that's its core business harmed people – most subprime lenders at the peak of the housing bubble, certain multi-level marketing firms and tobacco companies come to mind. BP certainly doesn't fall into this category.*

*I truly love BP. I am making money on BP plc stock,*

#### 5.4.2 Twitter

**Figure 5.1BP: Twitter contributors**



In Twitter discussions, BP America represented BP while the rest of the tweets were dominated by BP's parody account, individuals and media organizations. BP America provided news and updates of BP's actions and activities during the crisis but the majority of contributors in this case were media organizations (see figure 5.1).

*View new photos of BP's oil response operations including the sealing cap and ROV control room: <http://bit.ly/c7m3qq>.*

*Live tweeting of today's tech briefing with BP SVP Kent Wells will begin in approximately 15 minutes. Stay tuned for updates*

*Daily response graphic: Since May 3, BP has written 93000 checks, totaling \$277 million paid. More: <http://bit.ly/9mHlk9>.*

*BP Grant helping fund a program to help boost late-summer travel to destinations the Gulf Coast. <http://bit.ly/aFNkOC>.*

*BP is working with the Unified Command to support wildlife response. For more information, visit: <http://bit.ly/aXO8Zn>.*

*RT @uscoastguard Headquarters: Coast Guard determines Cocoa Beach, FL, tar balls not related to BP Deepwater oil spill: <http://bit.ly/d205Uq>.*

*Kevin Coyle with @USCG works to ensure response workers are "working safely and they get the care they need." <http://bit.ly/aDnXtO>.*

*Beach cleanup operations continue. See the different ways BP is cleaning & protecting beaches from damage. <http://bit.ly/8ZTbF6>.*

*With DD3 relief well, we are currently displacing seawater with mud. We are in position with Q4000 to begin static kill Aug. 4. -Adm Allen.*

Despite the effort by BP to communicate on Twitter, its parody account -BPglobalpr received more followers. BP had set up two accounts to disseminate information about the cleanup: BPAmerica and Oil Spill. By 25 May 2010, these accounts had about 4,800 and 5,700 followers respectively. However, another Twitter account, BPGlobalPR, had 20,730 followers which was more than twice the number of followers of the other two accounts combined (LaCapria, 2010). The latter's tweets were aimed at mocking BP's actions about the crisis.

*Yes, we disabled the alarms on the Deepwater Horizon. Oh, like you've never hit the snooze button? <http://ow.ly/2fQ6x>.*

*Negative people view the ocean as half empty of oil. We are dedicated to making it half full. Stay positive America! #IwantmyBPtshirt.*

*To be clear, we will always exist to do more great work for BP and other "polluters". That's part of the announcement.*

*We plan on spending millions of dollars to fix this mess. We also plan on jacking gas prices so high that you'll wish you never complained.*

*If Top Kill doesn't work, we're just gonna toss a giant "Get Well Soon" card into the gulf and hope for the best. #bpcares.*

### **5.4.3 BP Youtube**

The only BP Plc originated video that made it to the search list was the apology made by the CEO at the time, Tony Hayward. The comments towards the video were mostly sarcastic and negative. BP used its YouTube account to upload videos to transmit its message to the publics. They had an introductory paragraph explaining the objective of the YouTube account.

*BP has created this YouTube channel to engage the public in an informative conversation and dialogue about our efforts associated with the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. We want our page to be an appropriate forum for everyone. For more information on our Commenting Policy, please see the Latest News section on our main page: <http://youtube.com/bp>.*

It appeared that BP created this account because the YouTube link was made available in the official BP's website at

<http://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/press/features.html>. The research came to the conclusion that it was created during the crisis to manage the communication and information that needed to be transmitted because the account was created on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010 (<http://www.youtube.com/user/BPplc/about>) which was during the early days of the crisis.

The notice that BP put up on their YouTube account was met with negative comments from some publics and those comments were replied to using the same statements from BP.

*What the hell, BP? Comments must follow your COMMENT POLICY? You are in the public eye. You are open to criticism, whether you like it or not. Welcome to the United States and YouTube, a public website.*

*We understand that people are angry; however, we ask that your comments follow our commenting policy, which is listed in full in our Latest News section on the BP YouTube Channel page. We ask that conversations on this page be constructive, respectful, and contain language that is appropriate for all groups and ages. Thank you.*

*BPplcin reply to omhgitssasuke*

*You hate yourself for having to do this job. I give you three more weeks before the guilt is overbearing and you commit suicide. Is it really worth it the guilt to continue defending this "wanker," as they say?*

*ColbertandStewartpwnin reply to BPplc*

*take itlike a child complaining about getting spanked when yo know you did wrongstop your crying, its only going to get worse for you*

*@alexzracer2008: We understand that people are angry; however, we ask that your comments follow our commenting policy, which is listed in full in our Latest News section on the BP YouTube Channel page. We ask that conversations on this page be constructive, respectful, and contain language that is appropriate for all groups and ages. Thank you.*

*BPplc*

*You're like some kind of machine, posting the same stupid comment over and over again. Shut up about your stupid commenting policy! You're doing a better job at cleaning up the media than you are the spill!*

*omgdudeitsjavi3in reply to BPplc*

All other comments were mostly negative towards the apology video by Tony Hayward consisting of sarcastic remarks and hate wishes towards him personally or directed towards BP in general.

*Thats not good enough you scum!!!!!! You're sorry? Didn't you say in an interview that you wanted your life back, and took a vacation? Your spineless.*

*Thats great, now accept your responsibility, clean the oil, and then promptly go to JAIL polluting is considered a crime in several countries and your company just created an oil stain that can be seen from outer space! At the very least you should be removed from your position or resign.*

*really hope Tony Hayward gets fired. Being a cheap ass about safety regulations isn't a good thing Mr. Hayward.*

*hey tony, i hope you go to jail when this is done. your company did more damage to this planet than anything thats ever happened in recorded history. why bother having a contingency plan in case something goes wrong, right? thanks to you, the british accent no longer makes people sound intelligent.*

*understand that people are angry. " Angry Angry Hell how about OUTRAGED! BP has lied to us from the beginning. CNN reported that you said you could contain a LEAK (GUSHER) 10 times this size! What's the problem? It was all about your greed for money, to drill fast, screw safety and no backup plan. Don't worry Tony, BP will be JUDGED by the DISASTER YOU CREATED!!!*

*Mr. Hayward, I admire the fact that you're trying to reassure people that BP will pay for the cleanup and will pay all legit claims for damages. However, I think the money you spent on this ad would have been better spent on cleaning up the oil and plugging the hole. The best PR move is to solve this crisis; you can worry about mea culpa ads later.*

#### **5.4.4 Facebook**

BP America's Facebook page was the only BP-initiated page that was captured by Google and made it to the top ten. The discussion was centered on Tony Hayward when his apology was posted on the Facebook page, and most of the comments were directed towards him personally. On this BP-initiated page, there were participants that accepted the apology and supported Tony Hayward's action but there were more who criticized him for having to make that apology in the first place. The supporters not only expressed understanding towards Tony Hayward's apology but also extended their support to BP. Furthermore, they even defended Tony Hayward and BP to those that said otherwise.

*WOOOO!!! Tony Your the man!!!*

*Thank you for apologizing but as a normal compassionate person I totally understand and didn't take it as hurtful or thoughtless but as an honest expression.*

*yeah it was sort of a stupid comment but i understand and you apologized for it which is a hell of a lot more than some people would've done*

*Its ok Tony we all get like that sometimes,life is a hard pill to swallow..my family has been in the oilfield for over forty yrs and we actualy lost a uncle in a tragic accident on a rig so we are keeping you all in our prayers,GOD bless!!!!*

*I don't blame him for wanting his life back- HE didn't cause this. And morons in the press take everything he says and TWIST it around to make him look bad. You can see in his face how exhausted he is!! Poor guy.*

*But, I do agree, maybe he should take a crash course in PR. He doesn't mean to say the things he does but I would love to see one of these idiots (BP bashers) step off of their soapbox and walk a day in his shoes! I stand with BP.*

*I understand what he meant. I knew when I heard him say it that it was going to cause problems. But I knew he didn't mean it that way. He meant it the same way everyone affected by the accident feels. He was just talking from a personal perspective.*

*Bp keep fighting we are behind you!!!!!!!!!!*

*Personally I didn't even think an apology was necessary. But in this day and age where every single syllable is parsed and inspected under a microscope it doesn't surprise me. Utterly amazing the way "some" (lefties) lay in wait for the opportunity to attack like this when such human energies could be much more wisely expended.*

*It takes an individual of great integrity to admit he is wrong. That said, you got a pretty BIG mess on your hands and you need to step up now to fix the problem. Generally I would be slamming you. Mr. CEO now is the time to "sink or swim". Get the job done, or step down and let someone in there that can get the job done*

Those that opposed made it clear that they resented Tony Hayward's mistake and continued to blame BP. Moreover, they even condemned the support given towards Tony Hayward and BP.

*another worthless apology from a man who over & over again, does think before he speaks..... especially to the pres. This is not a first!*

*What your company has done is unforgivable. You are the epitome of a poorly run business. You never gave a damn about anything other than your bottom line and surely your payback will come some day in the form of suffering. I want my life back too! You arrogant son of a Bee. God forgive you for what you've done because I sure cant.*

*This guy makes 2 million dollars a year and lives outside London England in a private estate-do you think he really cares about a bunch of American rebel's and our shoreline. I doubt it, when this is over and even right now this douchebagenjoy's every second of his opulent life.*

*The thing is, no one trusts you Tony. British Petroleum isn't welcome in my country anymore I will never do business with them again. BPFU!*

## **5.5 Themes that emerged**

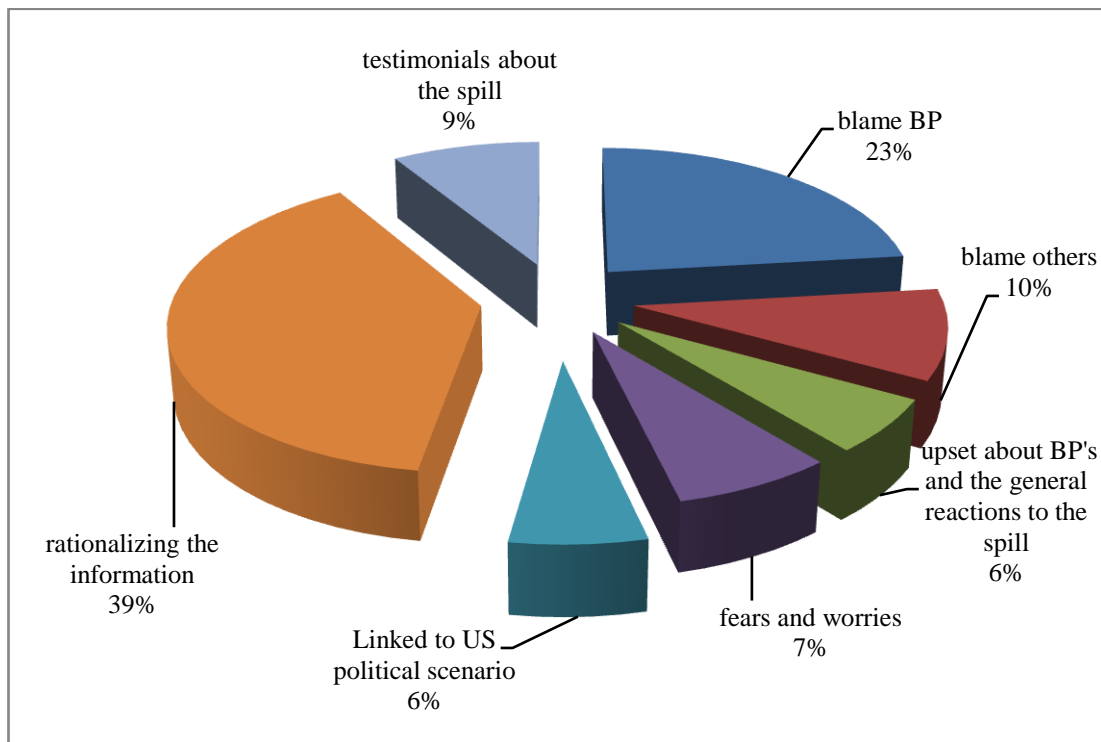
The conversation observed and analyzed in this study concerning BP solely involved on the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. These conversations dominated the social media at the time of data collection. Thus, it was fitting above to provide a background to the crisis before presenting the themes that emerged. This approach has been applied to other organizations, which experienced an issue or crisis during the analysis period.

There were six themes that emerged about the spill, namely reactions to the spill, reasons for the spill, the conspiracy theory of the spill, information about the spill, solutions and the effects of the spill. The themes that emerged described the reactions to, effects of and solutions to the spill.

### **5.5.1 Reactions**

Figure 5.2 describes the reactions to the crisis. The publics reacted in different ways when dealing with the news of the crisis and to the crisis itself. The majority of the comments in reacting to the crisis were on how the publics were trying to rationalize the information that they were reading and getting from most social media. The publics also put the blame on a few people they thought were responsible and were supposed to take responsibility. Mostly they blamed BP and others whom they thought were responsible for the crisis, such as President Obama and the U.S. Government and the end-users.

**Figure 5.2 Reactions to the Gulf oil spill crisis**



#### **5.5.1.1 Blaming BP**

Most of the publics blame BP for the spill but President Obama and the U.S. government were also blamed for their slow reactions in handling the spill when it first began. Most of the participants in the conversations shared their anger and held BP accountable for the oil crisis.

*BP caused the leak! BP failed to plug the leak! And thus far BP has failed to contain the leak!*

*No one is defending BP.They are to blame for the oil spill.*

*I am Republican and all for Criminal charges on BP. Might have been an accident but they should have seen something like this comeing.*

*I worked in the water industry for several years. Pipes break, drills break, things leak... Its hard enough to deal with above ground.. BUT We had measre to take in case that happened to keep a small problem from becoming a detrimental massive problem.*

*Have any of you seen BP's safety record? Check with OSHA. They have had over 700 safety violations. Exxon has had 1. Those of you praising BP need to look up things like that. I think BP is to blame, along with our*

*Govt. for what I call "lack" of proper inspections. Also why drill so damn deep to begin with?*

*..there own engineers were warning BP about possible risks and dangers concerning that well and BP totally ignored them.*

*the do suk. this disaster probably wouldnt have happenned if they didnt lease the oil rig 11 miles off shore. HOW DUMB. STUPID BP*

#### **5.5.1.2 Blaming others**

Besides BP, publics blamed other publics and leaders. Generally, most comments were frustrations towards President Obama and the U.S. Government. They also put the blame on the oil industry as well as the end-users for creating the demand for oil.

##### **a) President Obama and the U.S. Government**

President Obama was accused of allowing the spill to happen and the U.S. Government for the lack of response in managing and solving the crisis. After the explosion occurred, the U.S. Government, led by President Obama, had been managing the crisis with BP. Hence, the focus of most people in the conversations was on Obama along with BP. Numerous participants speculated about the relationship between President Obama and BP, and reacted to President Obama's handling of the crisis. The publics evaluated President Obama's performance as president based on his management of and solution to the crisis. The evaluation influenced their decision whether or not to support him as president for another term.

*.....Obama "loaned" BP the money for cleanup as part of making them responsible, so there goes more public funds to a big corrupt corporation as far as anyone is concerned right there....*

*Okay, well, what i heard was that Obama was giving them money for cleanup and they would be required to pay it back, that was from Obama's mouth on a live adress/speech i listened to. What it is, is not a loan exactly. It is a BP Escrow fund that is only 20 million (so far) to be paid for a myriad of things, cleanup, claims damages, things they dont want to go to lawsuit. I have gathered this info from a variety of news articles because i thought it was common knowledge...*

*From what I read there aren't a lot of personal consequences in the Obama administration for approving the drilling of the platform. The Obama administration tries to suppress information about the leak. At the moment it doesn't seem like the Obama administration intends to*

*do something that would really hurt BP. They however have an election coming up and making an example of BP might help win the fall election. Especially if it causes Republicans to side with BP. That would be populism and I think it also would be morally the right thing. ...*

*Those of you praising BP need to look up things like that. I think BP is to blame, along with our Govt. for what I call "lack" of proper inspections*

*Obama is to blame for the lack of coordination among the various bloated federal agencies. Obama is to blame for the decision to reject the offer of help from Holland and 12 other nations.*

*Please continue to speak out against this tragedy that BP and our government have allowed to happen.*

*Obama needs to clean up this Oily Mess ! It's Obama Fault, 64 days and President Obama still does nothing ! It is Time To IMPEACH BAD OBAMA !*

*both the government and BP have failed humanity and the planet. PERIOD.*

*They aren't doing crap. They're too worried about their money. Disgusting, sick, and twisted. They need to be severely punished for this! The whole government has become corrupt, and they need to be taken down, at all costs.*

The participants in the conversations expressed their concerns over the initial reaction to the spill as well as the management of the spill, stating that President Obama did not react fast enough or manage the crisis as well as he should have. The U.S. President was simultaneously commended *and* criticized for his team's management of and solution for the crisis.

*BP is doing everything they can think of to plug the hole and I don't blame Obama for that. But I do blame the lack of effort to contain the spill on Obama. He seems to think that all he has to do is make BP pay for the damage and that is all he is responsible for. Which is nonsense. Obama has to answer for every drop of oil that reaches the coast-Since: Jan 08 21,565 -Dallas, TX*

*I see Obamma has conned BP out of FAR more than is needed to clean the mess up - (which they were already doing and had said they would pay for)- but now Obamma gets ready to be the hero of all the blacks who will now put in bogus oil damage claims. But BP is 40% American owned, so it will hurt anyone whose pension fund holds BP shares. of course low class jailbird homies don't , so they will be putting in the bogus claims for compensation. - gibs me dat now, Birmingham, UK .*

*It takes a very shrewd, very clever diplomatic personality to deal head to head with an oil giant and come out on top. This was a great victory for Obama. He is starting to prove what a brilliant Harvard trained mind is capable of. I don't believe anyone has EVER went into a sharktank like he did and emerged victorious by obtaining such large concessions from such a huge oil conglomerate like BP. I always wanted to see big oil pay out the a\*\*. That day has arrived. Oh yeah!!!! BP now knows that all eyes are on them until they truly "make this right" and uphold their obligations. Some people think they will somehow wiggle out of this. I don't think so- One up on you, Jersey City, NJ*

*So you're for big government control of everything and elimination of the private sector. Obama already has the authority to regulate everything BP does in the Gulf. And since we have big government at least we should insist that Obama play less golf and do a better job of cleaning up the oil.  
- Mac-7 - Dallas, TX*

## **b) Blaming the end users**

Some of the participants blamed the end-users as—according to them—the users are the ones who are creating the demand for oil. In their opinion, it is that demand for oil that caused the oil companies to be in operation in the first place.

*I assume you use no petroleum based products right? You walk everywhere, and certainly dont use any form of plastic among other things right? If you do use petroleum products, you are an accessory to rape*

*We cant blame big corporations for feeding our demand, thats what big corporations do. We all have to accept that we are all responsible for the tragedy in the gulf.*

*Yeah, it sucks that they buy out the inventions to convert older gas guzzlers into clean eco-friendly cars, forcing everyone to depend on gas (except those who can afford a hybrid). Even then they force you to use SOME gas. I hate them all, but I use gas and drive an SUV so I'm to blame too : "( We all are*

*us for being addicted to oil.... if we werent so dependent on it there would be no reason to drill for it.. and i just as guilty as everyone else.*

*Humans, by being addicted to oil.*

*people don't realize that we're ALL responsible for the spill. We're all consumers of this toxic product (myself included). What are YOU doing, what am I doing, what are ANY OF US doing to move the ball forward towards a greener alternative energy future?*

### ***5.5.1.3. Linking the crisis to the U.S. political scenario***

The analysis of conversations concerning the crisis also offered a description of the realities of the United States' political state of affairs. The publics and stakeholders were referring to the political circumstances at the time in connection with the BP crisis. Most of the references were based on anger and disappointment.

*Barack Obama WILL DO 8 YEARS AS PRESIDENT!!!! Watch and SEE!! This has NEVER happened with a oil company in the history of the United States. Remember, this is NOT A CAP!! They had no choice. Clean up your mess and help the american people of GO DIRECTLY TO JAIL!! Obama got it done and will get it done!! NO OTHER president has done this with any other oil spill!!*

*No way can obama over come this oil spill, he has blown it!the polls show it, when the people of La think bush did a better job on katrina than obama has done on the oil spill....i think that says it all*

*Obama said he was gonna KICK AZT and he did just that and is not even done kicking it yet!He got MY VOTE!! Hands down. No candidate for president is going to be able to to this and they already know it. Ha Ha. BEAUTIFUL!!*

*On May 22, 2010, President Obama signed an executive order establishing the bipartisan National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, with former Florida Governor and former Senator Bob Graham, and former EPA Administrator William K. Reilly, serving as co-chairs. The commission is tasked with providing recommendations on how to prevent, and mitigate the impact of, any future spills that result from offshore drilling.*

At the same time, however, the crisis also promoted national pride and identity amongst the participants especially when they perceived their country to be under verbal attack.

*A vast majority of UK people deplore the spill - BUT, the fact Obama is British bashing is NOT acceptable. Obama is trying to paint this a British failure rather than a failure of the mineral management rights department. Simply put, Obama is seeking short term solutions for political gain in his rhetoric, rather than addressing the problem - which is poor regulation and oversight from a governmental department. Which is strange, since he could have blamed the previous administration, but since his demeanor is simply put anti-british (a legacy of his historical roots) it is understandable. I will always respect the American values especially since I am a republican- ie want to get rid of the monarchy), but a great deal of damage to our relationship is being done to the ties for*

*political expediency. Just remember Beyond Petroleum is a multinational company*

*Believe me, if it was safe they would have said it. They tested it, and it probably is very toxic. I say we start a class action lawsuit. I am tired of big companies having control of OUR earth. OUR nation. WE are the people. BP is not the people, Apple is not the people, HP is not the people, Exxon Mobil is not the people. Think about the constitution. "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." It's time to live it, not say it.*

*Obama throwing the UK under the bus is par for the course.*

**BUT LET ME MAKE THIS CLEAR**

*1. BP has an abysmal safety record - yes, since it learned that from thatcherism (when it was privatized) and has jointly corrupted politics in the name of profit. BUT THIS IS NOT JUST BP's DOING - LOOK AT YOUR COAL TRAGEDIES.*

*2. A vast majority of UK people deplore the spill - BUT, the fact Obama is British bashing is NOT acceptable. Obama is trying to paint this a British failure rather than a failure of the mineral management rights department.*

#### **5.5.1.4 Fear and worries**

Many of the initial responses were about fears and worries. Some people felt helpless and cornered. They felt condemned and that, there was nothing they could do about it.

*My biggest fear is that it will ignite into the largest fire man has ever seen and the winds will carry the toxic poison clouds across the US and poison all the waters and plants animals and people, I dont know if thats possible but it seems like it could happen.*

*Very scary yet pulls together facts that I've been reading for days into a coherent form. What news it was last night, that it is really 70,000 barrels a day. I am on the Florida gulf coast and just trying to enjoy each normal day because I don't know how many more normal days we will have...*

*Praying it works! This is such a terrible catastrophe already!*

*This is sooo scary and heart wrenching.*

*This thing is worst than I originally thought. The gas is what is worrissome, theres trillions of cubic feet that could be released very quickly*

*I think we are all doomed, if one storm comes around over there makes it that way ot toward New York. That won't be very good. I can tell you that. If someone dropped fire for let say in it there we go a big huge major fire which may can't be stopped. I hope they act fast and do something. I have been seeing alot about money. I am glad it not here the oil up in New York. That be terrible. I am working on the beach this summer. I hope they act fast before the Oil comes up here. They need to think before act, just like they use to say at school. I hope they get it fixed and cleaned up. I guess 2012 is happening little by little. What I will say is Godspeed and good luck.*

*I cannot believe this... Is it time to panic? I mean I don't want to be an alarmist but damn, I live on the Gulf Coast. WTH should we do?*

*we dont need any more mayhem!*

#### **5.5.1.5 Upset about the lack of reaction**

Other publics reacted negatively about what they perceived to be a lack of reaction from BP and the U.S. Government at the beginning of the crisis and during the crisis.

*No WE should not be mad WE should be FURIOUS!!! ??? Where are our LEGAL experts? What can WE do to put serious action into motion? Where are our HIGH profile celebrities that will HELP OUR ANIMALS AND ENVIRONMENT!!!!????*

*OK bro well ur defence is quality aswell with all your strong points.your a kook...Give me a example of how your Proud of your Goverment,Just ONE example.....Helping Haiti?But not having Telethons for our OWN country?How about YOUR goverment "blowing smoke up ALL of our asses about whats the REAL story..Bet by the end of this,the story will be 100% Defferent....Watch that video i posted and you tell me how good we are,u goon*

*THE ENTIRE EVENT ANGERS ME...The president, BP, and all the idiots doing much of NOTHING!!!!*

*ETA the obvious- that BP is just stalling until that can get a recovery of the field set up & screw the Gulf, the critters & everyone around it. It's practically passive-aggressive.*

*I wish BP would stop making excuses/ stalling & govt would lay off the "stern words" & act (at least by ultimatum) They need to shut down all of BP's operations in the US- ESP in the Gulf & ON the National Seashore.*

*THAT THERE NOT DOIN NUGGET ABOUT ANYTHING*

*BP doesnt even help*

#### **5.5.1.6 Making sense of the information**

Many of the social media users were trying to understand the crisis and what was happening. They did this by searching for information, comparing the sources of information, and asking questions to verify the information.

*Brianman posted these on the closed thread.....*

*www.cnn.com...*

*www.bp.com...*

*He posted that these two different sources are listed as being the same camera, and the same times, but with different footage!*

*ETA: I just checked them out, and they do seem to be different.*

*The cnn live feed is 49 seconds behind the bp live feed.*

*Add that to the video program of your choice. Its live, decent quality, and is official. Taken from the source code of the BP website thing. It works. Trust me. And it's LIVE.*

*I got an email that said its more like 200000 gallons a day which is a lot more than they are saying*

*Right now there are guesses as to how much flow is actually gushing out, but suffice to say...it's a lot...there are figures from 5,000 Barrels Per Day to 100,000 BPD....some are from video analysis of the "Plume video", some are from surface area calculations of the "Seen oil" slick..but even BP says they are all just guesses and even they are not sure*

Most of the participants watched the live feed and discussed the information they saw on social media. Again, the conversations revolved around making sense of what they were seeing, as there was a lack of explanation given by either BP or news media. This lack of explanation or clarity prompted further unanswered questions.

*Watching the BP live feed right now, and the ROV is doing a bunch of stuff. So this isnt the top kill yet, just preparation? BTW does anyone know what the top kill is? What it entails? Edit: Im confused I heard on the news that they were doing Top Kill tonight?*

*reply posted on 26-5-2010 @ 02:02 AM by darklife*

*Anyone care to describe what the heck is happening right now?*

*I am watching this at 2am and I see this huge tube like thing and no leak anymore.*

*Earlier it was gushing and easy to see. Now I don't understand what I am even looking at!?*

*Yeah, I saw it drop that bolt, too. Coincidentally, the robotic arm seemed to gesture in such a way that resembled a flipping of the bird. But what exactly is happening? Is there information on what's being done right now?*

There were many questions that filled the online conversation sphere and most of them were about the reasons for the spill and possible solutions to the spill. The most common solutions that were mentioned were the Top Kill, the Nuclear solution and the Corexit Solution. The publics also queried about other non-technical solutions.

*Why is Obama allowing BP to use Corexit in the Gulf of Mexico when it is so toxic that England has banned it use in their waters? Why?*

*Good point - where is FEMA in all this? Out of all the news reports over the last 5 weeks or so, I don't think I've heard mention of FEMA once. They keep talking about the "Department of the Interior" and VERY occasionally mention the EPA (who you'd think would be all over this event), but surely this should be right in the ballpark for the mandate for the EPA or FEMA to take control of the situation, or at least offer to be a liaison between BP, State Government, and Federal Government?*

*Does anyone know why they cant suck up the oil using tankers, then filter it out for use? Haven't they done this before???*

*Why doesn't Nobama get the Core of Engineers and the Navy involved*

*Use a nuke on a possibly weakened seafloor and near a major fault line...On top of the largest oil and methane deposit in the world?Are you sure?*

Questions were also posed that compared and contrasted the crisis with other historical incidents and past crisis.

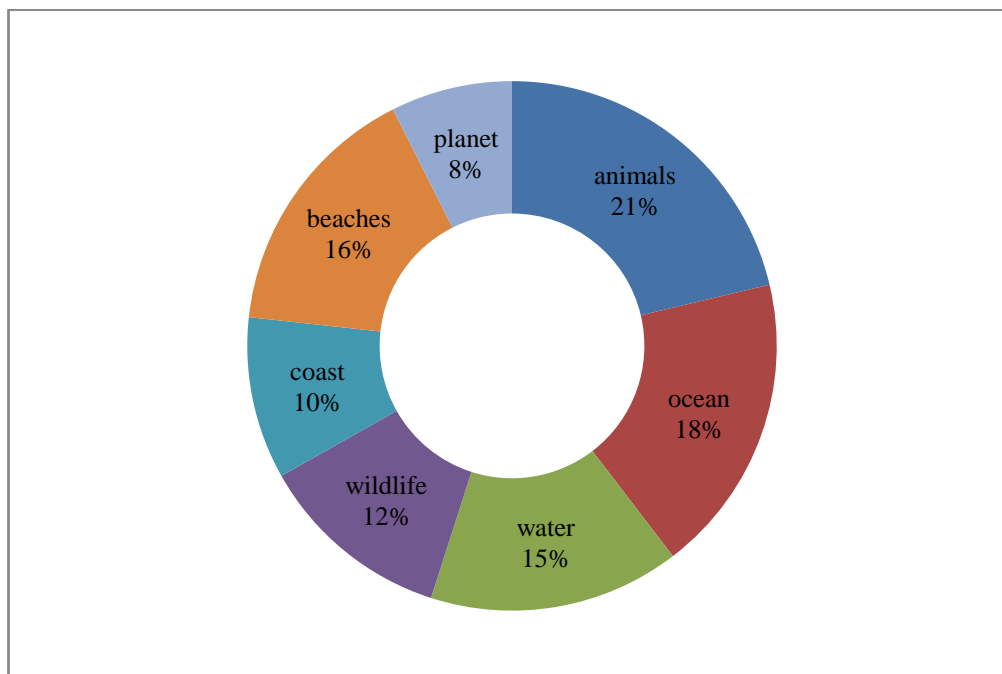
*How about you tell us why Halliburton and Cameron Int aren't getting any negative publicity? Who owned the Transocean rig? Who equiped it? Who made the BOP? What was the guy's name who ruptured the hydraulics? Let's get him and then let's get his family.*

*Then we can go look at why it's okay to start a war to get oil and how many thousands UNION CARBIDE gassed in Bhopal and celebrate Uncle Sam's safety record in Bhopal, huh?*

## 5.7 Themes that emerged: Effects

One the themes that emerged were about the effects of the oil spill in the Gulf. Some of the people were concerned about the environmental effects of the spill. They expressed concerns about the animals and wildlife, and how these were affected. They voiced their concerns about damage to the ocean, beaches, coast and the planet. Figure 5.3 reflects the environmental effects mentioned in the data.

**Figure 5.3**The environmental effects mentioned in BP conversations



### 5.7.1 Environmental effects

A number of conversations focused on the environment that was affected by the spill. Among these, the mentioned the most were the effects on the animals and the ocean (see figure 5.3).

*The BP company is under severe pressure to plug the leak as the environment continues to be devastated with almost 600 birds being found dead, as well as 247 turtles and 67 mammals, including dolphins. oysters & clams over a million thousands of crabs and crustaceans and*

*thousands of square miles of plankton; if they dont stop the leak 3 times this amount will be dead and gone in two months!*

*Poor animals! And, the bad economy at the Louisiana coast at the moment with honest businesses not doing well now, my goodness! I feel for them and I will pray for them*

*11 KILED AND MILLIONS OF LIVES RUNED THOUSAND OF WILD LIFE DESTROYED ASK GOD FOR FOGIVNESS THAT IS THE ONLY WA*

*Dead crabs. (My daughter picked up dead crab after dead crab on an AL beach).*

*Careless and Heartbreaking :(poor animals*

*Animal cruelty er...environmental catastrophe....etc*

*Poor wildlife!*

*disgraceful & animal murderers*

## **5.7.2 Social effects**

### **5.7.2.1 Conspiracy theory—reasons for the drill**

Social effects emerged as a sub-theme. Inconsistent and deficient information seemed to put the rumor mill into over drive and many speculated about conspiracy. Some of the conspiracy theories were explicitly linked to American politics and political leaders.

*I heard this could be industrial sabotage by the other majors. Fucking eh! That would be big time conspiracy....*

*What's the benefit of this scam? MONEY, and population control. Read this article [http://theintelhub.com/2010/06/18/gulf- ... ized-plan/](http://theintelhub.com/2010/06/18/gulf-...ized-plan/) If you're still reading this article, and even beginning to grasp the sinister nature of the fraud being perpetrated, then you'll realize that the corexit9500, and other dispersant's are not needed. They are purposely being sprayed by Evergreen Air/CIA to cull the population along the Gulf Coast.Also, explained to me, is the large amount of useless eaters, pond scum, or undesirables living along the gulf coast. These would be the Americans living off of the government. I will not beat around the bush with pleasantries, or politically correct statements here. This coastal area from Texas to Florida has the highest, or most dense population of targets of illimination by the US Govt., and corporations. These are the populations living on welfare(in this area dominated by African*

*Americans), and the older population living on Social Security(mainly Florida). These people are going to start dropping like flies over the next few years, and greatly reduce the burden to government coffers.*

*It is a conspiracy. If it wasn't we would be able to see all the feeds all of the time especially tomorrow when they attempt the fix.*

*Rabe Obama was BP's biggest recipients of cash in the election,*

*for conspiracy theories, but what about this one? Tropical depression shows up 6,000 miles away and gas jumps \$0.20 because there \*may\* be a hurricane. A worker in a refinery sprains his ankle and gas jumps. Now, the largest oil spill in US history happens and gas prices go down? You can almost hear the BP execs on the phone. "Listen, if gas goes up, everyone will notice and we're even more screwed. Keep it down!"*

There were also notions that BP collaborated with a social media site to block and delete any site that opposed BP during the crisis.

*What happened to the old site?? This is a conspiracy in the worst way!!!! They don't want our voices heard!!!!!!!!*

*of course they deleted it, they are the 'Government' when are you going to learn?*

*proves bp owns facebook, lock, stock, and barrel.*

*No media coverage, fake clean ups taking place, destroying evidence of dead wildlife, a simple 15 foot area leaking and no rush to stop the leak, BP doing what it wants, the spraying of deadly chemicals, the government not doing much of anything, no arrests, the deletion of 800,000 voices on the Boycott BP site.....what is going on???!!!!!!! Can't anyone see this is all wrong??? I am sad our country is this corrupt and how much power BP has, so much that our own government has backed down and stand idle while the beginning of the end it seems has started....*

### **5.7.2.2 Activism**

Movements were formed to challenge BP and the oil industry. These groups were initiated on social media based on similar causes, which allowed them to unify against BP. These activist movements called for others to join them in boycotting BP, its associates and products.

***BP BLOWS***

*Thanks to our friends at Babelgum for this great video of Tuesday "Vuvuzela's for BP" protest!*

*Vuvuzela-wielding volunteers stormed BP's international headquarters in London at noon on Tuesday July 13, blowing their horns in response to the oil giant's handling of the Gulf oil spill. To find out more, visit <a href="http://www.babelgum.com/vuvuzelasforbp">babelgum.com/vuvuzelasforbp</a>.*

*Boy Cottbp BOSTON PROTESTS! Live in MA? Get involved, start doing, stop talking, check us out:*

*<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Boycott-BP-in-Massachusetts/129966140351564?v=wall>*

*Only the consumer can make a real difference in this matter but people have to get involved and boycott these sons of bitches.....Please join our Boycott BP facebook page and sign our petition to Boycott BP....*

*Please Join FaceBook Goup: Destroy BP beofre it Destroys Us*

*<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=122101887810014>*

*Lots of good info on the Arkansas Boycott BP site, too...*

*The effects of the crisis also spread towards BP merchants where most of the publics have associated the blame with them as well. The movements against BP have asked all publics to not patronize BP gas stations. This resulted in financial loss to the owners of BP gas stations. Some publics refused to do and they explained their stand. The views of the perceived victims here, BP's oil retailers e.g. gas stations owners or franchise owners were minimal.*

*if your talking about boycotting the BP gas stations, NOT ME.... why boycott the stations, these poor people have nothing to do with the oil spill... they need to feed their families too... how do you expect them to do this is you boycott them? I will bye the BP gas when I am in the area that sells it...*

*The independents stations selling BP gas can switch to another gasoline! I have seen numerous already switch!*

*Not going to BP isn't the answer, retard. What about all the small business owners who own BP? They're local guys, not the jerkoff executives who don't give a crap about anything.*

## 5.8 Themes that emerged: Reputation

It was evident that there was a significant effect on BP's reputation, and most conversations were focused on expressing views that blamed BP for causing the spill. These conversations also chastised BP for its perceived lack of reaction or effective management of the crisis. A significant number of threats and profane messages were targeted at the CEO, Tony Hayward. BP's reputation was also compared negatively to other crises and other organizations in the oil industry.

### 5.8.1 CEO

At the time of the crisis, a thoughtless comment in reaction to the spill made by the CEO, Tony Hayward, backfired, and caused him to become a loathed man in America. Many individuals demonstrated their resentment by threatening him and sending hate wishes.

*I hope your grandchildren die, covered in oil, unable to breathe, like the birds and all the other lifeforms you've destroyed. Your name will always be associated with the foulest environmental crime in history. As BP sinks, I hope you go right down with them to the bottom of the sea, mourned by no one, disgraced forever*

*Hayward should be exiled to a gulag in Siberia.*

*How stupid can a CEO be, EVERYBODY KNOWS you should never do your-own commercials. His arrogance and insincerity is blatant and insulting to all who are suffering in this tragedy.*

*You want your life back! How about 15 to life for each of the 11 you murdered?*

*Tony. Give us back our unfouled coastline and you can have your precious pampered life back. Till then. SUFFER, BITCH! mhirtes12*

*Honcho whines, "I want my life back." I dare you, Mr. Hayward, to say that without a throng of security guards standing around you. There are 2 million people along the Gulf Coast that want their lives back but unlike you they can't just fly to London to get away from it all. F'n wiener.wannabetchef*

The public did not agree with BP's strategy in removing and relocating Tony Hayward as they felt that he should have been given a more serious 'punishment' for what was perceived as a nonchalant attitude towards the crisis.

*It's strange. When an ordinary worker messes up he/she gets fired. When a CEO FUCKS up HE (almost always a he) gets a reward. DUH!*

*He should be fired, not demoted to one of their offices in Russia. He is still employed while many have lost their livelihood because of his companys' neglect and lack of safety. This is just another reason why BP disgusts me.*

### **5.8.2 Oil Industry reputation**

Many participants expressed their negativity towards the oil industry. The crisis provided many of them reasons to transfer their negativity onto BP because it reaffirmed their preconceived notion that the oil industry was ruthless and inherently flawed.

*I know from personal experience that these companies, all of them, are top-heavy in scumbag, criminal, lying, cheating, dastardly, mean, nasty sons a bitches. They're not nice guys either. I worked for three of the major oil patch service companies: halliburton, hughes and baker. I worked all over... GOM, land rigs nationwide, onshore and offshore AK, North Sea... been on all their rigs... done business with all the companies... BP, Exxon, Shell, ARCO; you name it and I've dealt with them. That is if they were around as a company prior to 1992, 'cause that's when I got out. I was an ennineer and in management. I dealt with everybody from the roughnecks up to the VP's of majors. The nice guys, the decent people in the oil business never make it to the top. You have to be willing to steal from your mother to rise to the executive level. I could write a stack of books on all the dirty deeds I've personally witnessed. I CANNOT OVERSTATE THIS FACT: These bastards do not care a whit about the people they've killed or the damage they've done over the years to the environment.*

*From an ethical point of view I have to pass on this one. I worked in the oil industry for four years and saw things that would make your hair stand on end - or fall out in my case. I simply am not that in love with the oil business itself, and I believe you should invest in a business you really are in love with. Besides I bought heavily in the crash and already sold out more or less doubling my money.*

*The oil companies are the pushers, and we are their addicted schmucks who can't kick the habit; and we seriously resent them for it! We have to say ENOUGH! WE WANT INEXPENSIVE ALTERNATIVES TO FOSSIL FUEL NOW!*

*Realistically, this is not just about BP. Ruin that company and you will send a clear message to all the other oil companies that this is unacceptable and we(the people) have the power and the initiative to put*

*you out of buisness. It's not just BP's fault, by now we should all know that. This goes much much deeper. It's not just that well either. This could have happened on a number of rigs all over the world.*

*Seriously, the world is dying. We need to shut down the oil companies NOW. Seize EVERYTHING. Stop offshore drilling. Reinvest ALL of their money into solar/electric cars. It can be done but THEY have prevented it for DECADES.*

*Price of oil petrol going up??? How freakin arrogant are these oil companies. you screw up our planetary eco systems, rape our natural world and now your going to rob us....???*

*oh please , we could have found alt energy sources decades ago but oil companies buy out the rights to htese inventions and shelve them to keep the oil conglomerates at the top, in the for front and us dependant on them.*

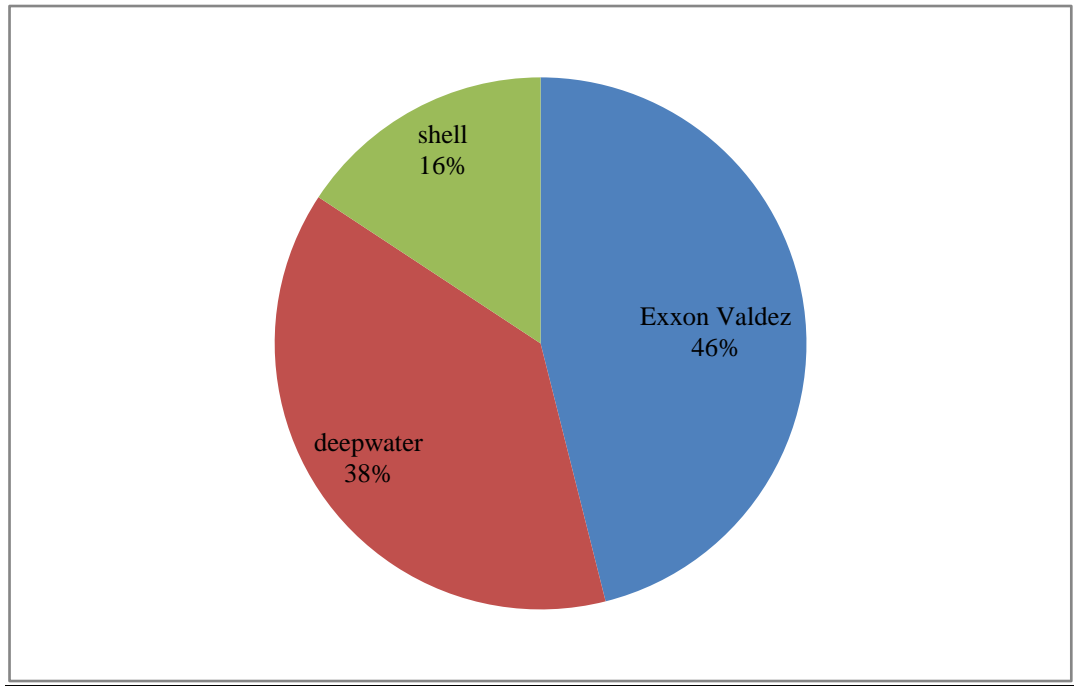
*They really are a pack of evil rat bags... boys who want to make money. If you look at the vaccum of space its hell, minus 245 degrees celcius, no air etc... news flash this planet is heaven and humans (some of them) dont deserve to be here.*

*What's the difference between the oil and tobacco industries??? - None!!!!!!!!!!*

*The oil companies are all in bed with each other as are all of the mega corporations.*

### 5.8.3 In comparison to others

**Figure 5.4 Organizations and events most frequently mentioned with BP**



BP's crisis was most frequently compared to the Exxon Valdez disaster, past drilling accidents and BP's own past incidents (figure 5.4). The Exxon Valdez disaster happened in 1989 when an oil tanker of the same name spilled 260,000 barrels of crude oil into Prince William Sound, Alaska, which killed more than 30,000 birds and marine life. The oil spill spread to 30,000km off coastal and offshore waters causing further damage (Piatt, Lensink, Butler, Kendziorek & Nysewander, 1990).

*Josh Deeds Exxon Mobil and BP are two sides of the same coin as far as I am concerned.*

*Beastly Psychopaths! No amount of money will ever fix this, there is still oil on the Alaskan beaches from the Exxon Valdez 20 years ago! A lot of people have DIED at the hands of BP: Blast at BP Texas Refinery in '05 Foreshadowed Gulf Disaster (15 people died)*

*\ Here's the thing, all oil companies had the same plans for a disaster that BP did. the explosion happened on a BP rig. if it happened on oh say, an exxon rig, same result.*

*Clearly BP has not learned anything from the terrible Exxon Valdez disaster - they are just as unprepared and act just as incompetent as in 1989! Yes, they were the main stakeholder in that accident, too!*

Have any of you seen BP's safety record? Check with OSHA. They have had over 700 safety violations. Exxon has had 1. Those of you praising BP need to look up things like that. I think BP is to blame, along with our Govt. for what I call "lack" of proper inspections. Also why drill so damn deep to begin with?

*BP oil spill cleanup workers getting sick, long-term health effects of Exxon Valdez cleanup serves as a warning <http://bit.ly/9cYmiX>. In May of 1970, 11 miles off the Louisiana coast, the Chambers and Kennedy Platform A exploded and burned in 58 feet of water, killing 9 workers. Human error was listed as the cause. 100 barrels were spilled. In December of that same year, a blowout, explosion and fire on a Shell Oil platform in Louisiana killed 4 people and injured 36 others. 53-thousand barrels of crude and refined petroleum spilled into the gulf and reached the coastline 17 miles away. So, NO, this isn't the first failure, but it does reinforce the notion that the oil industry has done nothing to improve safety in the last 40 years*

## **5.9 Themes that emerged: Solutions to the spill**

Despite the BP sharing information on ways and means to solve the crisis, there were many suggestions on how to solve the spill offered by participants in the conversations in which they participated. These suggestions came from individuals and self-professed experts who posted ideas and answers to solve the spill. However, most conversations about the solution were based on the information transmitted by BP and media organizations.

### **5.9.1 Solutions initiated by BP**

BP executed a few technical solutions to stop the spill. They also agreed to set up funding worth about US \$20 billion for clean-up, restoration and claims from those affected by the oil spill. The payout from BP, however, was met by mostly negative views as the participants of the conversations analyzed felt that it was not the best solution because the amount offered did not cover the extensive damage that had occurred.

*BP says it's sorry -- and guarantees \$20B for Gulf*

*President Barack Obama wrested a \$20 billion compensation guarantee and an apology to the nation from British oil giant BP Wednesday, announcing the company would set up a major claims fund for shrimpers, restaurateurs and others whose lives and livelihoods are being wrecked by the oil flooding into the Gulf of Mexico.*

*no amount of money can fix this people, we were killing the planet at a good pace bp just speeded it up alot.one good thing from this it will bring a much needed change that you in i cant afford,predicted the cost .b.s*

*20 bill,what a joke,the effect off this spill will be felt for decades.the people that work the gulf will lose out.no one will eat anything from those waters for along time.Bp's is try to save money,these guys should pay up big and be ran out off town*

*Google has confirmed that BP recently purchased key ad words on the popular search site. Now when people look for the key word "oil spill", they will be redirected to a sponsored link of stories from BP's own website, outlining how the company is helping to stop the oil hemorrhage. Reports also claim that BP has purchased key ad words on Yahoo search as well. (Source: networkworld.com)*

*Not surprisingly, the company has gotten themselves into deeper trouble for purchasing these ad words when the funds could have been better used cleaning up the actual spill.*

### **5.9.2 Solutions offered to solve the crisis: Technical solutions**

A number of self-professed professionals and experts shared their expertise online by suggesting solutions to stop the spill. Some suggested experts that could help, while others introduced themselves and claimed technical expertise.

*There is no need to use atomic weapons, the hole can be closed easily enough by using pressure valves, just to slow down enough the pressure and then to use hydraulic cement and will do the job.*

*TONY -----PLEASE ----- DO THIS SIMPLE TASK ----- PUT 5 OR 10 SUCTION LINES NEXT TO THE OIL EXIT POINT -----SUCK THE OIL/SEAWATER MIX INTO A SUPER TAKER -----VERY SIMPLE ---- NOTHING HIGH TECH ---- JUST SIMPLE SUCTION -----THIS WILL BUY THE TIME YOU NEED ----- AND IT WILL STOP POURING INTO THE GULF ----- I LIVE ON THE GULF ---- I KNOW MY WATERWAY -- --- DO THIS NOW !!!!*

*TONY --- WHEN YOU CUT THE RISER ---- MOVE THE 5 OR 10 SUCTION LINES OVER THE RISER ---- THIS WILL CAPTURE ENOUGH OIL ---- SUIRE YOU WILL GET SEA WATER AND OIL MIX - --- HOWEVER ---- YOU WILL CAPTURE ABOUT 90% OF THE OIL ---- - SO SIMPLE --- ONLY HOURS TO SET UP ----- PLEASE DO THIS NOW !!!*

*TONY --- I HAVE ALREADY FILLED OUT THE SUGGESTION FORM ON THE DEEPWATER HORIZON WEBSTIE --- AND CALLED BP -- AND CALLED THE COAST GUARD -- NO RESPONSE TO SUCH A*

### *SIMPLE TASK OF SUCKING THE OIL / SEAWATER MIX AT THE EXIT POINT*

*Why dont you squeeze the pipe with mechanical clamps. Based off of what I read in the papers and diagrams, the oil coming up is hot enough to keep the pipe fairly warm. The warmer the pipe, the easier it will be to clamp the pipe. Maybe some underwater welding with mech. subs can get a cap on the end*

While the above people were serious about their suggestions to stop the spill, others merely expressed their anger through their suggestions on how the spill should (or could) be stopped.

*Kill all the BP execs then stuff the hole with their bodies!*

*With BP's senior executives shoved into the hole*

*how about take all the people from bp and shove them in the leak then we ahve no more bp and we have no moke leak!*

*im smart@*

*i bet if we took all the LIES and EXCUSES BP people gave us that ll sure to stop the leak with all that BULL SHIT.*

#### **5.9.2.2 Second solution: Punishments of those responsible**

Besides the technical solution, another solution suggested by participants was to punish those who were responsible. Most participants voiced their opinions on the punishment of those they felt were responsible for the spill. Other participants were influenced by anger and frustration. Some were less abusive in their suggestions.

*No. I want BP to face extinction. I want all of the CxOs to go to jail. I'd call for the death penalty, but people will say Im out of line. IMHO if you kill an entire ecosystem, and the livelihoods of thousands of people, you are much worse than a garden variety murderer. Yeah, I want BP gone, on a permanant basis, They can stuff their appoligies in a large dark hole. I know where to find one.*

*How do you punish one of these greedy, arrogant a-holes for that? And in the long run, to what end? I'm not saying their not criminals; they are. Lock 'em up. But whatever punishment they receive will never be enough and only be a tiny footnote in the totality of this epic disaster.*

*fireing squad!!!!!!*

*Jail!*

*and major community service cleaning up the mess.*

*They should be plugged into the hole before we nuke it.*

### **5.9.3 Effects of the solutions**

Quite a significant number of individuals were concerned about the effects of the solutions that BP had used. They felt that the after-effect of the chemical solution could prove to be more damaging.

*I saw a youtube on oil eating microbes. Instead of pouring toxic Corexit 9500 into the sea, they could be using the microbes! So BP screws up, and now they pollute the water column endangering fish, oysters etc, and Commercial Divers who have to work in this water!*

*The EPA has stated that the formula used in the dispersants in the oil spill is less toxic than the oil in the gulf and not a threat to marine life in the Gulf. However, this testing only covered some of gulf marine species and did not test the effects of the dispersants when mixed with oil. The effects on life in the gulf could be much different when the two are paired*

*Anything after the top kill shots is desperation time, because the well will have to be opened up a whole lot more than it is now for anything else to be accomplished. If the riser is worn down and tears off before the top kill happens, that new BOP may take over the shot as the primary mission...they are prepared to some degree for this and there is a new bop on the rig in position, that has been disclosed.*

### **5.9.4 Green solutions**

Most suggestions of a long-term solution were centered on permanently getting rid of any oil spill and to lose our dependency on oil/petrol. They suggested alternative solutions such as green energy for a more sustainable and environmentally friendly world.

*The point is to stop this garbage and force the planet to go green. It will take a while to phase out all oil based products and replace them with others not produced with oil, but we can and should do it.*

*Too little of that is being done. We need to build the green infrastructure and at the same time shut down oil companies to force people to lessen dependence on them.*

*They have cars that will run on salt water. But we can't have them because we have to buy oil. That's the sick truth that no one talks about. Engines can run on salt water...*

*Alternative Energy....less need for oil.*

### **5.9.5 Clean-up and restoration efforts**

Most of the comments revolved around rationalizing BP's clean-up and restoration efforts. There were speculations about the clean-up efforts and that BP was not following proper procedure to ensure the clean-up workers' safety and well-being. The participants of the conversations analyzed, who claimed that they were the clean-up workers and their families, said otherwise.

*So the oil hit Pensacola Beach and Johnsons Beach (west of us) hard yesterday. The parts of the beach where the media are camping out got more attention than the rest. We have miles and miles of beach covered in thick dark oil. And no one cleaning those beaches. The stuff is everywhere. They finally got skimmer boats out, but it seems like they can do little. They had 2 months of warning to keep this from happening. When the oil came ashore on the remote areas no one was there.*

*They're not trying! They're doing the bare minimum so the government will get off their backs. Do you see any of them out there trying to clean up? NO! All the volunteers who are doing that are not even allowed to bring safety measures with them? WHY? Because BP is afraid it'll make them look bad..*

*im a clean-up worker and i really take offense by these posts . did you know the reason were sitting under tents is because the heat and humidity are so high that people are passing out ??and thatmost of the workers now are locals being put to work because some of out hotels.resteraunts, ect are being closed??*

*and since the oil is makin people sick there making us wear hazmat gear, long pants, shoes, ect in 110 plus heat with the index. so before you dumbass makiong accusations and start hating you should get your facts straight. id like to see you get out there with us for 12-14 hours everyday and clean up the beach . as a local im proud of the work im doin, im helping my enviroment and cleaning up MY beach. and im grateful for the job so im able to put food on my families table because there are no jobs here at all*

*were workin 14 hr days, 7 days a week. not sure when were getting a day off its been 4 weeks now. were trying are best to clean-up the beaches. its just upsetting to see the bad press were getting . the papers and people*

*are makin it look like were just ouit on the beach smoking and joking . i appreciate the attaboy bro*

*Just too bad more people aren't being supportive. My brother-in-law and nephew are now in LA working 12 an 16 hr shifts 7 days a week on cleanup. I don't envy them at all. I've done 2 weeks of 7-10s before, and an occasional 12 and 16 hr day in isolated cases. It's no picnic. Let your co-workers know that SOME of us are rooting for ya*

Suggestions were also posted on alternative ways to clean and restore the ocean after the spill was stopped. Some of the conversations about restoration efforts were from those who were interested to volunteer and as well as those who had volunteered and wanted to share their knowledge with others.

*Hello, Does anybody knows where can I get information to work with BP to clean the oil spill? Please my husband is unemployed and he would love to work for this company.*

*\ hello. i am available to help! i'm a nurse from  
new york and a strong swimmer. 917.992.3091.*

*we have tons of volunteers here, but BP won't allow them to clean up or do anything oil spill related.*

*Where do you go to Sign up?*

*I would love to help clean the birds and other wildlife I have animal experience but sadly it's hard to find a place to volunteer or even sign up. I live in pA but am willing to make the trip of I can help the animals*

*how can someone halp if from Europe??*

*I would love to go there and help, but cant find any /voluntary/ "offers"*

*any hints more than welcome*

*im getting paid 18bucks an hour bp to clean it it up, 27 an hour when i hit over time, we wrok 7 days a week 12 hours a day. granted we have to wear big white suits, but we do 10 minutes working, 20 minute break.*

#### **5.10 BP's online organization–public relationships (OPRs)**

BP's public relations activities during the crisis revolved around communicating regularly to the publics about its crisis management plans, activities and the progress

of the crisis. However, most of its communication was met with negative reactions and feedback.

*So...just watched Tony Hayward's interview on CNN. Sounds like there was trouble with the diagnostics last night and they will continue this AM and then, later today, he will make the final decision on whether to go ahead with the Top Kill. Anybody know what kind of problems they ran into?"*

*Throughout the extended top kill procedure – which may take up to two days to complete - very significant changes in the appearance of the flows at the seabed may be expected. These will not provide a reliable indicator of the overall progress, or success or failure, of the top kill operation as a whole. BP will report on the progress of the operation as appropriate and on its outcome when complete.*

*This was just added to the bottom of the feed from the BP page. Guess they realized more people saw the truth than expected. It started way earlier today, I'd say a good 5 hours ago maybe even earlier.*

*BP America We'd like to take this opportunity to remind everyone of our Commenting Policy that can be found below and on our Facebook page.*

*"BP has created this Facebook page to engage the public in an informative conversation and dialogue about our efforts associated with the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. We want our page to be an appropriate forum for everyone. The conversations should be constructive, respectful, and contain language that is appropriate for all groups and ages. We reserve the right to disallow comments that are obscene, indecent, profane, or vulgar; contain threats or personal attacks of any kind; contain offensive terms directed to ethnic or racial groups; are defamatory, libelous or contain ad hominem attacks; or promote or endorse a product or service."*

*Thanks you in advance for abiding by this policy.*

*AMAZING BP that you have the nerve to 'remind' us of your FB policies! Maybe we should all remind YOU of your LEGAL obligation towards the 'STEWARDSHIP OF THE ENVIRONMENT'! What a joke...people sticking up for Tony for making a 'mistake' with his constant thoughtless comments. Stop making allowances for stupidity! At the end of the day: BP YOU SHOULD HAVE HAD AN EMERGENCY DISASTER PLAN IN PLACE for this kind of thing. WHO CARES about the 'challenges' working at 5000ft below create for you. YOU are the oil drilling experts. I believe it is CRIMINAL to not have a TRUE emergency disaster plan in place. Even with all your \$\$, nothing will take away what you have done to the earth. YOU have to look in the mirror and you have to live with what you have done!*

*BP posts an accounting of cleanup workers\' health problems, but little information on illnesses from chemicals.*

*I'm boycotting them. Bp says there are other beaches besides LA, well there are other gas stations beside BP*

*Live tweeting of today's tech briefing with BP SVP Kent Wells will begin in approximately 15 minutes. Stay tuned for updates.*

*[twitter.com/BP\\_America/status/19019652937](https://twitter.com/BP_America/status/19019652937)*

*- View new photos of BP's oil response operations including the sealing cap and ROV control room: <http://bit.ly/c7m3qq>.*

*Daily response graphic: Since May 3, BP has written 93000 checks, totaling \$277 million paid. More: <http://bit.ly/9mHlk9>.*

*BP's Immediate Action Claims Team will handle emergency claims needs during Aug.19-22 claims handoff period. More: <http://bit.ly/aE3ALO>.*

## 5.11 Emerged publics

Based on the analysis, several publics emerged. These are listed in the table 5.2. The shaded area reflected the publics that emerged across all four organizations.

**Table 5.2 Categories of emerged publics**

Categories of publics/ organizations <sup>3</sup>	BP
Advocates/fans/supporters	✓
Antagonists	✓
Employees	✓
Shareholders	✓
Speculators	✓
Voice of Reason	✓
Sarcastic/Cynical	✓
Resourceful	✓
Skeptical	✓
International	✓
Media/Intermediaries	✓

### 5.11.1 BP advocates

There were not many who were brave enough to defend or support BP against the threats and angry publics. Those associated with BP were considered guilty by association. However, there were those who were in support of BP and who voiced

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<sup>3</sup>The shaded area reflects the publics that emerged across *all four* organizations.

their support for BP and its employees. Tony Hayward also received a few messages from those who empathized with his predicament.

*Its ok Tony we all get like that sometimes, life is a hard pill to swallow..my family has been in the oilfield for over forty yrs and we actually lost a uncle in a tragic accident on a rig so we are keeping you all in our prayers,GOD bless!!!!*

*Tony - its ok - you are human just like the rest of us...prayers for you, those who lost their loved ones, BP and everyone in the gulf*

*No need to apologize Tony. Anyone who has been in a position of responsibility, and has had to address a non-standard issue out of the clear blue, can appreciate where you were coming from.*

*I give my full support to bp and the workers out there. my boyfriend is out there working on the oil rigs. and he supports bp and says he would back them up all the way. bp has a really good safety plan and if it wasnt for the safety evacuation plans more people could have been injured. Tony I understand where you are coming from and I know you are working really hard to try to fix this problem. I know its an accident and Janine i appreciate what you just said.*

*It takes an individual of great integrity to admit he is wrong. That said, you got a pretty BIG mess on your hands and you need to step up now to fix the problem. Generally I would be slamming you. Mr. CEO now is the time to "sink or swim". Get the job done, or step down an*

*d let someone in there that can get the job done.*

*I just don't understand everyone complaining that too little action is being taken. BP definitely wishes this whole mess would go away so they can go about rebuilding their brand name. The government is deploying thousands of nation guardsman to help clean up the spill. The Army corp of engineers has been consulting with BP's engineers through the entire process. Obama has formed a team of engineers, from military to NASA, to help assist with the process to stop this. Who knows how many other thousands of people are assisting on this matter.*

*You guys just want BP to be screaming at the top of their lungs that they are sorry for this mess, and they have already said MANY TIMES that they are, but it isn't enough for you. You want to say that the governments response is inadequate, however, what do you suggest they do? They already have sent their best resources to assist in the matter. Kick BP out? The guys who's bread and butter is drilling and pumping these holes?*

*BP will survive this*

The BP employees were part of this group, and openly backed their employer and their CEO during the crisis.

*Hang in there chief, you have a lot of people standing with you...*

*Excuse me Christian, first this is going on in my backyard not yours, I am from very down south Louisiana, second, my job is to send these great men & women who work for BP to work, I interacted with the people on the Deepwater Horizon on a daily basis. I have met Tony Hayward a number of times since April 20th and he is a very down to earth guy, caring & he too can't wait to solve this problem. All kinds of professional in the oilfield are on top of this situation, if you have any qualifications to solve this please call BP but oops you are just a young ass cook with no experience but baking bread. You don't have to call me a bitch if you don't like what I have to say, I am one and proud of it.*

*For cryin out loud, he didn't mean literally! I;m sure he meant he wished this terrible disaster never happened and his life, along with the families of the 11 men, were like they were before it happened. Give the guy a break. I bet he works 20 hours a day and is frazzled!*

#### **5.11.2 BP shareholders**

The conversations by BP shareholders revolved around whether to sell or keep BP shares during the crisis. Others who participated in this conversation questioned the owning of BP shares because ownership of the shares was perceived as support for BP.

*So why on earth would we own the stock of this pariah company?*

*There not much distinction between BP and who owns BP.*

*The CEO's of BP get bonuses based on the stock price.*

*It seems that for most corporations success is determined based on stock price. Also, upper management often either receive bonuses based on stock price or have a large amount of company stock. For those reasons, buying BP stock does support BP and the management team*

*BP appears to have an atrocious safety record. In owning the stock, we are not endorsing its behaviour, either before or after the Deepwater Horizon accident. But as value investors,we sometimes have to hold our noses when we invest because the cheapest stocks are often the ones of companies that have behaved badly or are otherwise tainted. Example include McDonald's, which many believe bears responsibility for the obesity epidemic in this country (see Fast Food Nationand Super Size Me ), and Goldman Sachs, which many blame for the global financial crisis (see The Great American Bubble Machine). That said, we would have a*

*problem owning stock in a company if we believed that's its core business harmed people – most subprime lenders at the peak of the housing bubble, certain multi-level marketing firms and tobacco companies come to mind. BP certainly doesn't fall into this category.*

*That said, we would have a problem owning stock in a company if we believed that's its core business harmed people – most subprime lenders at the peak of the housing bubble, certain multi-level marketing firms and tobacco companies come to mind. BP certainly doesn't fall into this category.*

*Me and my wife as well as my father have invested a total of 10,000 dollars into BP. The people selling out are the people loosing money and these are the ones who react soon as something bad happens.*

*A great investor will take advantage of a collectives irrational actions. We've invested 10,000... Im 21 years old, Time is on my side... I have plenty of years to build up compound interest. And honestly when its gets back up WHY cash out when its back up at 64.00 a share? If the dividen stops for a year, whoopdy freaking doo. I still have 30+ years to collect on a 10% dividen*

### **5.11.3 Angry publics**

The hostile public came from the ranks of those who blamed BP for the crisis (see section 5.4) and the second group comprised of those who have a negative perception of the oil industry and who have turned into angry publics that considered BP guilty because of its core business.

*Realistically, this is not just about BP. Ruin that company and you will send a clear message to all the other oil companies that this is unacceptable and we(the people) have the power and the initiative to put you out of buisness. It's not just BP's fault, by now we should all know that. This goes much much deeper. It's not just that well either. This could have happened on a number of rigs all over the world.*

*This is the place where we unite and they do not want us to unite in large numbers because this is threatening to BP and the big money oil industries... We must find a place to meet where they can not control our grouping together because this is how CHANGE will materialize through us rising up...*

*might as well hate ALL the oil companies...they are ALL the same...I know I worked for one...BUT our wonderful government lets them drill in our fragile waters...so who is to blame...get the picture?????????*

*Uh, last I heard, oil/gas industry is a monopoly, fully, completely. OPEC sets its own price, and everyone else goes along. The 'fix is in' as they say. And, no new oil refineries have been built since the 1970's...supply & demand, and control. The biggest SCAM foisted on the world.*

Anger was also directed at Facebook due to its perceived partnership with the organization. BP supporters also conveyed anger in their conversations.

*If it really is a Logo issue, I think everyone should change their profile pic to a Boycott BP Logo.....Go ahead Facebook delete all of us. I dare you!!!*

*I think everyone should bombard FB with emails, letters, faxes, and phone calls. Then maybe they would get it...WE ARE NOT GOING ANYWHERE!!!*

*If you change a copyrighted photo by at least 10%, it is no longer considered the same copyrighted photo and is a whole new item unto itself. BP paid Facebook off to remove it... don't doubt that one!*

*WHY THE FUCK WOULD YOU HATE BP? YEAH THEY HAD AN ACCIDENT BUT THAT IS WHY IT IS CALLED AN (ACCIDENT). PLUS BP SUPPLIES OIL TO OTHER LOCAL BUSINESSES LIKE SHELL AND SPEEDWAY, IF BP RUNS OUT OF BUSINESS, WE WOULD BE SCREWED WITH OUR OIL SUPPLIES, SO ALL OF YOU WHO HATE BP, GO F YOURSELVES*

*must be awful to be so damn perfect...you know...have personally NEVER said something that didn't come out the right way...and heaven forbid if you've done it more than once in your life.....cuz if you have you're worthless...too bad seems like no matter what...he's pretty much damned either way by people like that...*

*"Constant thoughtless comments"?? What else has he said that so offended you? You tree huggers are so wacked out of your minds right now. Ypu are probably happy deep down that this happened so you can point your fingers at "Big Oil" and make them more of a demon than the media already has. Get over yourself and get down there to help if you're so concerned.*

#### **5.11.4 Antagonist**

The antagonists in this case comprised the angry public and the sarcastic public. The reason for this lay in the fact that it was harder to identify antagonists because of the crisis where all aspects of BP were criticized and scrutinized. It was therefore more appropriate to identify the publics into specific dispositions of an antagonist public

such as angry and sarcastic.

#### **5.11.5 Voice of reason**

The people who belonged to this group are characterized by being blunt and forthright when giving comments and sometimes their advice.

*If calling people names who disagree with you gives you joy I feel sorry for you.*

*Grow up*

*i think you are a little green son.*

*go back to lease handing til you learn whats what.*

*stop complaining about everybody else, why don't you get off your big fat arses and do something to help clean the spill up.*

*Its called the Gulf of Mexico not the Mexican Gulf!*

*since your the brainiac what would you do to fix it that they havent already tried? They are working around the clock and you make a retarded remark.*

*when you've grown up and no longer just a cook 2 yrs out of highschool and have learned what real life is then you can start expressing your limited knowledge. I can see from your interests that you have the maturity of a 16 yr old. So son, I suggest you find a real job or preferably get an education that amounts to more than watching Glee and listening to Snoopdog.*

*I try to keep my carbon foot print to a minimum but i still have one. But you see I am not the one who caused this spill, I am not the one lying to people about what they did. So you guys can just back off me and get back on the issue at hand.*

*Anna, sweetie, I think you need to stick to sites that relate to your age group, if that picture is any indication of how old you are.*

*ITS ABOUT MORE THAN THAT AND IM SORRY YALL CAN;T SEE THAT. and calling people names or correcting grammer shows the lack of concern you really have have a nice day GOD BLESS*

*I don't know, maybe the Amish lifestyle would suit you better? It's that or live in the woods? Eat grass? I'd say post how that works for you here on Facebook, but since you're renouncing technology, I guess we'll never know. Good luck, and God bless!*

*I'm glad I don't have your attitude Jake Colli. No, the world is not f\*&d up. YOU are the ONLY one who give a shi\*&t? Give me a break. You are the sad one.*

#### **5.11.6 Sarcastic/cynical**

This public posted sarcastic, emotional remarks in the conversations, mostly about BP rather than about other organizations.

*I see that people in Australia are not too bright either.they will blame Obama for not stopping the hurricane*

*I hear posting random words in capital letters makes your argument stronger*

*Who wants to clean oil up all day when you can be fishing? Oh wait, we cant't anymore because of some British effers and our poor gov't.*

*Congratulations for "stopping" the leak BP! You just won the Congressional Medal of Worst Oil Company Ever! <http://bit.ly/bLfx8R>*

*Apparently BP wants the @bpglobalpr account shut down. Very wise. Once that fake twitter account has gone, people will like them again.*

*BP's cut pipe is releasing 20% more oil. You know what they say - in order to make an omelet, you have to kill everything in the ocean.*

#### **5.11.7 Resourceful public**

This public explained and provided information about the spill. They shared information and experience with others.

*Here is some information on logs, the cementing, and pressure tests hours before the blow out.*

*[link to [www.theoildrum.com](http://www.theoildrum.com)]*

*Hmmm...interesting graphic here...and pretty new...shows the relief well plan...*

*[link to [www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com](http://www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com)]*

*I also googled for similar comments about ocean floor subsidence and this incident, and got one article which is reposted on several websites. I found it at this website, again as a (very long) response. Since the commenter provides his full name and credentials, I googled him... and got some pretty radical articles from him, as well as various other*

*credentials in everything from marine piracy, CIA covert operations, and operating systems.*

*To put this spill into Perspective:*

*Here are the Top 10 worst of all time:*

*1. Kuwait - 1991 - 520 million gallons*

*Iraqi forces opened the valves of several oil tankers in order to slow the invasion of American troops. The oil slick was four inches thick and covered 4000 square miles of ocean.*

*2. Mexico - 1980 - 100 million gallons*

*An accident in an oil well caused an explosion which then caused the well to collapse. The well remained open, spilling 30,000 gallons a day into the ocean for a full year.*

*3. Trinidad and Tobago - 1979 - 90 million*

*During a tropical storm off the coast of Trinidad and Tobago, a Greek oil tanker collided with another ship, and lost nearly its entire cargo.*

*4. Russia - 1994 - 84 million gallons*

*A broken pipeline in Russia leaked for eight months before it was noticed and repaired.*

*5. Persian Gulf - 1983 - 80 million gallons*

*A tanker collided with a drilling platform which, eventually, collapsed into the sea. The well continued to spill oil into the ocean for seven months before it was repaired.*

*6. South Africa - 1983 - 79 million gallons*

*A tanker caught fire and was abandoned before sinking 25 miles off the coast of Saldanha Bay.*

*7. France - 1978 - 69 million gallons*

*A tanker's rudder was broken in a severe storm, despite several ships responding to its distress call, the ship ran aground and broke in two. It's entire payload was dumped into the English Channel.*

*8. Angola - 1991 - more than 51 million gallons*

*The tanker exploded, exact quantity of spill unknown*

*9. Italy - 1991 - 45 million gallons*

*The tanker exploded and sank off the coast of Italy and continued leaking its oil into the ocean for 12 years.*

*10. Odyssey Oil Spill - 1988 - 40 million gallons*

*700 nautical miles off the coast of Nova Scotia.*

*from: envirowonk.com...*

*" Google released imagery on Google Earth from NASA's MODIS, ESA's ENVISAT radar images, and a crisis response site of a "fatal explosion on offshore oil rig Deepwater Horizon in Gulf of Mexico". "The rig sank, and the well pouring 5,000 barrels (210,000 gallons) of oil a day into Gulf, a serious threat along the coastal areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida.*

*To view this imagery and other datasets in Google Earth, turn on "Places of Interest" layer in the Layers panel on left-hand side of Google Earth, then navigate to Gulf of Mexico and click 'red icon'," noted Google. "*  
*From: www.ditii.com...*

*They're doing something. The camera just panned left, and then right. Like they were checking the lighting and stuff. Seems like it's live. I'm watching for little anomalies that would prove/disprove that it's live. But it seems to be live.*

*I am recording both the CNN feed at [edition.cnn.com...](http://edition.cnn.com...) and the BP feed at [mms://a261.19789246260.c97892.g.lm.akamaistream.net/D/261/97892/v0001/reflector:46260](http://mms://a261.19789246260.c97892.g.lm.akamaistream.net/D/261/97892/v0001/reflector:46260).*

*I will continue to do so for as long I have the free space to do so and the feeds stay online. If anyone has any other feeds/links to the same feeds (in case some go offline) then post them here and I will record those too. If there is any way to store all of the footage I capture online I will happily do so, if not I will upload the most important stuff in bits/pieces as people request it.*

## **5.12 Summary**

This chapter presented the analysis for BP and described the application of social media, the themes that emerged and emerged publics for BP. The data analyzed projected a description specific to the crisis at the time of data collection, namely the oil spill in the Gulf. Although the topics in this chapter are similar to the other organizations analyzed, for BP these were focused on how BP and its publics reacted and managed that crisis. BP used YouTube, Facebook and Twitter to reach its publics

but most of its efforts were met by criticism and negative remarks. Some publics were hostile towards BP, its employees and partners. They regarded BP as solely responsible for the crisis, and it seemed that any effort by BP to clarify the situation made little any impact on the negativity. Most publics also thought BP to be guilty based on their perceptions that the oil industry was corrupt and immoral. President Obama and the U.S. Government received a share of the blame as well, and President Obama in particular was blamed for not reacting quickly enough and being perceived as mismanaging the crisis.

There were also a number of conspiracy theories with the majority proposing that the U.S. Government, President Obama and the oil industry caused the crisis for other, undisclosed reasons. Some participants in the conversations went as far as blaming the end users for being responsible for creating the demand for oil.

It was interesting to note that a significant number of parody videos emerged because of the crisis. All the videos were made to afford blame to BP. A parody Twitter account was also created to make fun of all BP's efforts during the crisis. As a result, BP's messages were not heard because they were overshadowed by negative reactions of the crisis. However, there was back-up and support from BP's employees who identified themselves as such and who came forward to reinforce their support for BP. In addition, BP America Facebook account played a significant role in gathering all BP supporters as it was noted in other conversations that those posts that went against the objective of the page/discussion sites, would be asked to leave the page.

In the next chapters, the results for Nokia and Toyota are presented, with Toyota also experiencing a crisis albeit of a different origin.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Results of analysis for Nokia**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the analysis for Nokia divided into sources of data, social media application, themes that emerged, organization–public relations strategy and categories of emerged publics.

#### **6.2 Data sources**

Table 6.1 shows the data sources for Nokia from all the four social media used (i.e., Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and discussion sites).

Discussion sites for Nokia were mostly specialized forums discussing Nokia products or products in relation to Nokia. There was one discussion site initiated by Nokia but fans, software developers and organizations established the rest. Similarly, with Facebook, most pages were product specific except one by Nokia U.S. that made the search list. YouTube videos were mostly product advertisements uploaded by Nokia. As for Twitter, media organizations were the major contributors followed by individuals and Nokia. Nokia companies from many different regions and countries contributed tweets about their products and services specific to their region and country.

#### **6.3 Social media application and projecting an online presence**

This section presents the analysis of social media use and the conversations that transpired.

##### **6.3.1 Discussion sites**

Topics in the discussion sites mostly revolved around Nokia's products. As noted, the majority of the sites were initiated by users, partners (software used by Nokia phones or telecommunications providers) or the media. Nokia participated by providing a platform for users and fans to discuss and share their experience of its products and services.

**Table 6.1 Nokia's Data Sources**

	<i>Discussion Sites</i>	<i>Facebook</i>	<i>YouTube</i>
	Adobe Forums-PDF reader for S60 5th Edition-from forums.adobe.com	AISEC in NSu-developing leaders Day with Nokia-www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.382969199450.161181.	Nokia's N8 Foosball Fever - Greatest match ever played? -Uploaded by nokia
	All Nokia BB5 New modified PM-From forum.gsmhosting.com	Free facebook application for Nokia 5230-www.facebook.com_notes_technomesh.../144054385619903	Introducing the new Nokia N8 - uploaded by nokia
	App promo-nokia freeware for symbian s60 3rd and 5th edition-free software-from www.symbian-freeware.com	JQuery mobile framework is coming and supporting Nokia devices-en-gb.facebook.com/notes/...web/...nokia.../10150235408635005	Nokia 'Dot'- Uploaded by aardmancommercials
	CLISP 2.48plus with FFI on Maemo Fremantle from talk.maemo.org	Microsoft communicator mobile comes to Nokia's ESeries-www.facebook.com_notes_nokia-e72/...nokias.../115084961871093	Nokia ORIGINAL Ringtone - Uploaded by mooseboy101
	Google maps Alternative-Nokia Ovi Maps-locations-New Zealand-from forums.paydirt.co.nz	Nokia 5130-www.facebook.com_pages_Nokia-5130/121815074524181	Nokia N8 Sneak Peek - Uploaded by nokia
	MediaMonkey-view topic-playlist export to Nokia 5800XM-www.mediamonkey.com	Nokia 5250-www.facebook.com_notes_mobileinfoclub_nokia.../15373904464480...	Nokia E7- The Ultimate Business Smartphone - Uploaded by nokia
	Nokai N8-Vodafone forum_co_nz	Nokia announces new Models -Nokia C3,C6 and E5-www.facebook.com_note.php?note_id=113559881999113	Nokia x Burton: Push Snowboarding - Uploaded by nokia

	Nokia 6288 keypad faulty-from nzgeek.org	Nokia BH-503 php 1500.00- www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.201395576555824.56998...	The First Official Interactive Unboxing Of The Nokia N8 -Uploaded by nokia
	Nokia and MTP USB Driver problem-PC world forums-from pressf1_pcworld_co_nz	Nokia Bluetooth Headset BH-108- www.facebook.com/_media_set/?set=a.192947450769205.49717...	Nokia N8 TV ad - It's not technology, it's what you do with it. - Uploaded by nokia
	Nokia interactive Advertising-wikimobidex.org	Nokia C3 vs N97- www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.136625369728487.22417...	Dot. The world's smallest stop-motion animation character shot on a ...-uploaded by Nokia
	Nokia N96-Nokia users-discussion around the Nokia N96 and all aspect of the mobile-www.nokia users.net	Nokia N8 Tech Specs- www.facebook.com/notes/ <b>nokia</b> -n8/ <b>nokia</b> .../106368179434348?...	
	Nokia N97 Mini disassembly-from srimeenakshimobiles.com	Nokia US-www.facebook.com/ <b>NokiaUS</b>	
	OMG Nokia Ovi is Crap-nzgeek_org	Nokia X3-02-black complete set- www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.163312890432765.33358...	
	Swype for Symbian- from Nokia Beta labs at betalab.nokia.com	Nokia X9-www.facebook.com_pages_nokia-x9/101467919892485	
	The official Nokia N8 owners thread-www_geekzone_co_nz	Nokia-calling all innovators- www.facebook.com/callingallinnovators	
	Unlock a Nokia 3120c-Yahoo_xtra_answers- from nz_answers_yahoo_com	Nokia's New Futuristic mobile phone leaked due to release 2012-www.facebook.com/pages/ <b>Nokias</b> -New.../128670973832332	
	z-push_net-view topic- Nokia E75_z-push as 12.1.zarafa 6.30.15	The Nokia E52 comes to India with a Lifetime Subscription of Nokia Messaging- www.facebook.com_note.php?note_id=404623288400	

Where Nokia initiated discussions, these were mostly aimed at improving its products and services.

*Thanks to all of your feedback, we're happy to release an update of Swype for Symbian. Over the last 8 weeks we've addressed all of the critical issues raised on Beta. We've also made some key improvements that should make the whole experience from download, to install, to uninstall much more enjoyable. This will be our last release to Beta before graduating to the Ovi store, so test it out and let us know what you think about Swype 2.1 for Symbian.*

*Here's a summary of the features and major changes in this new version:*

*Complete overhaul to the install / uninstall experience. Install to C:,*

*SD Card, Mass Memory, etc, without a problem. (We still recommend you install to C)*

*Critical Settings crash has been fixed*

*Official Belle support*

*Thai and Vietnamese language support*

*Many small bug fixes thanks to our Beta testers*

*Your feedback has been invaluable in the past, so feel free to head over to the forums to leave comments, report bugs, and give us your thoughts. Thanks for all of your support and happy Swyping!*

There was no formal participation in the sense that a Nokia representative participated in the discussion or any direct intervention by Nokia. Instead, some of the customer relations tasks were delegated to the moderator of the site who would be an experienced user or an employee of one of the suppliers of Nokia's products. Occasionally, media personnel also fulfilled this role by sharing information about Nokia products and services.

*Will there be any restrictions on using an N8 in New Zealand if I buy a Nokia N8 from a country that releases it earlier?*

*There should be no issues but you still do this as your own risk*

*Hithere,*

*Thanks for your help.*

*Please see the attached pictures. When you type \*#0000# it says: RM-320 Nokia N96 (12.01) Can't seem to get the internet to work on O2. The other reasons I think it might be cloned/fake are: - it sounds a bit tinny- on the menu, the fonts look small like a courier type font - not like my N95. Any help you can give would be appreciated. Thanks, SD*

*Sorry to say it mate, but that's fake you have there, I'D GET MY MONEY BACK PRONTO IF I WAS YOU.*

*Until it's showing on Vodafone's Online shop, it generally won't have a price or shipping announcement.*

*Suffice to say it is a very VERY nice handset.*

*Hi Charly, I can't even advise a quarter that it may be here I'm afraid. I'd love to say it's 3rd quarter, but until it's approved no one knows. It's very much a wait and see game*

### **6.3.2 Nokia Twitter**

Nokia played an active role in Twitter by not only promoting news about its organization, products and services but also disseminating information that promoted customer relations.

The organization took a step further by personally replying to queries and comments by its Twitter followers (28%). However, the majority of contributors to Nokia's tweets came from media organizations, accounting for 40% of the total tweets (see Figure 6.1) while the remaining tweets came from individuals discussing Nokia products and services (32%).

*Our colleagues at Nokia Care have launched two support related Twitter accounts. Ping them at @NokiaHelps & @NokiaCareUS*

*Nokia acquires MetaCarta Inc.: Espoo, Finland - Nokia announced today that it has acquired MetaCarta Inc. MetaCart... <http://bit.ly/d7e6PT>*

*Here is some funny stuff for Friday :) - The Office meets Glee & Nokia Messaging (video) <http://bit.ly/ah5kFQ>.*

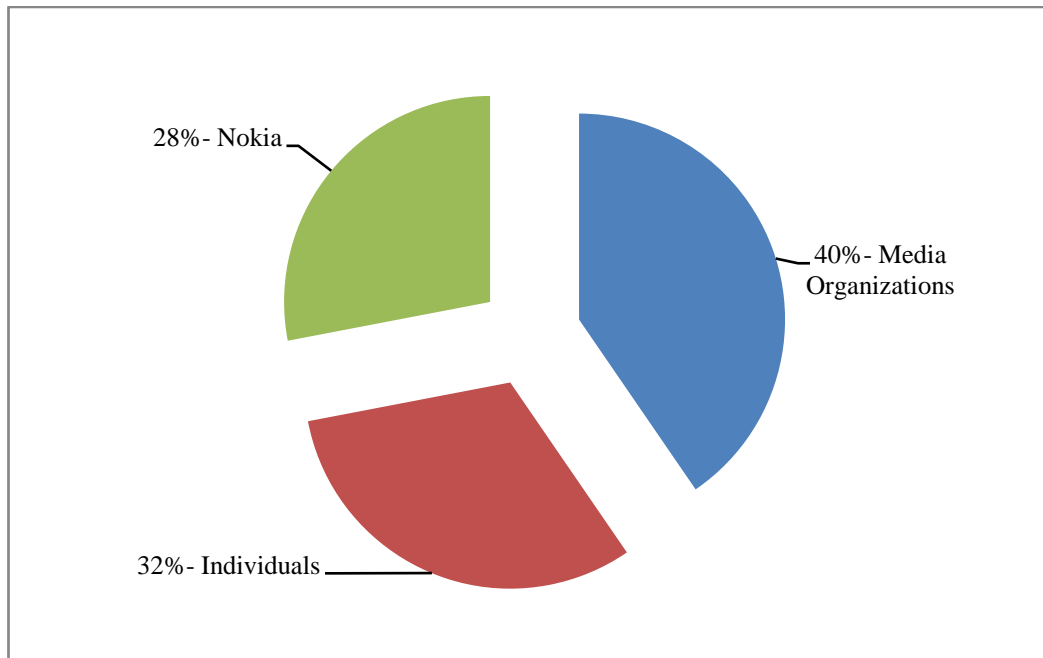
*Dot. The world's smallest stop-motion animation character shot on a Nokia N8 <http://bit.ly/9dC3ni> #worldrecord #N8 #Nokia.*

*How's everyone's weekends so far? Taken any amazing pics on your device?*

*isaacbolu Sorry, but Nokia Messaging don't support 7610. Check supported devices at <http://messaging.nokia.com/> cc: @nokiamessaging.*

*wewake83 Hi, @nokiaindia will keep you updated on this :)*

**Figure 6.1 Nokia: Twitter contributors**



Nokia also used Twitter to carry out its hiring activities by advertising job vacancies.

*Nokia - Digital Retail Executive (London). Miss this and your missing out !!!contact - [rebecca.folb@nokia.com](mailto:rebecca.folb@nokia.com).*

*Nokia - Freelance Digital Project Manager role (London), ongoing project till the end of 2010 - contact [rebecca.folb@nokia.com](mailto:rebecca.folb@nokia.com)*

Many of Nokia's sections and departments were represented on Twitter, posting numerous strategic messages.

*Vote for Head of Nokia Research Center Henry Tirri to speak at SXSW 2011!! <http://panelpicker.sxsw.com/ideas/view/5772>.*

*Today's #OviFIBA question is: Who was the top scorer in the Angola vs Argentina game on 30.08.2010? Reply via @ovibynokia with #OviFIBA.*

*Nokia Care (NokiaHelps) is on Twitter. Sign up for Twitter to follow Nokia Care (NokiaHelps) and get their latest updates.[twitter.com/nokiahelps](https://twitter.com/nokiahelps)*

*Nokia Global Careers (NokiaCareers) is on Twitter. Sign up for Twitter to follow Nokia Global Careers (NokiaCareers) and get their latest updates.*

*Nokia branches from all over the world promoted their Twitter account for users and publics to follow. Branches such as Nokia Antara, Nokia Australia, Nokia Music Malaysia, Nokia US, Nokia New Mexico and Nokia Canada publicized their account for users to follow. Generic message such as below was used for all.*

*Nokia Music Malaysia (nokiamusicmy) is on Twitter. Sign up for Twitter to follow Nokia Music Malaysia (nokiamusicmy) and get their latest updates.*

*twitter.com/nokiamusicmy*

### **6.3.3 Nokia on YouTube**

Users, animators or organizations that had featured Nokia products in their videos uploaded most YouTube videos. Some were Nokia advertisement for new products that social media users had uploaded while others were product related videos uploaded by Nokia uploaded. The discussion for the videos revolved around the product mentioned in the video, and most feedback was from those who liked the videos. Nokia did not acknowledge any of the comments and there was no intervention at all from Nokia—even for the videos they had uploaded themselves. Other participants in the video conversation, if there were any, answered all queries.

*Great ad!*

*sweet game!. viva football!*

*Phone looks awesome :)*

*i love it :) !*

*indeed can't compare n900 vs n8 .. n900 more of tablet, hence size and weight.. i wouldn't want such massive mobile phone*

*Wtf?! Have you even seen n900 irl? It's too small if it's anything, it's smaller than N8 heightwise, and only a bit wider (0,7 mm). And it's only 45 g heavier (180 g vs 135 g).*

*not used nokia for like 10 years but this phone could tempt me back if symbian3 isnt useless lol...*

*does this phone have slide keyboard like n97*

*No, but the rumoured N9 or N920 does, with Meego.*

*It'd be better if the entire movie was recorded by a Nokia N8. It wasn't, right?*

*Nope, watch the behind the scenes video*

*this is sick! and it is'n fake :)*

*" behind the scenes" 00:30 look that the ball wasn't there and appears from nowhere to bounce the ball and control it. total fake.*

*if nokia really wanted to push skateboarding they would put a nasty camera with a wide angle attachment that makes all the shots look really nice and then have ausb port and make it with a good editing software so people that have talent can have a nice phone and a camera and also not have to worry about carrying a huge fucking camera around with them... that would push the sport...*

*bestnokia product since the 3210... hope this takes off*

*Maybe I'm coming off as a jerk here but as a snowboarder and a skateboarder I couldn't give a crap about whether or not my 'tricks' are recorded. What's more important is style and execution, how one run down a mountain can feel absolutely amazing and unique meanwhile the next run feels just as exhilarating. Being able to list 'tricks' on my social network doesn't convey this.*

*At least something different from Nokia.... Awesome.*

*Nokia please bring this phone quick as possible to Australia and make shore its available with Telstra :)*

*it's possible. we med students use our camera phones to take pictures of cells and tissues through the microscope. =)*

*oohh wow!... that's great to hear, it's pretty useful to u guys then... ^^*

*Is telescope also possible?*

International participation using languages other than English was also evident in the conversations. It was interesting to note that this was allowed and seemingly accepted as a norm with no remarks against or for it. This was a normal occurrence in most conversations analyzed.

*Se puede unohacer profesional de esto???,si lo hubiesesabidoen mistiempozmoszohubiesesido la excusa perfecta para mis horas y horas de novillos XDDD*

*Muybueno lo que hace elvago ese*

#### **6.3.4 Nokia Facebook**

Most of the pages in Facebook were created based on a particular Nokia product. These pages were initiated by users, fans and technical experts to discuss, exchange information and help each other to solve any queries and problems about that product. The only active Nokia representation came from Nokia US.

Nokia U.S. was active in disseminating news, posting advertisements about Nokia products as well as promoting customer relations. These customer relations activities involved initiating activities to bring the users, existing and potential customers closer to Nokia as well to answer their queries. Nokia U.S. posted questions that promoted discussion as well as questions to get direct feedback from their publics.

*Nokia US shared a link.If you develop apps, or know someone who does, and could use a slice of \$10 million, have a look at this <http://bit.ly/97AI2s>*

*Nokia US : Business as usual with the E73 Mode...on the beach. Video of what happened when some E73 Mode users ditched the office in LA <http://bit.ly/e73mode>*

*Nokia US : Aren't Aardman (the makers of Wallace and Gromit) great? They shot the world's smallest stop-motion animation with an N8! <http://bit.ly/8ZEqP4>*

*Nokia US :Have you seen all 3 Nokia Nuron vids yet? Which is your favourite? <http://bit.ly/d1W9jI> or <http://bit.ly/cpgYmi> or <http://bit.ly/9qGvDx>Let us know!*

*Nokia US Hi R. A., we cannot comment on future releases of software on the Nokia C6-00.*

*Nokia US Thanks Ryan, glad you like the new releases*

*@Harvey Qin: To see applications, themes & wallpapers available for your N900, check out the following link: <http://maemo.nokia.com/maemo-select>*

## 6.4 Themes that emerged

The main themes for Nokia focused on its mobile phones. Like Apple users, Nokia users were very descriptive and critical about Nokia mobile phones. Their main concerns were channeled in discussions about a specific model with the most frequently mentioned at the time being the N900. Most Nokia users were satisfied with the N900 but wished Nokia had spent more to extend the product's potential in terms of its features and applications. Many participants of the conversations also talked about Nokia product features such as its phone cameras and battery capabilities as well as product design. Furthermore, Nokia users often discussed what they did not like about its operating system software, Symbian. Others talked about the applications available in the Nokia OVI store or the lack of them.

### 6.4.1 Products and their features

Figure 6.2 shows that the N900, one of Nokia's mobile phones, was the most talked about, followed by other aspects of Nokia products such software and hardware:

*I have the n900 and to me it almost fills my needs i love it I just wish that it hadn't been abandoned by nokia and that it had a bit more oomph.I hope nokiadoesnt dumb down symbian 3*

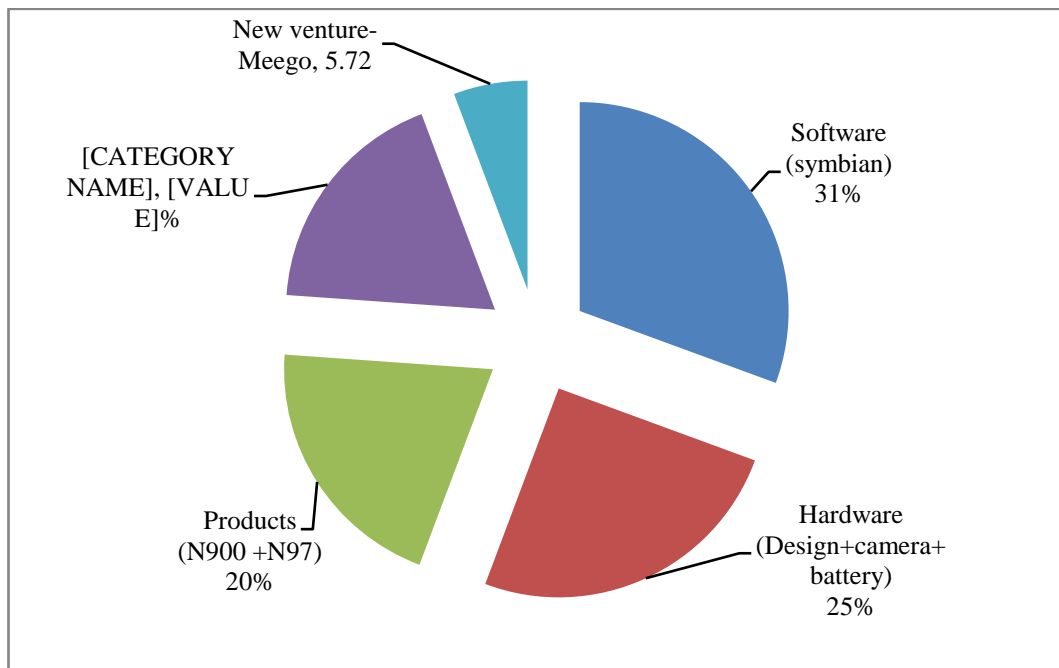
*I just feel like n900 was simply a way for Nokia to show that they have technology to compete in the modern smartphone market, & they succeeded, however displaying the tech is useless if youre going to turn around & show the world that you wont support it, & I know Nokias saying its for the community & I do respect that, I just feel like it could loads better with the proper care, but they just wont put any effort in*

*I love my N900! This is the phone and OS that contends with Android and iOS. I just wish there was a version for AT&T 3G. 2G/EDGE speeds are barely cutting it for me...*

*I have N900 which is I am happy with Linux so far but still Maemo User interface is still need to get improved.*

*i used HTC magic,but it disappointed me,soi moved to nokia,Nokia N900!!!!!!See,I can do that because of one phone too!!!*

**Figure 6.2 Products and products features most talked about by Nokia publics**



Concerning product features, its mobile software Symbian was the most mentioned in the conversations. The majority of users did not like the software because of its inefficiency when compared to other phones.

*Symbian^3 doesn't look that much different from Symbian^1/S60v5. I'm going to wait for the reviews before I go for this phone... Nokia should've already learned from the N97 flop that features no longer win customers anymore...*

*I love nokia hardware but i think it is about time the recognize that they have been left behind in terms of software development... symbian is going nowhere fast... just embrace Android and I will return to being a proud Nokia customer. This this of hardware combined with a proper app store with more than 50000 apps like android would make it a most attractive proposal. PS. for Iphone lovers... I do not care that you have more apps than android... I am not going to choose to live in a prison!*

*it might be cheap ( as some blogs says...), but i think something is wrong, the specs are good, but symbian? seriously?*

*It's horrible..*

*Symbian is very slowly and ugly!!*

*Android is more good than Symbian shit!!*

*Symbian is dead in anyway )*

However, there were Nokia fans that were optimistic about the software if it were to be combined with a new product.

*I am excited to about this phone and I have to agree with Juan about this being the best cell phone. When I say this, it is because it meets my needs. I love taking pictures and videos, but I refuse to invest in a camera and video camera. The Symbian 3 looks great, memory is more than sufficient, the editing features, and the construction of the phone itself. I am a little hard on my phones and having an all aluminum body and the almost scratch resistant gorilla glass is perfect when I keep my phone in my pocket.*

*wish to change i will wait untill the phone arrives here and if Symbian^3 is not what i want i will wait to Meego if i don't like Meego i will say Goodbye to you Nokia :( Nokia i still believe ♥*

*I hope nokiadoesnt dumb down symbian 3...frankly icant stand people complaining about ease of use if you cant figure it out maybe you shouldnt have a smartphone stick to iphone tech savy people shouldnt have to suffer at the expense of idiots*

Other features that were discussed included the phone's external design, its camera and the batteries used.

*N8 shouts Camera and Video and for Apple to reach this shooting quality will take years. For those who dont like Symbian could consider the N900 as its fast and feature packed.*

*At last, a xenon flash. I can finally replace my beloved N82.*

*great hardware but symbian OS is dying..nokia has to something great with symbian 3*

*Microsoft Mobile Suite....so yes it can handle DOCX and XLSX. Battery life...it's a Nokia...are you sure you want to make this kind of argument?*

*I Don't Need To Trade Symbian For Android, Besides I Never Seen A Phone With Android With A Great Camera, Great Build Quality Or Great Battery Life Like A Nokia So I'll Pass.*

*Nokia still owns when it comes to design and cameras.*

Participants also talked about Nokia's App Store, the Ovi Store.

*Well I Have News For You...Symbian^3 Does Most Of What You Mentioned. The New Ovi Store Has Most Of The Main Apps On Android And iOS,*

*i'm gonna wait, this device without a proper OVI store is gonna fail like n900 which was a real iPhone killer, but GOD, 5 pages of apps on OVI? Nokia is really thinking that Jobs sold millions of "Phones"? No, they sold millions of fking App readers with a really bad phone built in*

*I'm over the fact that the ovi store doesn't have as many apps as Apple or Android. I find at the moment on my iPhone I only use no more than 5 apps. The rest just sits there doing nothing:)*

*I just think that without a really good gaming platform in their Ovi store offerings, it'll die a death...the iPhone and most Androids both have the ability to play PSP-esque games with ease and there are plenty of titles for iOS (don;t know about Android) that are of this calibre.*

#### **6.4.2 Suggestions**

There were a number of suggestions concerning Nokia products but most participants were about asking Nokia to keep up with its competition. Some wanted Nokia to emulate its competitors especially in its Appstore, by improving its operating software, Symbian, although not everyone agreed.

*Nokia has the beautiful products down pat, but definitely needs work on a polished, organized, UI. The OS seems pretty beefy, but bland. I kind of hate going into a menu to be greeted with a black screen with icons... kind of breaks the fluid UI experience.....*

*Please nokia choose between Android with an homemade interface like htc does wich I'm sure will kick ass or hurry up and release a final version of MeeGo like the one on the pre alpha tablet interface. But for g\*d sake, enough of symbian!!!*

*great hardware but symbian OS is dying..nokia has to something great with symbian 3*

*meggo for all phones??? how's about a thinner phone with a bigger screen??*

*i will never understand why nokia wont go android... its not rocket science. stop holding out and getting murdered by HTC and the likes. and im still upset my N900 doesnt have proper support/access to the newest maps... OviStore and stuff... talk about getting shafted.*

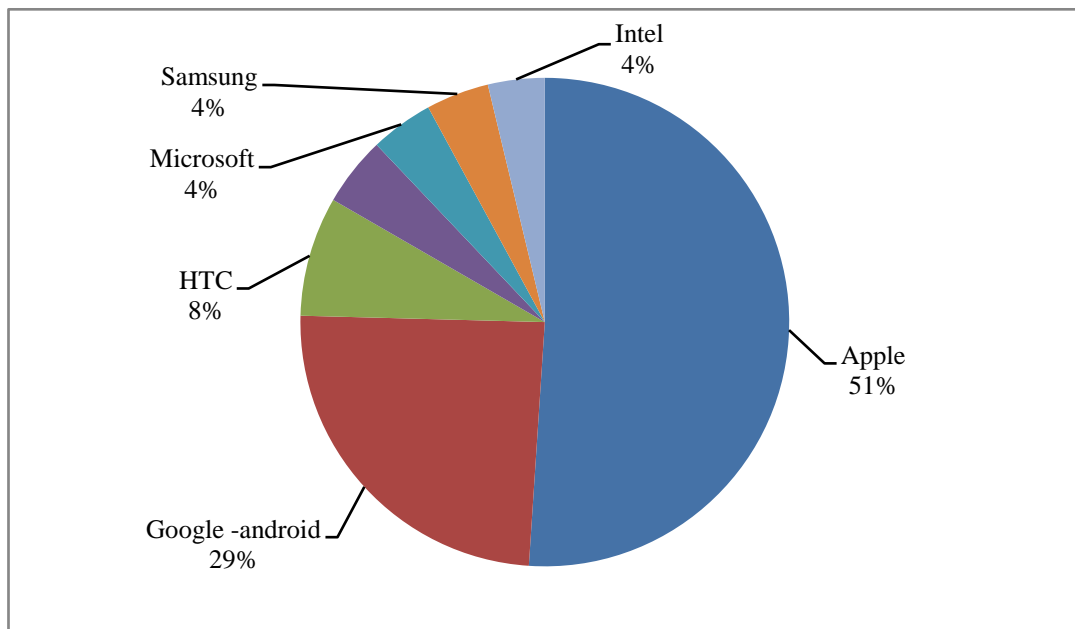
*disappointing to say the least, 3D games like Asphalt 5 been running on iphone 3gs for like a year. selling 12mp camera isn't going to save you, infact you should stop plugging camera quality on the phone..it's a nuisance. seeing Android with 50,000apps and stealing your show, epic fail. nokia should start firing people now, embrace android if you have to win marketshares or even buy WebOS for cheap.*

*@joey me too hell I still have a few laying around my daughter uses my old n90 as a toy...My worst fear is that nokia will go the way of apple or android to me maemo 5 is great and icant wait till meego comes out, my wife will have the n8 since symbian is easier to use.I wish that the lifespan of the n900 would have been longer. I love being able to downlod a torrent or a rapidshare file and extract the rar file and play the file ..... do that iphone .(here is to hoping that n9 doesnt follow the capacitive screen trend)*

### 6.4.3 Association with others

Nokia was mostly compared to Apple's iPhone in terms of innovation of its products and software (see figure 6.3). A number of people explicitly preferred Nokia products and some suggested that Nokia emulate Apple's innovation especially concerning the user interface.

**Figure 6.3 Organizations most frequently mentioned in association with Nokia**



*i'm an iphone user, but this is pretty awesome. i think i'll buy it*

*Awesome!! Way better than my Iphone!!!The pics are great!time to move!xavierid*

*iphone does what iphone can do, nokia does what we want~ lolx*

*Apple iPhone 4 and Nokia N8- Who will win the battle?  
<http://bit.ly/bz3qut> via Feedly.*

*deploying Nokia E5 smart phones, dumping iPhone and Blackberry, latter limiting work flow efficiency due to proprietary cens...<http://ooik.eu>.*

*From what I have seen so far with the newest device, N8, Nokia is getting caught up hardware wise (except for maybe the screen res). The things I feel are lacking from Nokia at the moment is a nice user interface. I'm not a big fan of Apple software, but I do like their products aesthetics. They have slick and beautiful designs and all of the OS user interface is polished as well as simply laid out. Nokia has the beautiful products down pat, but definitely needs work on a polished, organized, UI. The OS seems pretty beefy, but bland. I kind of hate going into a menu to be greeted with a black screen with icons... kind of breaks the fluid UI experience.*

The second most mentioned organization in relation to Nokia was Google/Android, specifically when it came to its operating system and mobile phones. A number of suggestions were made in getting Nokia to use Android programs and applications.

*Hmm Nokia seem to be going downhill lately. I remember the days when theirphones ruled. Now in a world of Iphones and Android,*

*u need to be unique to excel ... nokia's unique. no need to go for the android like all other phone companies.. stick to your OS. just tweak it up a bit. like add some cool new apps or enhance the user interface. thats it.*

*i prefers HTC with android. I m angry with nokia they just copy all the effects from apple like the cover view etc.....*

*I don't like Symbian at all. In fact, I hate Symbian. I like Android, Windows Mobile and Windows Phone 7.*

## **6.5 Nokia online organization–public relationships**

An aspect that stood out in the analysis of the discussion around Nokia was its online public relations activities. Of the four organizations analyzed, Nokia was the most visible and active in sending out public relations–related messages to its publics. Most of these were customer relations messages that come from either Nokia headquarters or specific regional representatives. For example, Nokia U.S. was very responsive to their Facebook friends/fans/customers. Not only did they communicate promotional messages but also the messages were fun and interesting, and questions were designed

to promote two-way conversations. They also included activities to engage their customers in conversations and create excitement.

### **6.5.1 Promotional messages**

Promotional messages on Facebook were focused on Nokia's product and services.

*Nokia US*

*Aren't Aardman (the makers of Wallace and Gromit) great? They shot the world's smallest stop-motion animation with an N8! <http://bit.ly/8ZEqP4>*

*Nokia US shared a link.*

*Are you Team Ed or Team Jake? This spoof video might help you decide. It stars the Nokia Nuron and has been posted on a couple of sites including this one: <http://bit.ly/bbOrq7>*

*Video: Nokia Nuron's Twilight Parody Selected from Poptent*

*Back in June, Nokia asked the Poptent community to create a commercial about the Nuron. If you are unfamiliar with Poptent, it is a portal that connects brands*

*Nokia US shared a link.*

*We are proud to again be the #1 company on Greenpeace list of green electronics companies. Something we can all do to contribute to the greener good ... recycle your old phones*

*Twitter / Nokia Conversations: Post: Mary McDowell talks ...*

*Post: Mary McDowell talks about Nokia X3 touch and type (video)*

### **6.5.2 Questions to promote discussions**

The strategy of asking questions to promote discussions on the sites appeared to work well in getting participants to engage in conversations.

*Nokia US*

*wants to know: What ringtone are you currently using? :-)*

*What do you do with the pictures on your phone? (Poll results)*

*How's everyone's weekends so far? Taken any amazing pics on your device?*

*Nokia Conversations: Post: What are your three ...*

*What are your three essential pieces of kit to survive a long trip? (Poll results) <http://ow.ly/17zGqL>.*

#### **6.5.4 Having a conversation with its publics**

Another noticeable trait of Nokia and its public relations activities was that it encouraged conversations by posting questions and answering queries.

*Nokia US*

*August 5, 2010 Have you got a question for our Head of Sales and Marketing? Well he will be on Twitter tomorrow holding a live Q+A, take a look: <http://bit.ly/attf87>*

*Nokia US Hi Fraydelin, what do you like about it? Great to know your specific feedback!*

*Nokia US @Lobna No news as yet, but when it is we'll be sure to let you know :-)*

*Nokia US @Crystal - there is no info yet on when other colours will be available for pre-order, but we'll let you know just as soon as they are.*

*Nokia US @Ivan: we don't currently have any specific details on this right now but we will keep you posted.*

*Nokia and its representatives also practiced good customer relations by acknowledging key comments and feedback from their publics.*

*Michael Doan I love my N900! This is the phone and OS that contends with Android and iOS. I just wish there was a version*

*Nokia US Thanks for the feedback Michael, we'll pass it on :-)*

*Nokia US Thanks for the feedback guys :-)*

## 6.6 Emerged publics

Based on the data analysis for Nokia, the following categories of publics emerged:

**Table 6.2 Nokia: Categories of emerged publics**

Categories of publics/ organizations <sup>4</sup>	Nokia
Advocates/fans/supporters	✓
Antagonists	✓
Employees	
Shareholders	
Speculators	
Voice of reason	✓
Sarcastic/Cynical	✓
Resourceful	✓
Skeptical	✓
International	✓
Media/Intermediaries	✓

Employees, shareholders and speculators were not explicitly identified for Nokia in this analysis. However, the categories of advocates/fans/supporters, antagonists, voice of reason, sarcastic/cynical, resourceful, skeptical, international and media/intermediaries did emerge in the analysis. The following sections provide a more detailed description and examples.

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<sup>4</sup>The shaded area reflected the publics that emerged across all four organizations.

### 6.6.1 Nokia advocates

Nokia advocates/fans/supporters are those who love a particular Nokia product. Their admiration and loyalty are linked to the quality of the product. However, the advocates did express their concerns that Nokia might be left behind in terms of innovation and were not designing products that are quality, user-friendly and fashionable fast enough to remain competitive, and these views applied across its software, mobile phones and even Nokia's decision to form partnerships.

*Sorry and the Xenon flash - I still really love my old sim less N82.*

*Don't worry about speed, I was hesitant at first when I heard about the processor but recently my girlfriend got her hands on a final copy and shot a video for me. From the looks of things the speed put my overclocked nexus one to shame and the transitions were definitely iPhone smooth. She did go on to say that it was boring to use and there was nothing to do on it lol but yeah she's not a phone lover.*

*Nokia tried their own gaming system a few years back and it failed. N-gage I think it was called.*

*I think Nokia is now targeting a different market - productivity and photography enthusiasts - with this new N series device.*

*Suffice to say it is a very VERY nice handset.*

*Any views are that of my own and in no way reflect the views of my employer.*

*I can't believe a company like Nokia would release such a bloated piece of sh!t software suite, I for one have reverted back to the reliable, quick and non memory hog that is Nokia PC suite, I also uninstalled everything that had OVI in the title from my cellphone and it's now running literally 2 x faster and so far I've not noticed any loss in functionality.*

*Just to prove my theory ..to myself.. i re-installed all the Ovi stuff and reset the phone and sure enough it went back to it's glitchy slow menu slow app loading slow message opening self*

*Just thought I'd share. i love Nokia, 5130 is my life*

*u need to be unique to excel ... Nokia's unique. no need to go for the Android like all other phone companies.. stick to your OS. just tweak it up a bit. like add some cool new apps or enhance the user interface. that's it.*

*From what I have seen so far with the newest device, N8, Nokia is getting caught up hardware wise (except for maybe the screen res). The things I feel are lacking from Nokia at the moment is a nice user interface.*

*I have N900 which is I am happy with Linux so far but still Maemo User interface is still need to get improved.*

*Nokia + Intel = MeeGo sounds like a good OS to me, hope Nokia will stick with it.*

*can u tell whts price this nokia 8 in pakistan*

*I hope Nokia doesnt dumb down anything, I have had nothing but Nokia phones since I first got a phone... I tried others but they just werent right in one way or another, Nokia seems to have a good balance. But I just wish that the UI would be updated soon.....*

*Nokia make the best phones and INTERACTIVE videos on you tube EVER*

*At least something different from Nokia.... Awesome.*

*Nokia still owns when it comes to design and cameras.*

*.....I agree 100% They still design the best looking mobiles IMO. My N97 Mini manages to capture stares every time I use it in public.*

*,nokia can improve thier devices and enhancements more than this, the technology in nokia phones is way good, but it needs a littile enhancements to these small things that matters to most people. thanx all*

*that means that nokia can improve louder phones easy by using high quality speakers in it, as i used an old 9110 speaker and it gives petteroutbut than n95 8g, one other thing that the headfones that comes with nokiafonesis'nt that good, i tryd an original sony noise cancelling earfone and the sound is totaly amazing,*

### **6.6.2 Angry public**

Nokia's angry public was mostly found on YouTube, followed by discussion sites and then Facebook. When let down, advocates became angry public and turned on Nokia.

*i prefers HTC with android. I m angry with nokia they just copy all the effects from apple like the cover view etc.....*

*to hell withenokia!!!!!! nokia+kimjong il= pussy*

*OK WHERE THE FxxK IS nokias APPS!!!!!!! why has the n8 had the most complaints about its software, with its dreaded symbian*

*sxxt!! what the fxxk is ovi store? the point of having an app store is to have apps, what happend to the great N900!! wheres the fxxking apps for that!!!! on the other hand*

*wheres the games like asphalt 5 or 6 and no idont mean the crap*

*ass apps made by some guy down the road!!! like that dum ass meomo.org sxxt!!!! i mean stuff thats current.*

*that means its going to be crap then!!!*

*symbianos is shit as!! and as for nokia there*

*adown hill fast CRAP ASS COMPANY!!! ifyour looking for quality get a HTC !!! or an iphone not this wast of plastic!!!*

*android and iphone rule.*

*I WISH NOKIA WOULD STOP HALF STEPPING AND BLOW THE CELL PHONE MARKET OUT OF THE WATER... im am not impressed by this phone 1 bit.... if they keep it up they will be just a cell phone maker with no OS to support!*

*DID any one notice that the device is SLOWISH !!*

*Nokia is good at putting Hundreds of functions in a device that lacks the very basic thing.. Powerful processor that makes the phone works smoothly*

*my next phone will never be Nokia. they lost my trust forever now!*

### **6.6.3 Nokia antagonists**

Nokia's antagonists are those that liked other brands such as iPhone and HTC. Some were ex-advocates or at least close observers of Nokia, as they compared and contrasted its previous and current progress at the time, and focused more on the negative aspects of its products, services and business strategies.

*Yep. Nokia is way too proud to choose the better OS for their customers... I can't stand them.*

*You like to use Android hmmm...*

*Apple iPhone (Mac OS X) = Rolls-Royce,*

*HTC (Android) = Ford,*

*Nokia (Symbian) = Russian Lada*

*fuckinnokia didn't get it right again. Oh and they copied coverflow lol*

*NOKIA IS FINNISHED... bye bye .. 7 years with Nokia now going with Android! Symbian^3 user experience is two decades behind iphone and android, Don't believe me? Try N8. It's not about the specs, it's about what you can do with the phone*

*awesome video, an admirable effort by the sumo science guys. But that still doesn't get me any closer to me wanting a nokia phone.*

*iPhone has had 3D games of equal or better quality since the App Store opened in 2008. Nokia's "next level" is Apple's "two years ago"..*

*Slow graphics, Symbian, 12M is useless if you have zero optics.*

*After all, very veryvery AVERAGE Apple iPhone 3G (not even 3GS) copy. Looks like this model is HTC manufactured and Nokia Brandlabeled only. Maybe Nokia have lost all the good designers or Nokia does lost all their brain... iPhone is still lightyears ahead. Nokia lost it big time again..*

*disappointing to say the least, 3D games like Asphalt 5 been running on iphone 3gs for like a year. selling 12mp camera isn't going to save you, infact you should stop plugging camera quality on the phone..it's a nuisance. seeing Android with 50,000apps and stealing your show, epic fail. nokia should start firing people now, embrace android if you have to win marketshares or even buy WebOS for cheap.*

#### **6.6.4 Voice of reason**

This public spoke their mind and injected bluntness into the conversations in which they participated. Often, they were the voice of reason.

*Not a bit biased there right Brent?*

*I assure you it operates in 3G networks. I don't know where you got the information it wouldn't, but your source is wrong.*

*Camera doesn't mean everything man, the N8 has the crappy touch symbian OS on it, so don't worry about it too much if you have the n900. The n900's 5mp carlzeiss lens camera is good enough. If you worry about taking pictures that much, buy a dslr!*

*it won't make you do the tricks! It will measure what you do and give you points, so you can compete with your friends around the world, like a real-life computer game. But you'll have to do the tricks by yourself still!*

*You have been misinformed. First of all it's called Meego and secondly, Meego, Symbian^3 and Symbian^4 are totally compatible with each other, so a program made for Meego will also work on N8 (google "Qt"). Thirdly, Meego is an operating system for high-end phones, tablets and probably*

*First of all, its called "Meego", not "Meevo". And second, tech is just one large waiting game. You can always wait for the latest and greatest, but you'll always be waiting. By the time the next thing comes, something better will be coming up.*

*Third, the rumored Meego device seems to not be replacing this device, but to be a higher end device. This means that the Meego device will be more expensive. It's not a matter of being outdated. You're just wrong about everything.*

#### **6.6.5 Sarcastic public**

This group used sarcasm in their contributions or comments. The sarcasm was used when they did not agree with a decision or actions taken by either Nokia or other organizations.

*yeah after i go out and skate some spot all i'm really thinking is how bad i want to go home and look at a pie graph of how well i statistically did....wtf?*

*leave it to nokia to upload a video in 360p in 2010*

*this is some essential shit!!!! how were we able to live without it before?  
this will change the world forever!*

#### **6.6.6 Resourceful public**

Nokia's resourceful public was geared at finding solutions and ways to improve Nokia products and services.

*After waiting for 2 years for adobe to solve the issue of viewing pdf file on my mobile phone, i come up with a fast and easy solution and it works very well for me on my nokia 6300 series 40.*

*To easily read Adobe pdf on your mobile phone without scrolling left and right(Nokia series 40 and Symbian OS), you can copy and paste your pdf file into your note on your PC. Save as a text file and download to your mobile phone.*

*You can use free Yong Reader to read the large text file quickly and simply. Yong Reader is available at <http://www.doitech.com/reader>. Alternatively, you can download it immediately by pointing your mobile browser to link <http://www.doitech.com/r.ja>*

*ok after 2 hours of research...i came to a way to find out if phone is fake or not*

*here are tips*

*1) on the back of the phone where it says Nseries on the fake ones (most of them) even the one I posted they write it bold and is written like this Nseries the Ns are stuck together that it make it look like one letter instead of 2*

*2) the N96 writtinginfront of the phone that is on top left of the screen...on real one its in thin neat writting on fake its bold*

*3) the head set jack on top of the phone on real one it has a black frame around it on fake it doesnt*

*4) when u first turn on the phone, on real one the day is written like this Mon 10/04/2010 on fake one its 10/04/2010 Mo*

*5) another software notice is the menu iitself all fake ones have bad grammer like on real it says Search: Internet and My Content (notice capitals) on fake it says Search: Internet my content (no and, no capitals)*

*hope these help if u have any more ways to find out please add to my list*

*Top reason for why iwont buy n8 is because the battery is build in, so when battery needs replacement you have to take the n8 to dealer for battery replacement.*

Like the publics for Apple and BP, these publics offered their time and information for free, showing a willingness to be helpful and share.

## **6.7 Summary**

In this chapter the analysis for Nokia was presented, highlighting Nokia's use of social media and identifying the themes and publics that emerged from the grounded theory analysis.

Notable in this instance was that eight of Nokia's videos made it into the search list and that these videos were accompanied by were significant positive remarks from social media users. Equally noteworthy was that while Nokia was responsible for uploading

the videos using its account at (<http://www.youtube.com/user/nokia>) which was also linked to its discussion website at <http://discussions.nokia.com>, it did not actively participate in the conversation or contribute any comments on YouTube.

The organization followed a different approach on Twitter and Facebook where it played an active role in conversing and replying to comments and questions from the publics. It responded personally to most statements and queries made on the Twitter account and Facebook page.

The majority of themes that emerged for Nokia focused on its products. The organization was generally compared to Apple products and software, and its software, Symbian, received significant scrutiny from its customers and users at the time.

The publics that emerged for Nokia included advocates, angry publics, antagonists, voices of reason, and sarcastic and resourceful publics respectively. The advocates were generally loyal fans of Nokia products that supported Nokia because they liked a certain model or product but they could turn into angry publics when Nokia did not 'listen' to their suggestions in terms of improving the products. This public could also turn into antagonists when they gave up on Nokia completely once they had convinced themselves that Nokia had failed them. Besides advocates turned antagonist, the latter group also included those that preferred the same product but from a different manufacturer. As they were loyal to the opposing brand, they would condemn the competition.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Analysis of results for Toyota**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the results of the thematic analysis for Toyota is presented, following the grounded theory approach as set out in Chapter 3. As with the previous chapters, there results for Toyota are divided into several sub-divisions, namely sources of data, social media applications, themes that emerged, organization–public relations strategy and categories of emerged publics.

#### **7.2 Data sources**

Table 7.1 shows the data sources for Toyota from all the four social media used, namely discussion sites, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. In total, seventeen discussion sites, seventeen Facebook pages, ten YouTube video discussions and some 300 tweets were analyzed. Most of the discussion sites were focused on issues and were initiated by fans, Toyota dealers and media organizations. A similar pattern emerged when analyzing Toyota's Twitter contribution while Toyota USA was mainly responsible for participating on Facebook.

#### **7.3 Social media application**

The application of social media differs from one organization to another, and the analysis presented here is derived from Toyota's participation in each medium as well as the comments made by the publics about the organization—as with the analysis of Apple, BP and Nokia in the preceding chapters.

##### **7.3.1 Discussion sites**

Fans, Toyota dealers and media organizations initiated all of the discussion sites analyzed. Most of the discussions were topic based. Toyota did not participate in any of those discussions but fans and owners came together to discuss their love for the product, issues about the product (either technical or personal), conversion and modification of the products and comparisons between different models.

**Table 7.1 Toyota's data sources**

	<i>Discussion Sites</i>	<i>Facebook</i>	<i>YouTube</i>
	1997 Toyota Hiace 3.0 Desiel Turbo Problems- www.hiace-super-custom.free-boards.net	Butler Toyota run for your heart-facebook- www.facebook.com/pages/Butler- <b>Toyota</b> - Run.../112052198806794	Breaking news- Toyota's chief test driver dies behind wheel of LFA-uploaded by elmexicandehoustone
	1uz-fe Toyota-lexus-the fuel expense in a boat- www.nzjetboating.com	Carson Toyota-automotive-facebook- www.facebook.com/pages/Carson- <b>Toyota</b> /109671395727432	Killing a Toyota part 1-top gear-BBC- uploaded by Top Gear
	Advice on buying 96 Toyota Carib- www.kiwibiker.co.nz	Colonial Toyota-Automotive-Smithfieldrhode Island- Facebook- www.facebook.com/Colonial <b>Toyota</b>	New Toyota RAV4 2011-uploaded by CJIABuk77
	No regrets Member forums-www.noregrets.cc	Defend Toyota-Facebook- www.facebook.com/pages/Defend- <b>Toyota</b> /110410295637497	PomplamooseMr Sandman- Toyota Avalon comercial uploaded by fangwoman
	Performance car magazine-toyotaAltezza Gita 3.0l-forums.performancecar.co.nz	maita Toyota-local business-sacramento-facebook- www.facebook.com/yourmaita <b>toyota</b>	Toyota Ignition Key Programming- uploaded by ADPTraining
	QnAWhat's the difference between the toyotacorrola and the toyotarunx-allex- nz.answers.yahoo.com	Mike Erdman Toyota-commercial automotive-car dealership- www.facebook.com/pages/Mike-Erdman- <b>Toyota</b> /72078778800	Toyota IQ Nimble as a mouse campaign-by adnewsaut
	Report-US finds driver error in some Toyota cases-news.cnet.com	Toyota Echo- www.facebook.com/pages/ <b>Toyota</b> - Echo/104087639626909	Toyota Prado Commercial with Berta Rojas-uploaded by BertaRojasGuitar
	Toyota and Tesla Go for a spin	Toyota FJ55 land Cruiser fan club- www.facebook.com/pages/ <b>Toyota</b> -FJ55- Land.../323696537724	Toyota Prius DIY oil change,2004-2009-by suspensiontuna

	Toyota Caldinatiptronic transmission problems- pressf1-pcworld-co.nz	Toyota Fortuner- <a href="http://www.facebook.com/ToyotaFortuner">www.facebook.com/ToyotaFortuner</a>	Toyota Prius Noisemaker-approaching vehicle audible system-uploaded by PriusChatdotcom and it is in Japanese but the visual is comprehensible by all
	Toyota Corolla vs Toyota Carb- <a href="http://www.propertytalk.com-forum">www.propertytalk.com-forum</a>	Toyota Hiace- <a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/Toyota-Hiace/103112053062275">www.facebook.com/pages/Toyota-Hiace/103112053062275</a>	Toyota Yaris 2006-2011 review-uploaded by Car buyer
	Toyota Hiace Seacts-hiace-super-custom.free- boards.net	NASCAR Toyota All-Star Showdown- <a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/NASCAR-Toyota-All.../266580794843">www.facebook.com/pages/NASCAR-Toyota-All.../266580794843</a>	
	Toyota Service Coupons-Toyota Nation Forum- <a href="http://www.toyotanation.com">www.toyotanation.com</a>	Toyota Sports Center-Local Business-El-Segundo, CA- <a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/Toyota-Sports.../117165374967484">www.facebook.com/pages/Toyota-Sports.../117165374967484</a>	
	Toyota Sienna Towing- <a href="http://www.topix.com">www.topix.com</a>	Toyota USA- <a href="http://www.facebook.com/toyota?v=app_134501369897299">www.facebook.com/toyota?v=app_134501369897299</a>	
	Toyota surf or Nissan Terrana- <a href="http://www.kiwibiker.co.nz">www.kiwibiker.co.nz</a>	Toyota UK- <a href="http://www.facebook.com/toyotauk">www.facebook.com/toyotauk</a>	
	Toyota TF110-GTP Forums- <a href="http://www.gtplanet.net">www.gtplanet.net</a>	Toyota latino- <a href="http://www.facebook.com/ToyotaLatino?v=app_11007063052">www.facebook.com/ToyotaLatino?v=app_11007063052</a>	
	Toyota trucks type logo smash in after effects- adobe after effects-forums.creativecow.net	Toyota Trucks Texas- <a href="http://www.facebook.com/toyotatruckstexas?filter=2">www.facebook.com/toyotatruckstexas?filter=2</a>	
	Uncle Silvia's 1988 Toyota Hiace Super GL- <a href="http://www_oldschool_co_nz">www_oldschool_co_nz</a>	Toyota North-Car Dealership-MountKisco,NY- <a href="http://www.facebook.com/toyotanorth">www.facebook.com/toyotanorth</a>	

Most participants contributed their comments because they preferred Toyota products to other products. They tended to examine, repair and improve the Toyota automobiles they owned. For them, prior reputation of product reliability rang true when they purchased a Toyota.

*My question is if the toyota cars were so bad why is it that they were on podiums pretty often last year? Toyota was never a bad team. You can't just jump into F1 and be competitive, no matter who you are. Other teams have bought teams. Red Bull used to be Jaguar. Mercedes used to be Brawn who used to be Honda who used to be BAR. Toyota came into F1 on it's own. Built everything from scratch and hired who they could. The toyota way was in place but the management was different. It wasn't what F1 was used to and that caused problems. But Toyota was never a bad team.*

*Its a Toyota, bloody reliable. Watch for clunky shift from auto and rust under the tailgate lip. If it doesn't drive smoothly walk away. 4wd chews tires if wheel allignment is off. Anymore details?*

**BUY TOYOTA AND THINK LATER YOU CAN NEVER REGRET IT**

They also highlighted technical and personal issues and experiences with Toyota products.

*I have a 2005 Sienna LE (includes towing package, weight 3500 lbs). It looks like I can add a hitch and tow subject to weight restrictions (I'm considering renting a 5x10 uHaul trailer to move my daughter).*

*My question is about maximum speed. The Sienna owners manual states I should not exceed 45 mph with a trailer. I don't recall a lot of towing Siennason the hiway, but I also don't recall a lot of cars towing at 45 mph.*

*What speed do you travel at?*

*I was going to get my transmission serviced the other day. I was wishing that I had a 10% or 20% off service coupon. This would save me \$15 to \$30 just on the transmission flush.*

There were also examples and experiences shared in terms of conversion and modification of Toyota cars.

*If you fit the intercooler please post pictures because its a modification we would all love to see.*

*I have a 2006 Toyota Sienna too and just started towing a 2003 Coleman Mesa Pop Up. The trailer has a max weight of 3450, but we only towed it with about 2700 lbs so far. We use a Valley Class III hitch with weight distribution.*

*The whole family (two kids, two parents, and one aunt), gear, and the tongue weight was below the gross vehicle rating by about 300 lbs. The combined vehicle weight was about 8000 lbs and the manual says we have 8700 lbs. Small note on the weight distribution hitch; it actually worked too well and put an unequal amount of weight on the front axle of the car. I dropped it a link and the rear axle supported more of the weight.*

*We had an electric break control and a sway bar installed. I don't know if you need either, but I use the Prodigy control in the van and it seems to work well.*

*Owner's manual does say to take it out of overdrive when towing. We have gone a few hundred miles and everything seems to be going well.*

Other conversations compared Toyota products with competing companies' products with most of the discussions requesting help in making purchasing decisions.

*Bloody hard to go past a Toyota, even easier to make a decision when the other options are a Nissan. I am somewhat biased as I sold them for years, they are though a bloody good vehicle.*

*Well, every one has a over priced Toyota very reliable very bland and shapeless... the Nissan is trouble but I'll have another. (current one has tweaked turb, uni filter and 2.5in exhaust with non restricted muffler, not loud tho) Hauls 2 bikes on the deck and up to 3 on the trailer + gear + passengers and gears over the alps with no issues or slowing down..a Toyota 2.4 will run out a puff.*

*any day toyota is my preferred choice, but in terms of v6 engines go for honda. Toyota v6 authentic mechanics are not easy to come by. But apart from that toyota all the way!*

*take my advice and go for a toyota. it may not have all the external beauty of a honda but I tell you they are more reliable in the long run.*

### **7.3.2 Twitter**

Toyota USA played an active role in Twitter by not only strategically tweeting but by replying personally to tweets directed to Toyota.

*Login · Join Twitter! @RacingTheWebDrive safe...and enjoy the race!  
10:12 AM Apr 16th, 2010 via web in reply to RacingTheWeb · Toyota.  
Toyota USA ...*

*- carcomplaints This is my new mission for the company & we've taken  
many steps to make sure this doesn't happen again. #TQS.*

*safetymom Hi Alison. Glad to hear that your kids are digging the ride.  
Safety daughter might end up being an auto engineer. ^SD.*

*jjtakala If you like your Celica, you're gonna love the FT-86! Stay tuned.  
#TQS.*

*sarah\_messer Hey Sarah...congrats on the Yaris. That's what I cruise in  
every morning on the 405 fwy. ^SD.*

*Thank you for watching the Sustainable Mobility Seminar. Visit  
www.toyota.com/esq for more info. ^@amykt*

Other Toyota departments, country representatives and retailers also participated on Twitter but the tweets were mostly news updates and promotional messages about Toyota.

*Toyota settles suit over high-profile Calif. crash - Yahoo! News  
<http://yhoo.it/bqimFw>.*

*[twitter.com/toyotasales/status/24870334746](https://twitter.com/toyotasales/status/24870334746)*

*Check out our photo gallery from the #TPCR Hospital Visit today. What a  
memorable day. <http://bit.ly/bquZPs>.*

*[twitter.com/toyotaracing/status/12256949455](https://twitter.com/toyotaracing/status/12256949455)*

*Team Lexus IS300 came out in full force <http://ow.ly/i/2Dh8>.*

*[twitter.com/ToyotaCanada/status/18625440558](https://twitter.com/ToyotaCanada/status/18625440558)*

*Toyota Auris Hybrid - <http://bit.ly/b2DIz2>. ... Toyota Auris Hybrid -  
<http://bit.ly/b2DIz2> 11:40 PM Jun 5th, 2010 via MarvinAPI · priusmy.  
Malaysian Prius ...*

*[twitter.com/priusmy/status/15539657156](https://twitter.com/priusmy/status/15539657156)*

*Electronic Throttle Control <http://bit.ly/aDBMXT> 9:35 AM Jul 21st, 2010  
via twitterfeed · toyotaofsb. Santa Barbara Toyota ...*

*[twitter.com/toyotaofsb/status/19089298757](https://twitter.com/toyotaofsb/status/19089298757)*

### 7.3.3 YouTube

None of the conversations initiated by Toyota made it to the search list for YouTube, not even through the submission of videos, even though Toyota has a YouTube account which was activated in 2008 (<http://www.youtube.com/user/ToyotaUSA/about>). All the videos about Toyota and its products that were analyzed in this research were uploaded by fans or media organizations. These included advertisements, news or videos featuring Toyota products. Toyota did not participate in any of the discussions of the videos that were analyzed—users and other publics contributed to the discussion.

A video uploaded by BBC's Top Gear of an episode where a Toyota Hilux pickup truck was tested under extreme conditions to determine its quality and durability generated the most conversation. The car withstood all the tests and was still going at the end. This resulted in the majority of Toyota fans reiterating their faith and support of Toyota-made vehicles.

*If the Ford brand stands for affordable then Toyota stands for "try breaking this then you heavy handed basterd"*

*Toyota's are indestructible!*

*America's plan to bring back GM with their plot to crush Toyota as a corporation with mass propoganda is now a huge fail*

### 7.3.4 Facebook

At the time of the data collection, the recall crisis resulting from Toyota Lexus' breaking system being found faulty (see section 7.5) dominated most of the conversations on Facebook. The majority of participants supported Toyota in pro-Toyota pages but there were some who were not supportive.

*Toyota sucks !!!*

*Never again :)*

*'06 Camry, 124,240 miles (even though it wasn't built at this plant; Gagetown, Kentucky)... Toyota, and Honda are the best. I find Honda though to be similar, sometimes lesser quality than Toyota, and their cars are a little more expensive. I guess that's why Toyota, even after all of those recalls (the Gas Pedal recall was deemed cause of "Driver Error" [*

<http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/35458/20100714/toyota-tests-blame-driver-error-for-sudden-acceleration-shares-up.htm> ]) is still no. 1

*I love toyota, no matter what happens. They have always carried my and my family for hundreds of thousands of miles. And they have never let us down, and still kept on going!! I told my dad back in 1996, when i was six years old, that i wanted his 1996 Geo Prizm, and i got it two years ago, and im still driving it with no problems, and this toyota has carried my dad, mom, me and brother for 280,000 miles and counting! Thanks Toyota!*

#### **MERCEDES IS AWESOME TOYOTA IS ACCIDENT PRONE**

*I agree Chad, Toyota is getting a lot of stick and it's all manufacturers that have problems no just one!*

*I notice in all of GM's ads they're always bashing Toyota and saying ...May the Best Car Win! I guess they feel very threatened and they have resorted to smear tactics to bring Toyota down! Thats very true Beverly!...Toyota is a big target for being on top!*

*Looks like Toyota is setting a very dangerous precedent in China by admitting defeat and settling with buyers. They probably should not do that unless they know something the rest of us don't.*

### **7.4 Themes that emerged**

The majority of conversations centered on Toyota car reviews and recommendations, and most of the participants offered their opinion, questioned others and exchanged information about Toyota cars. Hilux and Lexus were mentioned more than any of the other models.

#### **7.4.1 Reviews and recommendations of automobiles**

The reviews and recommendations were based on the owners' experiences and users' history with Toyota products.

*Its a Toyota, bloody reliable. Watch for clunky shift from auto and rust under the tailgate lip. If it doesn't drive smoothly walk away. 4wd chews tires if wheel alignment is off. Anymore details?*

*Rear universal! Bugger! Toyota is the right make but if you need something reliable then buy a good basic one. We've had pretty much every model of corolla going and never had any major issues. The best bang for buck we had was a 93 liftback, a good tidy one of those would be around the right money. Try and get a 5 speed, they tend to last better.*

*Def the Surf, the engine is pretty bullet proof, can't go wrong.*

*Get the surf, but if you are able to spring a few \$\$ more go for the 3 litre turbo one. Drive one and you will see why.*

*I'd put in a good word for the 3L Turbo surf, my girl has one and it's been pretty good for a good four or five years or so. She's blown one clutch in that time (horse floats plus the old lead foot 'o' death), and I think that was about it.*

*my dads 81 toyotacelica is still going strong. never been rebuilt, only a timing chain replacement, and a rear end, due to a recent flood; the whole car was underwater....sadly, my 1981 lincoln mark vi, with 20k original miles, and the rare coupe version, died in the flood.*

#### **7.4.1.1 Hilux**

Toyota Hilux was mentioned more than any other model because of the YouTube video featuring an old episode of BBC's Top Gear that showed how the hosts tried to (unsuccessfully) "kill" a Toyota Hilux. That video prompted the publics to recall their experiences with Toyota. There was a unanimous echo that Hilux is a highly durable Toyota truck.

*Had a 2.8 hilux D/C... slow gutless but never failed me (have heard of several braking cranks)*

*Only problem with that Hilux is it's too small haha. Great little rally truck though.*

*imgettin me a hilux !*

The Toyota Hilux has proven itself time and time again to be truly "unbreakable" i wouldn't own anything else!!

and anyone who doubts this claim needs too watch the top gear episode when they TRIED too kill a hilux... but couldn't... GO THE LUX!!!!

*The Hilux's immortal!!!!*

#### **7.4.1.2 Lexus**

Toyota Lexus was mentioned mostly due to the recall at the time of the data collection due to faulty braking systems (see section 7.5 for a discussion of the conditions around the recall). The participants who mentioned Lexus were informing others about either the recall or commenting on its features.

*The Japanese car company has also had recalls related to electronic issues, recalling the 2003 Sequoia SUV, the Lexus GX 460 SUV, and 2010 Prius. These cases involved stability control (Sequoia and Lexus GX 460) and antilock braking systems (Prius).*

*Toyota to recall Lexus following concerns that its drivers may go off on crazed shooting sprees. #Raoul #Moat.*

*Yea Toyota used to make quality cars now Toyota can go fuck themselves. And their expensive Lexus aka Toyota too!*

*i mean the lexus was probably a ton lighter than the BMW. i'm guessing he took a really hard hit. it's not surprising he died. People here are saying they see people in worse accidents walk away. Well there are just as many people who die. a head on crash is always serious, especially when you're in a little carbon fiber supercar*

*By the way, in my opinion BMW needs much more to match Lexus in terms of quality, reliability, innovation or even performance.*

*You make no sense. It's a super car. The Lexus LF-A is one of the most technologically advanced cars on the road. That being said, I do not like them.*

#### **7.4.2 Locally made (host country) versus Japanese made**

Some participants were proud of their locally made products but others preferred Japanese made as they associated anything made in Japan as being of quality. Others linked Toyota with Japanese quality.

*Obviously they had air bags as well in the old Hiace van in Japan, but I guess Toyota Australia didn't reckon that our tradies lives were worth a few extra bucks to fit them to our very basic Hiace vans. Not to mention ABS brakes. Iv'e had a gut full of Australia crap cars we get here*

*Thank Japan for imports. hehe. Here in Dominica we pay like double the price of an imported vehicle and its still better than buying brand new. Buying a vehicle brand new can be compared to buying a house!*

*Funny, a lot of American car makers have moved out of the US, and the Japanese car makers are moving in! Yay! Now we can get great reliable cars for even less!*

*Love my 4-door Tacoma. EXCELLENT QUALITY....and built in the USA!!!*

*I wonder if these American made Toyotas will be just as crappy as the rest of them,*

*Thank you for USA Product! Keep them coming in. GO TOYOTA!*

*thats good i guess but i WILL NOT BUY A TOYOTA THAT WAS MADE IN THE USA.... i think thats why toyota has problems in the first place. and if all toyota cars trucks and suv's are made in the usail just go and get a freaking chevy. thats if you ask me. ONLY MADE IN JAPAN!!!!*

*I PREFER TOYOTA LAND CRUISER PRADO, JAPANESE VERSION OF LEXUS GX-470*

*If you want to buy a reliable car, buy a Japanese branded make. Toyota just proved it.*

*Japan sure know how to make good cars!*

*American cars are built like shit so it breaks so u can buy another. Cars from other countries like germany and japan are built with quality*

*Japanese cars the best*

#### **7.4.3 Association with other brands**

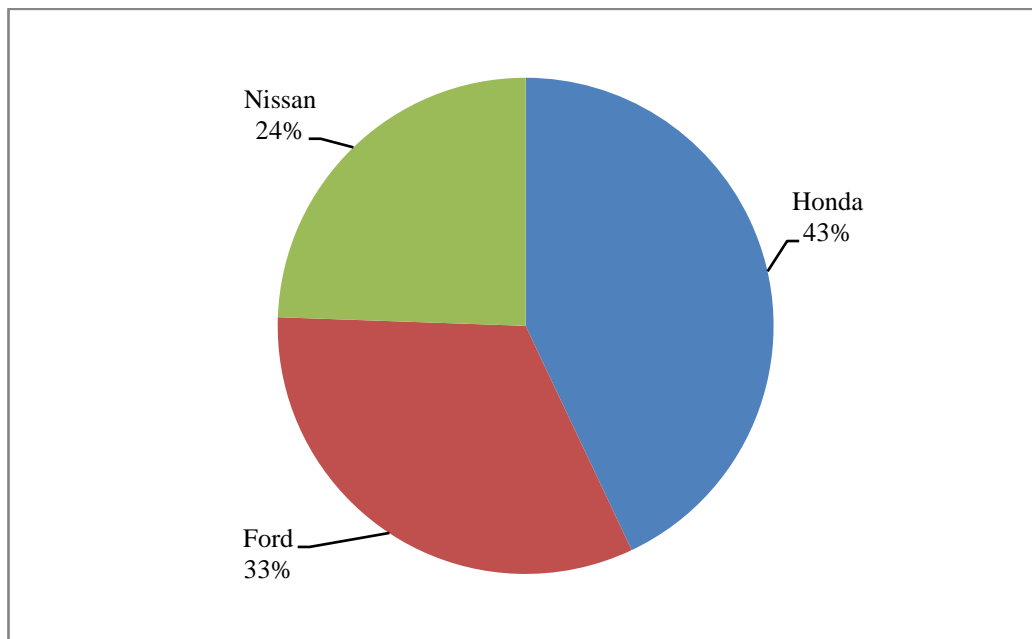
Toyota was most frequently mentioned in association with Honda, Ford and Nissan respectively (see figure 7.1), and the majority of publics narrowed down their choices to either Honda or Toyota when deciding to buy a car. The publics highlighted Toyota's fuel efficiency strength and overall reliability over Honda's engine performance and aesthetic design leadership.

*Hey, Toyota is a fine car and it's fuel economy is a lot better than Honda. But let's be honest with ourselves, honda brings out better performing cars and the car designs are off the charts.*

*any day toyota is my preffered choice, but in terms of v6 engines go for honda. Toyota v6 authentic mechanics are not easy to come by. But apart from that toyota all the way!*

*Toyota, and Honda are the best. I find Honda though to be similar, sometimes lesser quality than Toyota, and their cars are a little more expensive*

**Figure 7.1 Organizations most frequently mentioned with Toyota**



The comparison with Ford revolved around its product recall and product features when compared to Toyota products.

*FORD - 12 million vehicle recall in February of 2008, Ford issued the industry's largest-ever recall, affecting Lincoln and Mercury SUVs, pickups, cars, and vans of model years '93 to '04. The lowly cruise-control switch was behind this mother-of-all do-overs. It had a nasty habit of catching fire, sometimes hours after the vehicle had been parked and turned off. Owner response, however, has been slow, so in a rare move Ford reissued the recall in September of 2008 for the 5 million vehicles still unrepaired*

*@ Rebecca.Im guessing you forgot about the recall Ford has had about Cruise Control, Gas tank, and engine fires. GM has had recalls for Rust, and recently some of their cars for power steering failure. Im wondering why nobody is jumping on Them for any of that. Its a bit um one sided. People shouldn't put something on such a high pedestal cause People Make Mistakes. They learn from it and are better cause of it. So Move On.*

*I love Toyota.... Ford sucks... That's the worst car to own...*

*This is the best commercial for Toyota ever made and the Fiesta review is the best for Ford!*

*the only real problem with ford is thier transmissions are garbage*

Toyota was compared to Nissan in reviews of different vehicle models where product advocates for both organizations shared their experiences in owning a particular model, giving recommendations.

*Iv'e noticed the same, especially with the two i'm comparing the terrano realistically is probably a better buy, i'm letting looks and favouritism get the better of me I guess. From other sites they seem as reliable as each other, problem being other sites are overseas so I want info from kiwis on how theirs have preformed.*

*I own a Terrano so I'm probably biased, but when i was looking to buy it stacked up a lot better than a Surf for the same money. The 2.4t toyota engines can have expensive problems, the 2.7t nissans are usually good for around 300k. Terrano manual gearboxes last about 150k before they do the bearings if you tow with them, auto's usually last as long as the engine*

*The TD27 terrano is one of the most reliable engines around, IF AN ONLY IF they've had regular oil and filter changes. There are heaps of TD27 engines at wreckers and bugger all Toymotas for a good reason.*

*Hi lux is indeed a great car! Had one! But sorry, Toyota can't beat Nissan's Fairlady Z! ;-)*

## **7.5 The product recall issue: Background**

Toyota's issues with unintended acceleration problems began in 2009 in California when an accident involving a Lexus ES 350 sped out of control and crashed, killing the driver and three passengers. Initial reports from Toyota and local authorities suggested that the loaned Lexus has had a wrong floor mat installed which interfered with the gas pedal (MacKenzie & Evans, 2010). At the end of September 2009, Toyota recalled the floor mats of 4.2 million Toyota and Lexus vehicles and advised owners to remove their floor mats and put them in the trunk, and directed dealers to use zip ties to secure the mats so that they could not interfere with the gas pedal. That accident led to two separate recalls of 7.5 million vehicles and a suspension of sale of its eight best-selling vehicles, which cost Toyota and its dealers US\$ 54 million a day in lost sales revenue (MacKenzie & Evans, 2010).

Data collected by government agencies explained that unintended acceleration problems occurred more frequently in Toyotas than any other brand suggesting the cause might be defects in its electronic throttle control system (Ramsey, 2012). Toyota denied media

reports that a problem existed with its drive-by-wire electronic throttle system (MacKenzie& Evans, 2010).

In December 2009, another accident occurred. This time it involved a Toyota Avalon, which crashed into a Texas lake after accelerating out of control and killing all four occupants. Floor mats were ruled out as a cause as they were found in the trunk of the car. A month after the accident, Toyota announced that its brake override software fix would be made globally available by 2011 and that the software would be fixed in all its future models (MacKenzie& Evans, 2010).The scandal led Toyota Chief Executive Akio Toyoda to apologize formally before Congress and declare that the company would restore its quality control management (Allen & Sturcke, 2010; Ramsey, 2012).

In 2009 and 2010, Toyota recalled more than 5.3 million vehicles in the U.S. for problems related to ill-fitting floor mats and 2.77 million for accelerator pedal problems. It was fined more than US\$66 million several times by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administrator for non-notification in a timely manner of problems with its vehicles. Toyota was also fined by the same agency for not notifying the public about its floor mat issues in a separate recall of its Lexus RX350(Ramsey, 2012). However, a U.S. Government probe of unintended acceleration in accidents involving Toyota vehicles absolved the throttle-control electronics. It found the cause of most mishaps to be driver error, but sticky accelerator pedals and floor mats were found to play a role in other accidents (Ramsey, 2012).

Toyota also faced two separate lawsuits related to the 2009–10 recalls, which involved a consumer protection and fraud suit in Orange County California and a class-action suit brought by the attorney generals of 28 states alleging that a flaw in Toyota's electronic throttle-control system was the cause of Toyota drivers accelerating out of control and crashing. The settlement of the class action suit at up to US\$1.4 billion put Toyota's cost of recalls and probes to exceed US\$3.1billion (Ramsey, 2012).

#### **7.5.1 Announcements and reasons given**

The product recalls were mentioned mostly by news agencies and there were announcements about product recalls that were not limited to the accelerator and floor

mats problems but other product troubles and fears, such as steering issues and faulty engines.

*Toyota is recalling 412000 cars, mostly the Avalon model, in US, & 16420 in Japan for steering problems <http://bit.ly/csODRS>.*

*URGENT\*\* WSJ- Toyota says 270000 vehicles globally, including luxury Lexus sedans, have faulty engines.*

*Toyota announces another recall involving more than one million cars in the US with potentially faulty engine c.. <http://bbc.in/acX87a>.*

*Toyota recalling 412K cars, mostly the Avalon model, for steering problems in which three accidents have been reported, the automaker said.*

*Toyota recalls Lexus GS and LS vehicles for a valve spring replacement. Owners will receive recall notification letter: <http://bit.ly/bPGPBA>.*

*The Japanese car company has also had recalls related to electronic issues, recalling the 2003 Sequoia SUV, the Lexus GX 460 SUV, and 2010 Prius. These cases involved stability control (Sequoia and Lexus GX 460) and antilock braking systems (Prius).*

## **7.5.2 Placing the blame**

The cause of the problems for the recall was placed at the door of three key parties: Toyota, the American Government and the drivers. Participants generally blamed Toyota but a number were quick to defend and support Toyota. In some reports, the drivers were blamed for the accidents and some of the people agreed with these reports.

### **7.5.2.1 Blaming Toyota**

A group of participants blamed Toyota for producing faulty products.

*My Acura has started having significant transmission problems lately. They were minor before and hence did not feel they were significant or report them. Guess what, I see the same problem on various online forums and there was a class-action settled by Honda a few years back for the exact same problem in addition to a recall earlier (through which they only installed an oil jet pack instead of changing the tranny then). Does that mean I am making up my problems, hell no. Why do you think the Toyota issue be totally dis-similar?*

*Sure -- but 8 million cars in one year?? If they're "just like everyone else", why are they the only automaker being investigated by Congress? I'm blown away by the fact that so many people are willing to defend this company that would rather spend money on zillions of TV ads than make sure they're selling cars that won't kill you.*

*If Toyota cares so much about their customers, why aren't they doing more thorough vehicle testing BEFORE putting these dangerous cars on the market?!? Would you continue to defend a restaurant that sells poisonous food over and over and over again, because you personally think it tastes good? Look at the bigger picture people!!*

*And say what you will, but Toyota is the only automaker that has issued recalls on nearly every model they make in just the last 6 months. No other car company even comes close.*

*A car that's gas pedal will stick at inopportune times, causing injury, maiming, and death. Formerly known as a good quality car, now associated with pain and suffering, lies about "bad" floor mats, blaming others for own faults.*

*I got my recall letter from those liars today. I will not let my daughter drive that Toyota deathtrap again*

*Definitely, your friend can't be confused about the beauty and style but the reliability and performance since beauty is supposed to be in the eye of the beholder*

*Having said that, and from all indication, Toyota is taking the lead.*

*As for Mr. kabukabu aka Cyclist/Taxi, The recall was not for those manufactured in 2005 but for those of 2010*

*how many cars have gm recalled that are 12 to 21 years old???? none because they dont care about customers. if you want to support "american cars" you should move to Canada because thats where gm's and chryslers are made!!! you should support toyota because in their fleet of cars only a hand full are actually made in Japan....most are made in the us!!!*

*80% of all Toyotas ever sold in America are still on the road so Toyota haters better start lovin cause that ain't gonna change toyota's#1*

### **7.5.2.2 Blaming the drivers**

At times, the drivers were blamed for the accidents rather than the faulty products as reported by the media. Participants commented on this.

*Preliminary results show some cases of driver error, the Journal reported Wednesday. "The early results suggest that some drivers who said their Toyotas and Lexuses surged out of control were mistakenly flooring the accelerator when they intended to jam on the brakes," the Journal said.*

*I've personally seen an old lady did just that when backing up in a Ford. She ended up on the sidewalk and in my neighbor's fens. She said the car just "jumped". Yeah right.*

*I would be far more likely to believe that an accident was the cause of human error than sudden acceleration. We think that mixing up brake and gas is only something an idiot would do, but it happens a lot more often than people think.*

*These "sudden acceleration" incidents have one thing in common - all or nearly all the drivers over the age of 50 with many over 60. Guess what that means - driver errors, bad/slow reaction times and panicking.*

*And, from what it sounds like, I would be blaming the driver, not the car.*

### **7.5.2.3 Blaming the U.S. Government**

A number of participants blamed the U.S. Government, suggesting that they had created the crisis to simply damage Toyota's reputation.

*American government is behind all this Toyota trash talking. Now they're going after Nissan! Conspiracy! This is the only way America can sell American cars. How sad.*

*The witch hunt against Toyota is nuts. They're only doing it because the American auto workers union is millions in the hole for benefits they promised people and they want you to buy American. Follow the money. Besides, my dad's flatbed trucks over the years (GM American made) have had sticky pedals and issues for YEARS.*

*Also, werent these issues a result of parts made in the USA by AMERICANS???? Problems in the US plant???*

*they are the only car manufacturer being investigated by congress because it makes everyone forget how pissed off we were when WE as taxpayers bailed out the domestic auto industry & focus on how we should buy domestic instead of foreign. True Toyota fans see this as a*

*scam to get the US to fund inferior car makers even more by purchasing their inferior products.*

*I am sure the sucky economy has a large part to play in this - they're trying to promote American brands - we'll see if it's just hype or if people are voting with their pocketbooks. (Toyota will be back!)*

*Media picks on Toyota because government picks on Toyota! Government picks on Toyota because it effectively OWNS GM & Chrysler!!*

*Toyota's are indestructible!*

*America's plan to bring back GM with their plot to crush Toyota as a corporation with mass propoganda is now a huge fail*

Most participants compared the product recall crisis with similar recalls by other organizations and manufacturers as a means to support and defend Toyota from negative scrutiny. Still others were convinced that Toyota was a good organization due to its past and recent actions.

## **7.6 Other recalls**

The recall crisis was compared to other companies' product recalls. Some used the comparison to put the blame on Toyota while others defended Toyota by making similar comparisons and suggesting that the issue is a shared one. Most often, Toyota product recalls were compared with Ford vehicle recall.

*So much talk about the Toyotas. Fords still burn up even after my cruise control recall was fixed.*

*FORD - 12 million vehicle recall in February of 2008, Ford issued the industry's largest-ever recall, affecting Lincoln and Mercury SUVs, pickups, cars, and vans of model years '93 to '04. The lowly cruise-control switch was behind this mother-of-all do-overs. It had a nasty habit of catching fire, sometimes hours after the vehicle had been parked and turned off. Owner response, however, has been slow, so in a rare move Ford reissued the recall in September of 2008 for the 5 million vehicles still unrepaired*

*Never got this much pub when my Focus was recalled for it's steering wheel recall, where there was a chance the steering wheel could fall off while driving. I took little chance with that one, and went back to Ford immediately, and shortly there after traded it in.*

*Sounds like a cruise control malfunction. On my vehicle with electronic cruise control, it floors the accelerator for an instant until the vehicle speed rises to whatever you set the cruise to. This has cause the rear wheels to spin on a damp spot in the road when the transmission downshifted after hitting resume on the cruise control with a 2002 Chevrolet Tracker with Nippon electronics, same electronics as a Toyota. The automatic transmission is also made by a Toyota subsidiary, Aisan, who also makes all kind of electronic devices for cars. The Tracker's cruise control is unusable for the most part as it downshifts at the slightest virtually invisible rise in the road. There was no fix from Chevrolet. Perhaps something is triggering the cruise control and then the throttle sticks to the floor.*

*I still think its a GM conspiracy! They can't outsell or equal quality of Toyota so,they're resorting to the smear tactics! My '09 Rav4 is better than ANY GM product I've had and,I've been driving for over 30yrs. Toyota RULES!!!*

*@ Rebecca.Im guessing you forgot about the recall Ford has had about Cruise Control, Gas tank, and engine fires. GM has had recalls for Rust, and recently some of their cars for power steering failure. Im wondering why nobody is jumping on Them for any of that. Its a bit um one sided. People shouldn't put something on such a high pedestal cause People Make Mistakes. They learn from it and are better cause of it. So Move On.*

## **7.7 Toyota and the American economy**

Toyota product ambassadors promoted positive characteristics such as Toyota helping the U.S. economy, and to counter the negative ones during the product recall crisis. These views were challenged by those who suggested that Toyota's investment in the U.S. automobile industry did not help the American economy because it would only transfer money out of the U.S. and back to Japan.

*I dont know to be excited or worried. Jobs dissappearing and now japaness markets moving onto our home soil?question is does this money flow straight into americas economy or back to japan? Dont get me wrong I am not bashintoyota but last thing we need flowing money to sourse that doesnt come back to us. Its like the equivalent of just spending money instead of investing it.*

*nice to see a company investing in the us*

*Toyota is an AWESOME product AND Toyota is not just now bringing jobs to the US. Toyota's have been assembled in California for years! Pay attention folks! Toyota's are a "staple" in the United States and are not going anywhere! Especially since the US automakers can't keep up with the quality, dependability and longevity that Toyota is known for.*

*I defend Toyota because to put it as simply as possible, it has always been the best cars we have ever owned and my confidence in Toyota and the way they handle their customers is as high as it has ever been. They employ soooo many people here in North America and treat each one with respect and dignity. That is why I defend Toyota and always will. Will be very glad when the Witch Hunt is over!!*

*I hate to be a buzzkill ultimately once people are paid for making the truck....money still goes overseas...I get the part about employing Americans...but revenue goes to Japan. Not sure how this helps....our economy here. Hope some one can explain calmly without flaming*

## **7.8 Toyota's organization–public relationship (OPR)**

Toyota was very active on Twitter by sharing strategic information and personally responded to the publics (see Section 7.3). On Facebook, the Toyota U.S. page was also active at uploading messages. However, the messages were all–generic and were not personally targeted at anyone in particular. Toyota U.S. did also not personally reply to any publics. Instead, they prompted conversations by posting customer relations messages and questions that encouraged conversations.

*This week's Featured Fan is Jennifer Tallent Travis. Her great great grandmother was the first person to purchase a Toyota in the US! Thanks, Jennifer, for sharing your photo and congratulations on being our Featured Fan for this week, and a part of Toyota history!*

*For our Spanish-speaking fans, hay unapaginanieva aqui: Toyota Latino*

*Do you have any questions about Toyota quality and safety? Dino Triantafyllos, one of Toyota's top quality executives, will be sharing ongoing safety efforts during a LIVE Digg Dialogg on June 23. Head over to [http://digg.com/dialogg/dino\\_triantafyllos](http://digg.com/dialogg/dino_triantafyllos) to submit your questions, starting at 12 p.m. PDT, today!*

*This week's Featured Fan is Charles Johnson and his family of Toyotas. A RAV4, a 4Runner and a Tundra! Those are some lean, mean driving machines! Thanks for your support and congratulations on being our Featured Fan for this week!*

*We did it! Our Toyota USA Facebook page just hit 100,000 fans. You are showing us a lot of love. And we'll show you our love too -- so get ready for some great activities and stories to come!*

*Hi fans, other than Facebook, what other blogs or websites do you frequent on a daily basis?*

Toyota advocates and antagonists contributed to the conversations with comments, suggestions and questions but these were answered by other publics, and not Toyota U.S.

## 7.9 Emerged publics

Based on the analysis, several publics emerged. Unlike Nokia, employees and speculators were active in the conversations. Also present were advocates, antagonists, voice of reason, sarcastic publics, resourceful, international and media/intermediaries. Skeptical publics and shareholders did not emerge in the conversations analyzed for Nokia. As with the other organizations analyzed, the shaded area reflects the publics that emerged across all four organizations.

**Table 7.2 Toyota: Categories of emerged publics**

Categories of publics/organizations	Toyota
Advocates/fans/supporters	✓
Antagonists	✓
Employees	✓
Shareholders	
Speculators	✓
Voice of reason	✓
Sarcastic/Cynical	✓
Resourceful	✓
Skeptical	
International	✓
Media/Intermediaries	✓

### 7.9.1 Toyota advocates

Toyota, as the other organizations studied, had its fans, but what stood out about Toyota fans was that they were ambassadors of its products. Toyota ambassadors would express their affection for and loyalty towards Toyota products. They also shared their experiences and indirectly promoted and recommended Toyota products. They were loyal and had stayed with Toyota for many generations but their loyalty was towards Toyota's product quality rather than anything else.

*I love it so darn cool :) Toyota by far makes the BEST CARS the best in every way dependability I know I will always be Safe inside my Toyota*

*My 88 corolla had over 180,000 mile. 92 Camry over 200,000. Now my 01 is currently @ 140,000. Don't care what nobody says best car EVER!*

*Toyota is cheap to keep, just change the oil and keep riding. Tacoma is the best little truck that I have ever owned. Thanks Toyota for making the best while others make the rest. It is great seeing 30+ year old Toyota,s still on the road.*

*I got my Camry back today! My Dad backed out of his garage and hit her! I drove a Kia Forte while it was being fixed. I was sooo glad to get back into MY car! I love it!! Go 05 Camry!!*

*My 01 Corrola S is the love of my life!*

*Just got my Tundra Crew Max 5.7 4X4 and I am officially in love! Loyal Toyota fan for years. I still have a T100 with over 300,000 miles. Still runs great!*

*toyota is for life,I LOVE THEM*

*I have a 2010 Camry SE and I love it. My first Camry was a 1996 L*

*No...you have to have a Toyota Tundra Crewmax-I love my new truck!!!*

*uhm. i have a lifted red tacoma. andi love it! :) i love the tundras too. it was a loaner for a while. lovetoyota :)*

Toyota employees were also one of the groups that supported Toyota in times of crisis specifically during the controversial recalls. It was particularly noticeable how vocal Toyota employees were in support of their company. Of all the four organizations under study, Toyota employees were the most responsive and the bravest in defending the

company while under public scrutiny. They were also the ones who advised Toyota to do the right thing.

*I'm proud to be part of the Toyota SA Plant Family... :)*

*UAW suck! I wish I was still working there, Toyota is #1*

*Standing to the left of the truck just outside the pic when it was taken. TMMTX builds the best trucks. 23 year Toyota employee*

*GM pulled out of the joint venture first, leaving Toyota holding all of the cost and not all of the sales. I'm glad to be a part of the engine plant supplying TMMTX!*

*Its Great to see another well made truck made in texas by texans. I remember being the first in the whole county with my tundra that rolled out of that plant. WOOT GO Toyota*

*Sc Gal Exactly, Toyota has been at the top of the heap for so long that the naysayers are using this to smear them. I work for them and Toyota is awesome. I am on my second one and the last one I drove almost 200,00 miles...*

*Toyota VP for Public Affairs urged company, "The time to hide on this one is over." Listen to the comm experts, execs! <http://bit.ly/ajkQYY>.*

*Toyota executive e-mail said before gas pedal recall: "We need to come clean"*

### **7.9.2 Toyota antagonist**

It was interesting to note that Toyota had the fewest number of antagonists in the conversations analyzed. Most of them had been advocates but had changed their support because of a product or a change in the product design. Others did not like Toyota because of the public perception of it being low quality.

*Sure -- but 8 million cars in one year?? If they're "just like everyone else", why are they the only automaker being investigated by Congress? I'm blown away by the fact that so many people are willing to defend this company that would rather spend money on zillions of TV ads than make sure they're selling cars that won't kill you.*

*If Toyota cares so much about their customers, why aren't they doing more thorough vehicle testing BEFORE putting these dangerous cars on the market?!? Would you continue to defend a restaurant that sells*

*poisonous food over and over and over again, because you personally think it tastes good? Look at the bigger picture people!!*

*And say what you will, but Toyota is the only automaker that has issued recalls on nearly every model they make in just the last 6 months. No other car company even comes close.*

*they are CRAP!!!*

*buy a Jeep!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

*all your toyota will do is kill you and a bunch of other people*

*A Japanese car company that stupid brainwashed Americans think is GOD. Was actually good in the 70s to the 90s until they started discontinuing their awesome models like the Supra, MR2 and the Celica. Now it's just overrated crap that is ugly and it drives like it's made by a monkey*

### **7.9.3 Voice of reason**

This public was also active in conversing with their counterpart. As with all other organizations analyzed, these publics expressed forthright comments in the conversations in which they participated.

*You disagree with this, and I accept that. Despite agreeing with some of what you've said, I still stand by my point of view.*

*Ok, I mis-read your initial comment, but I still backed up my argument further which you chose to ignore too.*

*Interesting and well written, but please say "pilot error" not driver error, after all this is a tech Website*

*Why do people who have negative things to say have to put there 2 cents on these posts? No matter how you slice it Americans are being employed by this.*

*Obviously Mr. Patton is much more educated than I. I only have 2 PhD's and speak 3 languages fluently.*

*can those people give some respect, people dead in this tragic accident ,*

*just stop all those stupid comments, just give some little respect to someone = respect yourself, consider if you are the one who involve , how you feel if someone not even give you any respect, before getting those comments out, step back and think clear, everyone got family...*

*YOU should read more. FORD still holds the record for the largest automotive recall in history for their cruise control switch fire problem. GM's recall for acceleration problems is still the third largest and Toyota's comes in at number 4. Also, GM CONSTANTLY has serious safety recalls for fires, loss of control problems and improperly designed seat belts*

#### **7.9.4 Sarcastic public**

This group contributed sarcasm in addressing other people's comments. These sarcastic remarks were mostly about the defects of the recalled Toyota model.

*·well.... i killed a toyota with my honda once*

*If you don't kill the Toyota, the Toyota kills you*

*yes not even the brakes can stop them!*

*Next time test the Toyota with the Toyota Executives IN IT :)(the ones who messed up the Toyota brakes),...poetic justice :)*

*Peace*

*How Bin Laden escaped from Tora Bora ?*

*Behind the wheel of a bullet-riddled ,half-exploded Toyota Hillux with burning wheels ! Into the sunset and towards freedom :-D*

*Payback is a bitch aint it? Rest in peace.*

#### **7.9.5 Resourceful public**

The resourceful public—as with the other organizations—suggested solutions and provided information on any matters concerning Toyota.

*Autozone will read the computer error codes for you.*

*Finally the advancements from Lexus RX400h -> RX450h is now available in the Highlander hybrid. More power yet more fuel efficient.*

*For those interested in more information of the improvements:*

*<http://pressroom.toyota.com/pr/tms/lexus/LEX-14-08.aspx?ncid=12493>*

*BBC had to pay for all the damage he did with that truck. The stone wall he hit had to be repaired, as did the tree.*

*Once you get the water out of the cylinders theres no reason the engine shouldn't run if the gas is clean.*

*reminds me Toyota's factory racing driver Sachio Fukuzawa, who died by the accident at test driving in 1969. Toyota has never disclosed the cause of the accident and Sachio's family is still angry about it. I think that bad karma is still remaining now.*

*Berta Rojas is a musician who moves easily from classical to other musical genre. Rojas has captivated musica-lovers in the Americas , Europe and Asia*

## **7.10 Summary**

In this chapter, the analysis of online conversations about Toyota was presented. It was evident that Toyota used social media. In fact, its Twitter account and Facebook page were captured in the search list. Toyota was also very active in disseminating tweets and replying personally to tweets directed at them. However, Toyota was passive in responding to comments on Facebook and left that responsibility to its advocates. The organization was seen to only post messages that promoted discussion rather than actually participating in the discussion. Most of the public relations activities were seen in Twitter and Facebook, where efforts were made to converse with publics and activities were initiated to motivate more online conversations.

The themes that emerged were mostly focused on its cars and related issues. Issues such as locally made cars (referring to the host country, the U.S.) compared to Japanese made ones were addressed in many instances. Many participants referred to Japanese made cars as being superior to those made in the U.S..

The Toyota recall crisis that resulted from the accelerator fault was mostly compared to other crises that occurred at Toyota itself. The participants in the conversations analyzed also linked Toyota to the U.S. economy, and most thanked Toyota for contributing to its growth.

Overall, the emerged publics for Toyota were similar to those of the other organizations analyzed except that the advocates were seen to promote and talk about Toyota even after owning the products for many years, and the majority of the discussions initiated by the advocates were about older models and products while the Toyota antagonists were mostly hostile when talking about the recall crisis.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Discussion**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the key research findings presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 with reference to each of the research questions and the themes that emerged. As is the convention in grounded theory approach, the results of the study are discussed in relations to previous, published research studies. The last section describes the proposed theory and how it came about.

#### **8.2 Research objectives and questions**

The main objective of the study was to develop a substantive theory in reputation and public relations research. Since this is a grounded theory study, the main descriptions and issues concerning an organization's reputation emerged from the data. Moreover, patterns found within the data could be identified as categories.

The objectives of the study were guided by the following specific research questions:

- RQ1: What are the discursive themes that emerged from online conversations under analysis?
- RQ2: Who are the publics that participated in the conversations analyzed?
- RQ3: What is the significance of each social medium contributing to an organization's reputation?
- RQ4: What are the key elements of the reputational constructs for each organization based on the overall perceptions and reactions communicated by their publics in online conversations?
- RQ5: How do online stakeholders' and publics' conversations shape an organization's reputation? A theoretical explanation is proposed.

The research questions have been changed to follow the flow of the study and the data collection process. The questions started out as general terms that reflected the topic and issues being researched but evolved into more specific and targeted questions as outlined in table 9.1 below. Initially the research questions are formulated in order to locate the research and give a sense of rationale for conducting this research. The earlier questions came about after defining reputation as a concept based on past research.

Once the data collection was completed, it became evident that there was a need to improve the research questions to reflect the gathered data more accurately. The final research questions became guidelines for the study, providing control measurement, while the changes in the middle of the study reflect the types of questions needed to better comprehend the problem (see Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This change is one of the strategies used in a constructivist grounded theory approach (Butler–Kisber, 2010, Charmaz, 2006, Clarke, 2005).

**Table 8.1 The changes made to the research questions**

<i>Initial research questions</i>	<i>Second version of the research questions</i>	<i>Final research questions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do online interactions between an organization and its public project its reputation?</li> <li>• Do online interactions between publics of an organization project its reputation?</li> <li>• What are the discursive themes that these social media present in the online conversations' observed?</li> <li>• Do firm's public relations effort influence online conversations and thus their reputation?</li> <li>• Do publics influence firm's reputation management strategies?</li> <li>• Which one of the social media is mostly used?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the discursive themes that emerge from online conversations under analysis?</li> <li>• Who are the publics that participated in the conversations analyzed?</li> <li>• What is the reputation of each organization based on the overall perceptions and reactions communicated by their publics?</li> <li>• What is the significance of each social medium that contributes to an organization's reputation?</li> <li>• How do online stakeholders' and publics' conversations shape an organization's reputation? A theoretical explanation is purposed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the discursive themes that emerged from the online conversations under analysis?</li> <li>• Who are the publics that participated in the conversations analyzed?</li> <li>• What is the significance of each social medium as it contributes to an organization's reputation?</li> <li>• What are the key elements of the reputational constructs for each organization based on the overall perceptions and reactions communicated by their publics in online conversations?</li> <li>• How do online stakeholders' and publics' conversations shape an organization's reputation?</li> </ul>

The current study uses the guided research questions to narrow the focus of the research. A grounded theory analysis of online discussions from four different social media revealed similar and yet also distinctive themes for each organization. This study draws from the concept of reputation as a sum of perceptions from internal and external

publics. Thus, reputation represents a set of images that the publics formulate from the organization's identities, actions and activities. In other words, reputation does not only change over time but it is an evaluative judgment that is shared between different publics, and thus, reputation is formed through subjective impressions outside the organization. These impressions are the result of public expressions of opinion and information sharing, and networks of communication by active and aware publics. The results from the analysis therefore show the determinants of reputation and reputation management that are deemed as important by the publics.

### 8.3 Summary of results analysis for the four organizations

The following table summarizes the results of the grounded theory analysis in this current study for all four organizations, Apple, BP, Nokia and Toyota.

**Table 8.2 Results of the analysis for all four organizations**

<p><b>Apple</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application of social media and projecting an online presence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provided a discussion site</li> <li>○ CEO had a Twitter account</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Themes that emerged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Strengths and weaknesses of products <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Highlights of product features and performance</li> <li>▪ Evaluation, reviews and feedback</li> <li>▪ Association with other organizations, their products and features</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Management of a product issue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complaints</li> <li>▪ Solutions</li> <li>▪ Reactions to the solutions</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Emerged publics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advocates</li> <li>▪ Angry public</li> <li>▪ Shareholders</li> <li>▪ Antagonists</li> <li>▪ Voice of reason</li> <li>▪ Sarcastic</li> <li>▪ Resourceful</li> <li>▪ International</li> <li>▪ Media</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>BP</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application of social media and projecting an online presence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Owns an account and participated on YouTube</li> <li>○ Owns an account and participated on Facebook</li> <li>○ Owns an account and participated on Twitter</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- Themes that emerged: The product crisis
  - Reactions
    - Blaming BP
    - Blaming others
      - President Obama and the U.S. Government
      - Blaming end users
    - Linking the crisis to the U.S. political scenario
    - Fears and worries
    - Upset about the lack of reaction
    - Making sense of the information
  - Solutions
    - Initiated by BP
    - Publics' suggested solutions
      - Technical solutions
      - Other solutions: Punish those perceived to be responsible
    - Public relations activities conducted
    - Effects of the solution
      - Environmental friendly/Green
      - Clean-up and restoration activities
  - Effects
    - Environmental
    - Social
      - Conspiracy theories on reasons for the spill
      - Activism
    - Reputation
      - CEO
      - Oil industry
      - Comparison to other organizations: Past and recent crises
- Emerged publics
  - Advocates
  - Employees
  - Shareholders
  - Angry public
  - Antagonists
  - Voice of reason
  - Resourceful
  - International
  - Media

## Nokia

- Application of social media and projecting an online presence
  - Owns an account and participated on Facebook
  - Owns an account and participated on Twitter
- Themes that emerged
  - Products and their features
  - Suggestions
  - Association with other organizations, their products and features
- Organization–public relationships
  - Promotional messages
  - Questions to promote discussions

- Initiated relationship building activities
- Converse with publics
- Emerged publics
  - Advocates
  - Angry
  - Antagonists
  - Voice of reason
  - Sarcastic/cynical
  - Resourceful
  - Skeptical
  - International
  - Media

### **Toyota**

- Application of social media and projecting an online presence
  - Initiated discussion site by dealers
  - Owns an account and participated on Twitter
  - Owns an account and participated on Facebook: Toyota and dealers
- Themes that emerged
  - Reviews, recommendation of automobiles
    - Hilux
    - Lexus
  - Locally made (host country) versus Japanese made
  - Association and comparison with others
    - Honda
    - Ford
    - Nissan
  - Product crisis
    - Announcement and reasons
    - Laying the blame
      - Blaming Toyota
      - Blaming the drivers
      - Blaming the U.S. Government
    - Other recalls
    - Toyota and the American economy
    - PR activities
  - Emerged publics
    - Advocates
    - Angry
    - Antagonists
    - Employees
    - Speculators
    - ‘Voice of reason’
    - Sarcastic
    - Resourceful
    - International
    - Media

Reputational components here come in many forms and are unique to each organization’s activities and the conversations they shared with their publics as well as those between the various publics about the organizations. The analysis of findings for

each organization has resulted in varied, yet important elements of reputation that have an impact on the organization and how it is perceived in the public domain, and specifically, the social media.

The themes that emerged specific to the research questions and were focused on the application of social media and the identification of publics through the conversations in which these publics participated, resulting identification of advocates, employees, antagonists, media and international publics as key publics to name but a few. All these determinants comply with the notion that reputation is an interpretation of multiple publics (Aula &Mantere, 2008). Financial and economic factors are not the only factors that define reputation but reputation is also a narrative and communicative construct as it consists of stories and it exists in communities (Aula &Mantere, 2008; Doorley& Garcia, 2007) and in this millennium where communication are likely exercised using some form of new media, it is through online discussion. The following describes and discusses the main themes that emerged from the data analyzed.

#### **8.4 RQ1: What are the discursive themes that emerged from online conversations under analysis?**

##### **8.4.1 Product features, component and performance**

One of the major themes for all four organizations was “products and services”. The publics articulated and conversed about specific product features, components and performance. They did it through providing feedback, reviews and evaluations—all of which were apparent in the conversations analyzed.

Apple, BP and Toyota experienced a product crisis at the time of the study, and the conversations were focused on providing/producing better quality products and services. The study showed that these three organizations’ publics wanted better products than what was being offered at the time. When they perceived the product to be of lower quality than its competitor or not of a standard they expected from the organization, they demanded an improvement to be made and at times almost immediately. Apple publics wanted an iPhone 4 that was free from “the antennagate” problem whilst Toyota publics wanted safer Toyota cars without any acceleration problems and, as for BP: the publics wanted a better reaction and management of the

crisis and ultimately a greener, alternative solution to petroleum. Nokia on the other hand did not face any product issue or crisis during the research duration. However, its publics still wanted a better product, and in this case, feedback on its mobile phone was directed towards the components and performance of the phone.

This finding confirms Fombrun and Van Riel's (2004) reputation quotients where products and services are one of the six dimensions explaining why an organization is held in high regard by its publics. The researchers suggested that these dimensions are important for publics when determining an organization's reputation. 'Emotional appeal' suggests that publics simply like, admire and trust an organization and therefore will stand behind that organization. 'Products and services' explains how highly publics regard an organization because of its ability to produce quality, innovative, reliable or good value products and services. 'Financial performance' allows publics to feel confident with an organization's profitability, its future prospects and investment potential. 'Vision and leadership' states that publics believe in an organization's visionary and strong leadership. 'Workplace environment' identifies the importance of an organization being well managed with excellent employees, that is, an organization that would be great to work for. 'Social responsibility' highlights that publics believe that an organization is a good citizen that supports good environmental and community causes and does right by them (Fombrun & van Riel, 2004). Srivoravilai and Melewar (2008) identified similar but specific constructs, namely the quality of products and services, the organization's performance (financial and non-financial where non-financial performance refers to successfully implementing branding and public relations strategies and policies), the size of the organization, its corporate capabilities, individual reputation (employee or customer reputation), visual identities, environmental responsibility, security (customers feel secure about purchasing products and services offered) and legitimacy (regulative and normative).

Therefore, it can be safely surmised that product features and components are not only an important aspect for the publics in this study but it is a crucial element of an organization's reputation. Publics converse about this aspect the most and place noticeable emphasis on product and services through feedback, reviews, suggestions and discussion of issues.

#### **8.4.2 Points of comparison**

The current study has found that products and services from all four organizations were compared or mentioned in comparison to other competitor's products. For example, Apple's iPhone 4 was contrasted and compared with Nokia mobile phones and vice versa. Nokia phones were compared to HTC or Samsung phones, and similarly Toyota was most often compared to Honda, Nissan or Ford.

In the case of a crisis, an organization and its actions are also compared to a past event or crisis. BP's oil spill crisis was compared to the Exxon Valdez incident and other oil spill crises; while Toyota's faulty product crisis was compared to Ford's and General Motors' recalls. In this case, Toyota and BP were compared to past reputation of organizations that experienced a crisis in the past.

Furthermore, the ChiefExecutive Officer (CEO) plays a crucial role during a crisis, and in this study, the CEO's reputation was directly linked to the organization's reputation (Alsop, 2004; Turk, Jin, Stewart, Kim & Hipple, 2012). How he or she reacts during the crisis is important because the publics associate the CEO's behavior with his/her organization. In this study, Tony Hayward's and Steve Jobs' personalities were linked to their respective organizations, namely BP and Apple. However, notably, in Toyota's case, its CEO received less attention in public conversations, perhaps because the CEO was not that well known and because the crisis occurred in the U.S. rather than in Japan where its CEO is stationed. Turk et al.(2012) found that where an organization has a good prior reputation, shareholders prefer that the CEO is visibility during a crisis response. This suggests that corporate reputation and CEO visibility can amplify positive effects in a crisis. In BP's case, Tony Hayward's response and comments were regarded as being BP's (see Section 5.4.4), and a public mistake made by him when he was seen to be putting himself first over the crisis and its victims, affected BP's reputation negatively. Steve Jobs, on the other hand, was regarded by the antagonist public as arrogant and cocky—characteristics they also applied to Apple. Thus, it was clear that the CEO's actions are reflected in the organization's reputation.

Industry reputation is also one of the points of comparison, which was evident in this study where the publics associated BP's reputation to that of the petroleum industry. The publics in this study perceived BP's reputation to be negative when they evaluated

the petroleum industry to be negative. Thus, an organization's reputation is closely linked to the industry in which it operates, and reputation management becomes a challenge when an organization's reputation is deemed negative because of the industry.

The country of origin was also taken into account and the organization's reputation is therefore closely associated with national identity. It was interesting to note that the public associated Toyota's and Honda's automobiles with very good quality because of Japan's reputation producing quality cars. Furthermore, during the Toyota pedal brake crisis, Toyota cars were compared with American made cars based on the country of origin's reputation where the former was still preferred as a good automobile manufacturer. The country of origin's reputation is also one of the factors that was used as a point of comparison in public's conversations and is an element in constructing an organization's reputation.

Associating with another organization, issue or crisis is similar to the concept of assessment; in this case, an organization is being assessed based on another organization's best practices, products/services and good reputation. The concept of assessment runs parallel with the construction of reputation where it is cumulative or a sum of perceptions. When it is accumulated, it will involve some kind of assessment based on specific standards or comparison with others. This comparison with another does not only apply in the present but also in the past and possibly the future. For example, BP's crisis was compared to a past crisis, and its past poor safety record was mentioned and compared to that of other organizations. In addition, BP's function as an organization was compared to the oil industry's past and future reputation. In all the other organizations (Apple, Toyota and Nokia), they were evaluated based on some standard or compared with another organization, other products or services. In his review of definitions of reputation, Walker (2010) identified five conclusions about the reputation construct. One of these is that reputation is inherently comparative; it can be compared to specific standards or competitors or even prior reputation. Other conclusions are that organizations may have multiple reputations depending on public and issues, each reputation only represents the cumulative perceptions of all public for that specific issue, that reputation can be positive or negative and that corporate reputation is relatively stable and enduring.

Assessment is one construct of reputation where, in order for a reputation to be labelled either “good” or “bad”, it needs to be distinctive and distinguish itself from others (Aula &Mantere, 2008). There needs to be a point of comparison to assess whether it is favorable or not. The point of comparison exists not only at a particular time but is evident in past actions, the present state and the future of an organization, and therefore, reputation links an organization’s past, present and future. The assessments or points of comparison differ as not all publics share the same idea of what a good reputation is (Aula &Mantere, 2008).

This study proposes that a point of comparison is important in determining an organization’s reputation as it provides a measurement system whereby different standards are set according to different points of comparison for different issues or events.

#### **8.4.3 Online crisis communication management**

Crisis communication scholarship has been criticized for its tendency to marginalize the perspectives of publics but these perspectives are crucial in interpreting crises and for developing the body of knowledge in crisis communication (Schultz, Utz, Goritz, 2010; Schwarz, 2012,). This study captured the publics' reactions, their ideas for solving the crisis and the effects of the crisis they deemed important. During a crisis, the source of information does not only come from the organization involved but also from publics outside of the organization. Through their social-mediated crisis communication model (SMCC), Liu, Austin and Jin (2011) help organizations generate desirable crisis outcomes through understanding how publics use social media. Schultz, Utz and Goritz (2010) also propose that crisis communication research should react to the rapidly changing media innovations and explicate research on social media use during crisis thereby placing importance on social media communication. In this view, favorable outcomes can determine a favorable reputation.

During the BP’s Gulf of Mexico crisis, the data that emerged came in three major themes: reaction to the crisis, solutions to the crisis and the effects of the crisis. This is in line with how Heath (as cited in Yang, Kang & Johnson, 2010) describes crisis responses as narratives and framed in time where “a crisis is best framed in terms of what happened, what response is being made and where that effort leads” (p.318). ).

Overall, immediate reactions to the crisis were the “blame game” where the organization and political figures or other publics were blamed. Schwarz (2012) contends that when a crisis occurs, it creates considerable uncertainty, which triggers tremendous attribution activity to reduce that uncertainty. This reaction to crisis supports the underlying assumptions of attribution theory. In the BP's case, extensive blame was attributed to the organization, President Obama, the U.S. Government and the end users. The publics involved in the crisis that had occurred at BP and Toyota reacted by blaming others because they were trying to understand and coming to terms on what had happened in addition to making sense of the information that was available on social media. The central themes reflected key elements of crisis communication where they were centered on reactions, solutions and effects of the crisis for BP. It is similar for Toyota but minus the effect as the publics talked more about the faulty parts and Toyota cars than the accidents that resulted from the faulty parts.

This study also showed that BP's voice was buried under comments from its publics, which were generally negative and hostile. It did not help when generic replies were used by the company in an attempt to communicate with publics during the crisis. Narratives using a conversational human voice online are said to promote collaborative relationship building with publics (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Additionally, during a crisis, communication activities that are conversational and personal could mitigate negative emotion. Neither happened in BP's case.

As technology in communication continues to progress rapidly, organizations need to incorporate online crisis communication techniques into their reputation management strategies (Brown & Billings, 2012). Publics are no longer passive recipients of information from traditional media but through the use of communication technology have become empowered into active information seekers who wish to receive information instantly (Brown & Billings, 2012; Stephens & Malone, 2010).

The active participants in this study discussed matters that were important to them about the crisis, and specifically the organization's communication, its actions and reactions during the crisis. The publics' feedback and conversations happened in real time and immediately in reaction to the organization's actions or messages. Hence, this study is

proposing social media is ideal for crisis communication management because of the embedded, real-time feedback mechanism.

#### **8.4.4 The public–organization relationship: A contemporary approach**

In the case of Nokia and Toyota, their online public relations efforts promoted conversations and dialogic communication that in turn cultivated long-term relationships. They used questions to promote conversations, gave feedback and answered queries personally. More importantly, they conversed with their publics consistently and in real time, suggesting they had invested in having permanent employees assigned to social media and trained them to cultivate online relationships.

Conversely, Apple and BP received negative reactions to their online public relations efforts because—even though they provided platforms for conversations—they did not actively participate in these conversations. In fact, they were seen as trying to force the outcomes from these channels. Apple, for example, deleted negative comments made by its publics instead of addressing the issues and contributing to the conversations. Thus, they chose to control the conversations by ending them, putting their reputation at risk. Similarly, BP failed in its attempt to communicate important messages during the crisis using YouTube, as it tried to force the content of the conversation. When BP intervened, it posted generic standard replies to a few negative comments, making it look more robotic like than human. In both cases, the publics were angry about the lack of participation and the attempt to control the conversations, and subsequently commented negatively on both organizations. However, the focus on the organization's attempt to control the conversation died down after a while and the publics continued discussing their original topic, ignoring the organization entirely.

This resulted in another theme emerging, namely where the publics perceived a lack of reaction from BP about the crisis. The publics expressed their anger about the crisis through YouTube's conversation's section, where vulgar words and obscenity were expressed in the conversation. Instead of responding to the issues being discussed, BP posted a standard instruction on how the channel should be used. BP posted it a few times. BP had active Twitter and Facebook accounts during the crisis but its voice was not heard because of incidents such as the one on YouTube, which ignited further

negative responses and conversations from the publics. These conversations and negative responses almost silenced BP's crisis communication efforts altogether.

Publics' conversations can affect an organization's reputational activities because the publics choose in which conversations they want to participate and respond to. They also decide which kinds of responses from the organization they will accept and which they will ignore. These findings contribute to the idea that the way an organization responds to its publics is important as the outcome can encourage or cease interactivity, which in turn can impact the building of organization–public relationships (OPRs). The latter can shape the images publics hold of the organization, and therefore, the organization's reputation.

The notion of interactivity and responsiveness was identified by Avidar (2013) where, from her research on the level of responsiveness of organizational replies, she proposed a responsiveness pyramid that has three levels: Low, medium and high. This pyramid explains the relationship between responsiveness and interactivity, and how they contribute to OPR. These levels were present in the current study's organizational responses. When BP, for example, asked YouTube participants to be objective and follow its guidelines in commenting about BP, the publics demonstrated a non–reactive response, which belongs to the low or basic level of the pyramid. Non–reactive responses are responses that do not refer to the request and therefore have a minimum contribution to the continuation of an interaction and OPR building. In the case of Apple, platforms were provided but these only provided second level, reactive responsiveness, that is, where participants refer to the request and provide the requested information but they do not initiate an ongoing conversation and do not encourage the continuation of an interaction. Thus, they have a medium contribution to OPR.

On their Twitter, Facebook and YouTube accounts, Nokia and Toyota not only provided responses to the publics' queries and requests, but also initiated other interactive conversations. The publics responded to the activities and demonstrated interactive responses, which reflected the highest level of the responsiveness pyramid. These responses refer to requests and contain various interactive elements that encourage the continuation of an interaction. Thus, they contribute the most to OPR building.

Responsiveness does not necessarily involve interactivity, as responsiveness exists when one person reacts to another's request although the response is not interactive, but in order to have interactivity, there must also be responsiveness or else there is a breakdown of communication (Avidar, 2013). By looking at how organizations reply to their publics, Avidar (2013) proposed the highest level of responsiveness in relation to interactivity and OPR building. This current study extends this pyramid of responsiveness by not only considering how an organization responds to a request, but the publics' response to the organization.

In order to achieve a positive, lasting and resilient reputation, organizations need to invest in relationships building and maintenance with their publics (Fombrun, 1996). This statement endorses the core tenet of public relations scholarship: building and managing relationships with publics. Thus, public relations activities are important at managing corporate reputation (Carroll & Combs 2003; Kioussis, Popescu & Mitrook, 2007), especially since reputation is a by-product of the organization's public relationship management (Yang & Grunig, 2005). Additionally, Kim (2001) suggests there is a positive causal relationship between public relations goals and their impact on reputation. This causal relationship explicitly links organization-public relationships with reputation studies. Relationship is simultaneously an antecedent and consequence of reputation. It is an antecedent because good reputation will attract publics to form relationships with organizations by purchasing, investing and working with it, and a consequence because with existing reputation, organizations need to promote and manage relationships with stakeholders and publics so as to ensure that they continue to be in that relationship, and to either manage existing reputation or enhance future ones.

The central principle of organizational reputation is the management of stakeholders and public relationships can lead to positive, strong and resilient reputations. This principle is visible in the current study where the cultivation of relationship building through social media conversations with publics is important to the longevity and reputation of an organization. Although building relationships using social media involves risks, including inappropriate content or negative remarks by publics, there are also rewards associated with the outcomes, such as promotional aspects, message dissemination, and publics' conversations (Giles & Pitta, 2009 as cited in McCorkindale, 2010). The importance of this study lies in the exploration of

conversations within and beyond the confines of an organization's social media platforms.

This study found that the participants gather around the issues they want to converse about. Largely, they create their own topics of conversation about an organization of interest, and thus provide additional information about important elements of reputation management. Consequently, it is proposed that public relationship theory and practices should not only be organization-centered public relationships but should also view reputation from the perspective of the public, an area that has been missing in many of the discussion around reputation management.

### **8.5 RQ2: Who are the publics that participated in the conversations analyzed?**

In the conversations analyzed, different groups of publics were found to emerge. Although they were similar, they were specifically characterized by each organization's unique issues and actions. Across the board, there were two primary groups of publics that were identified based on the content of their conversations, their characteristics and their reactions towards the organizations and each other. The first group comprised the advocates, antagonists, media, and the international publics. The second group emerged from to their disposition and emotionally inclinations such as displaying anger (angry publics), being the voice of reason, sarcastic/cynical, and a resourceful public. Others were more organization-specific, such as employees and shareholders. Other groupings such as speculators and skeptics did not appear across the board. Table 8.3 summarizes the formed publics specific to the organizations analyzed in this study.

Kruckeberg and Vujnovic (2013) suggested that it defeats the purpose of identifying publics in this new era of communication technology. They argued that the attempt to distinguish among non-public, a latent public, an aware public and an active public is futile when volatile publics can form immediately and unpredictably, and they can act seemingly chaotically and with unforeseen power. They state that the only truly strategic public that can be identified with any certainty is the general public.

**Table 8.3 Categories of emerged publics for all four organizations**

<i>Categories of publics/ organizations</i>	<i>Apple</i>	<i>BP</i>	<i>Nokia</i>	<i>Toyota</i>
Advocates/fans/supporters	✓	✓	✓	✓
Antagonists	✓	✓	✓	✓
Employees		✓		✓
Shareholders	✓	✓		
Speculators		✓		✓
Angry	✓	✓	✓	✓
Voice of reason/ ‘Say it how it is’	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sarcastic/Cynical	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resourceful	✓	✓	✓	✓
Skeptical		✓	✓	
International	✓	✓	✓	✓
Media/Intermediaries	✓	✓	✓	✓

Traditionally these two areas of research remain separate and few attempts were made to connect the two in order to advance theory and research. This is especially true when it comes to publics that are formed on social media. Contrary to Kruckeberg and Vujnovic’s (2013) view that the only true strategic public is the general public, this study thesis shows that in this new technological era the general public can be defined and identified by the characteristics that they project in the online conversations they

partake. It supports Grunig and Repper's (1992) view that publics are not created but that they arise on their own when there is an issue, revolving around the topic of concern. In this case, the organization's product, services or issues/crisis. The publics in these online conversations were active and participated in topics that they initiated about the organizations. Thus, they are not audiences or passive receivers of reputation but actively participate in reputation building. By identifying them by their characteristics, it is easier for the organization to decide on how to act in communicating with that particular public at a point of time.

### **8.5.1 Product advocates**

The advocates are an organization's ambassadors. In this study, they were found to promote their preferred products and services to others. They were dedicated in enhancing the brand of their chosen organization by discussing, endorsing and disseminate information (mostly positive) about products or organizations of their preference. Through this study, it also became evident that they were the ones that would shield and support the organization when in a negative situation or a crisis. This view is supported by Booth and Matic (2011) who point out that this is not the era where media communicate a brand's message but rather it is consumers as individuals (the publics) who broadcast personal or second hand stories to their social network and the world. They are termed the "brand storytellers" and ambassadors or influencers. These brand storytellers and ambassadors are the advocates in this study, and where the organization was less visible (or present) in conversations, e.g. Apple, the advocates made themselves more visible and thus their presence was stronger in such cases.

Results of a survey conducted by IBM's Institute for Business Value involving more than a thousand consumers worldwide showed that 60% of customers believed that loyalty and passion about a product or brand were the main prerequisites for engagement in social media (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). This passion and loyalty were evident in all the organizations' users and customers—even BP. These advocates are devoted not only to an organization's products and services but also to its vision, mission and leadership. Apple, Nokia and Toyota each had their own product advocates who were satisfied with the quality of the products and who would always offer critique

and feedback on how to improve the products. The most vocal and expressive advocates were those who supported Apple and Toyota.

These advocates defended their organizations when these organizations were facing a crisis or were under scrutiny by others. They would fend off negative remarks and help the organization regain its reputational capital. These characteristics were evident in advocates for Apple and Toyota but less so for BP. As for Nokia, the advocates promoted their favorable experience with Nokia products. They also provided suggestions for Nokia to continue improving itself, particularly targeting its mobile products and keeping up with its competitors.

Product advocates are an important asset in an organization's OPR activities as they will not only critique, endorse and recommend an organization's products and services but also will defend and protect the organization from other publics (particularly the antagonists) in crisis and non-crisis situations. Thus, product advocates are reputational assets for an organization.

Product advocates can also be stakeholders as this study found that stakeholders such as investors and employees made themselves known in the conversations, and reacted positively towards the organizations (see discussion in section 8.5.4).

Booth and Matic (2011) urge organizations to listen and act strategically with influencers (brand storytellers and ambassadors) through social media relations because these publics can help promote conversations about their brands. Thus, engaging with these influencers can help protect the organization's brand (Booth & Matic, 2011).

### **8.5.2 Antagonists**

Antagonists are those publics who do not like the organization or anything with which it is associated. In comparison to the other organizations in this study, Apple had a bolder and more passionate antagonist public. The latter group appeared to dislike (even hate) everything about Apple and especially its fans. Most of these antagonists were publics who owned or who had owned Apple products. They can be those that were disappointed in the organization's product or services and had left for competing products.

### 8.5.3 The media and other information intermediaries

The media and other intermediaries were present in the conversations but although their role was vital to organizations' reputations, it was limited. As disseminators of factual information through for example Twitter, their presence in a non-crisis situation was essential. However, their role was minimized on discussion sites and did not exist on Facebook and YouTube conversations.

Most of the media organizations identified in this research were either traditional media that used social media platforms to disseminate their news stories or the online technology news media cornucopia (such as Zdnet, Gizmodo, Engadget and Mashable) that have flourished since the advent of social media. Most of the media organizations use Twitter as a 'teaser' channel to attract publics to the actual news located on their websites, blogs or Facebook pages.

The media transmitted their messages and opinions about the organizations through the original headline, and thus this 'teaser' would be the first thing that publics saw on Twitter.

Tweets from the media organizations also covered the Apple product issue, and the news reflected and reacted to Apple's actions and management of the issues. Furthermore, it was evident from the analysis that the media exploited the late Apple CEO's celebrity status as a number of headlines included the late CEO's comments, such as:

*Apple CEO Steve Jobs announces iPhone 4 at Worldwide Developers Conference. Watch keynote here: Watch <http://on.cnn.com/cnndc11>.*

*Apple Shows That Nokia N97 Mini Also Suffers from Death Grip Issue <http://retwt.me/1NWQz> (via @mashablemobile)*

The analysis identified that the majority of the publics regarded the media with suspicion and distrust. Generally, the media was regarded with hostility and contempt by most publics. They were perceived as manipulating the information and news. This view was particularly evident in the conversations around Toyota where the media was perceived as bringing down Toyota's reputation by manipulating information. They were also perceived to be conspiring with the U.S. Government to bring down Toyota.

In the case of BP, the publics blamed BP for their hand in causing, and not effectively managing, the crisis, and the media were perceived as siding with BP and not being objective in their news coverage. This is in line with the spillover effect of one player's reputation to another. In fact, a favorable media reputation can be a strategic resource for the organization (Deephouse, 2000), and therefore the media can be considered as brand influencer.

#### **8.5.4 Employees**

Employees were the stakeholder group that emerged most frequently in all the conversations analyzed. They identified themselves in the conversations and were bold in their contributions, appearing when their organizations were facing adversity and helping them through proclamations of loyalty, job satisfaction and testimonials of goodwill in support of the organization. Although they were biased in their comments, it is interesting to note that even though they had the opportunity to tarnish the organizations' reputation most of them chose to promote or defend it.

This was particularly evident in Toyota's case when U.S. Toyota employees shared the positive experiences they had with the organization, expressing their appreciation towards Toyota for helping the U.S. economy and providing job opportunities for them and their colleagues. Even those who had left Toyota testified to Toyota's capability as a good employer. These positive experiences and testimonials helped promote a favorable reputation for Toyota during the time of its product recall crisis. On the other hand, there were not many employees that supported Tony Hayward when he was facing adversity but those that did, however, appeared brave, strong willed and genuine. The prevailing sentiment at that time was anger and irrationality. The publics were angry and they wanted to punish BP and those that were associated with it. The publics that stood up to support Tony Hayward and BP were brave considering most of them did this mostly through Facebook where they could be identified and that at that time BP and its supporters were being vilified by most publics participating in the conversation. The proclamations of support did not sway much public opinion of BP and its CEO though, but it may have helped regain a fraction of BP's reputational capital that was lost during the crisis.

It was evident from the analysis that employees' presence provided a buffer for organizations in crisis. These publics defended their organization by sharing their positive experience in having to work in the organization, and radiated a sense of pride in sharing their experiences. This finding supports Helm's (2011) view that employees can influence the opinions of other members of their private social network when they feel a sense of pride working for the organization and also towards its reputation. This effect can lead to strong enhancement of reputation.

#### **8.5.5 International public**

There was international participation in all four organizations' conversations. These participants participated in English or in their own language regardless of whether others could comprehend their contributions or not. Although foreign language inclusions were ignored by the other English-speaking publics no specific comments were posted that indicated that the others wanted them to leave. It seemed therefore that there was no reaction to foreign participation from English speaking publics. This international and foreign participation can be explained by what is called "a sense of community". Having a sense of community or the existence of a virtual settlement is one of the conditions of online community (Gruzd, Wellman & Takteyev, 2011). The international participants (and other participants) felt they belonged to that community because of their common interest (the organization they were conversing about).

Leitch and Neilson (2004) argued that publics are not fixed categories waiting to be identified but rather they are constructed and reconstructed through the discourses in which they partake. Publics have their own views of themselves and their own views of the organizations with, or about which, they communicate. There were, however, a few publics that emerged and that appeared to be dominant among the groups. They are the advocates, antagonists and employees. The dominant characteristics these publics displayed were voice of reason, sarcastic/cynical and resourceful. These publics were present across the board, although their roles were stronger in some organizations.

#### **8.5.6 Voice of reason**

Voice of reason publics was very blunt and straightforward in their comments towards others. They would 'say it as it is' and would not do it any other way. For Apple, this

group tended to be forthright about their comments of Apple products based on their experience using the products. Some commented on something personal such as the use of language in the conversation. For BP, it was similar but the only difference was the comment made were based on seniority such as a longstanding (senior) member in a particular social media group would have more clout in the conversation compared to a junior member. These more senior members would be the voice of reason to new members.

#### **8.5.7 Sarcastic/Cynical**

Sarcasm was present in all the conversations; the only difference being the degree to which it was expressed. Words that are more vulgar were used in crisis situations as compared to a non-crisis situation.

#### **8.5.8 Resourceful**

Resourceful publics were present in all four organizations' conversations. These publics would provide help in terms of answering questions and solving product related problems of the other publics. They would provide links and websites for information and solutions. Some would do their own research and post an answer based on that research. These publics are important publics for the organizations as their action could influence the direction of the conversation.

#### **8.5.9 Other Publics**

There were other publics such as speculators, sceptics and self-professed experts. These publics appeared only in specific organizations.

### **8.6 RQ3: What is the significance of each social medium contributing to an organization's reputation?**

Four social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and discussion sites) were used to analyze the data. Each displayed different characteristics regarding their use by publics and the information publics were interested in. All demonstrated different micro cultures that are attached to and understood by the publics who use these social media. It is interesting to note that social media can promote Web-based communication and

are believed to promote relationship cultivation (Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Kent, Taylor & White, 2003; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Park & Reber, 2008), hence their importance for this study.

### **8.6.1 Twitter**

This study found that traditional and social news media used Twitter to disseminate their news by enticing publics with catchy headlines and a link to another site where the news can be viewed and read in full detail (see 8.5.3). The majority of topics trending on Twitter are news feeds of breaking news or continuous news on sports, cities or brands (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010 as cited in Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2012). Organizations exploit Twitter for the purposes of disseminating links and primarily pushing one-way messages rather than stimulating conversation and maximizing stakeholder involvement (Xifra & Gau, 2010, Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012).

Publics on the other hand, tended to “tweet” and “retweet” news rather than tweeting personal views or opinions. This phenomenon was interesting especially since there were more tweets from traditional and social news media and other organizations than from individuals. It is possible that this finding was influenced by the fact that tweets from media and other organizations’ Twitter accounts were easily accessed as they were generally open to the public but individual accounts were often closed and other tweets and other information about the “Twitterer” could only be viewed when one “followed” that individual. Furthermore, most personal tweets found in this study were accompanied by a link to news media or organizational messages. Thus, it was concluded that the likelihood of a promotion about an organization’s messages from publics to other publics is higher when organizations’ use Twitter to disseminate their organizational messages.

Apple’s tweets generally came from their late CEO, Steve Jobs. He was the only source that represented Apple, and his tweets did not play an active part in disseminating information through Twitter. However, Apple’s unofficial websites bore that responsibility for Apple by not only promoting Apple, its products and services but also providing updates on Apple’s strategies and actions to the publics.

BP's Twitter activities at the time of the oil spill crisis were represented solely by BP America. It provided updates about the progress of the crisis and BP's stand on the decisions regarding the crisis. BP used Twitter to manage its crisis communication activities by providing links to more detailed pages.

Twitter is a social medium that is seen as more dialogic, interactive and a better promoter of relationship building (Schultz, Utz & Goritz, 2011). However, in BP's case, the focus was more on transmitting information instead of having a conversation. Furthermore, it had a rival in a parody account, BPglobalPR, which was created as a result of the crisis to mock everything that BP did relating to that crisis. BP tried to distance itself from the parody account for fear of confusing the publics (and possibly for fear of further reputational damage) by requesting via Twitter that the account holder complies with Twitter's guidelines. This request resulted in BPGlobalPR changing its description from "BP's message and mission statement out into the twitterverse" to "We are not associated with Beyond Petroleum, the company that has been destroying the Gulf of Mexico for 51 days" (Gentilviso, 2010, June 9). The account had more followers than BP America and gained 150,000 followers throughout the course of the spill (Gentilviso, 2010, June 9).

Nokia used a different strategy when employing Twitter. It utilized Twitter to not only promote and transmit updates about its organization, products and services, but also to converse with its publics. Nokia distributed customer relations activities through Twitter to initiate and build relationships with its publics. It took the time to reply to most tweets with some feedback or comment. There were many accounts that existed under Nokia but the main account had just the name "Nokia". The others such as Nokia Conversations, Nokia Sg, Nokia Helps, and Nokia Canada were either country representatives or specific divisions targeted at facilitating communication with their publics and stakeholders. Furthermore, Nokia also initiated conversation with potential stakeholders by advertising job vacancies through Twitter. Nokia utilized the social media and its interactive features fully to implement its public relations activities.

Toyota was similar to Nokia in that it was represented by many Twitter accounts based on departments, country representatives and retailers. The most active and strong representation of Toyota's presence on Twitter was Toyota's USA account. This

Twitter account was not only active in updating news and information about Toyota, but also replied to tweets from the publics. It answered queries and gave feedback on customers' purchasing decisions.

#### ***8.6.1.1 Promoting, endorsing and conversing***

The findings of this study on Twitter use among publics pointed towards a clear difference in crisis situations and non-crisis situations. In crisis situations, publics used it to connect with, promote and personalize informational messages, consistent with the findings of Smith (2010) who found that to be the case among publics who tweeted about the Haiti earthquake. The publics conversed about Haiti by either promoting their own contributions or by relaying news and headlines about the crisis. In this study, the retweets and tweets came either from traditional or social news media but were mostly focused on the organizations' messages and activities. This was particularly evident in the BP and Toyota crises, where more tweets were personal comments about the organizations' reactions, solutions and strategies. Often, the organization-originating tweets or retweets were accompanied by personalized comments.

However, in a non-crisis situation, the promotional involvement was demonstrated through endorsement and reviews of their organizations' products, services, and actions. Interestingly, publics seem to promote conversations in Twitter through relevant questions in a non-crisis situation more than in a crisis situation. Nevertheless, in both instances, publics were consistently promoting original messages with positive or negative personal comments attached to it.

As already mentioned, for media and information intermediaries, their objective in using Twitter was primarily to disseminate and promote their news and online sites.

The four organizations under study used Twitter somewhat similarly. The only difference lay in the fact that only some incorporated online public relations relationship cultivation strategies and, specifically, the conversational human voice (Kelleher, 2009 Searls & Weinberger, 2000). Toyota and Nokia used Twitter not only to promote its organizational messages but also to cultivate relationships with its publics using a conversational voice and displaying a commitment to communication. By doing so, the organizations were seen to be legitimate and open (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). The

publics treated Nokia as being human rather than an entity because someone answered their questions and responded to their comments. The conversational voice was enhanced by asking questions that promoted discussions—something especially Nokia and Toyota did. Similarly, Park and Reber (2010) found that the majority of the Fortune 500 companies responded to users' comments on Twitter but only one third of them asked unprompted questions and follow-up questions to stimulate discussion. They proposed that Twitter was created for the sole purpose of stimulating dialogue between publics. Hence, suggesting that Twitter is underutilized when it comes to promoting conversations. .

BP's tweets on the other hand were more formal and lacked personal comments or a conversational human voice but it communicated commitment by transmitting and promoting messages to its publics and stakeholders consistently and openly—even in the wake of the crisis. All the Apple tweets analyzed for this study originated from its late CEO, Steve Jobs, or Apple's unofficial weblog (TUAW—The unofficial Apple weblog). Steve Jobs used a conversational human voice when he tweeted his opinions, and publics generally re-tweeted his messages to others. This finding supports Schultz, Utz and Goritz's (2010) suggestion that Twitter is mostly used to share news or news-related information.

TUAW was a technical blog that wrote and reviewed everything about Apple. Their messages were promotional, seeking to attract people to their site. They tended to retweet Apple's organizational activities and comments, attaching their opinion to the retweets. This finding places a question mark over the idea that Twitter is mostly exploited by organizations to push one way messages and is not meant for motivating conversation and maximizing stakeholders' involvement, as suggested by Xifra and Gau (2010), Waters and Jamal (2011) and Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012). Regardless of this finding, however, overall it was found that organizations in crisis did not use Twitter as a tool to promote discussion but rather as a one-way communication tool to share information or promote their website or Facebook pages. This is, of course, in line with one of the crisis communication strategy where information dissemination is crucial at the beginning of the crisis.

### **8.6.2 Facebook**

Apple's participation on Facebook was non-existent. Most of the Facebook pages were created by fans, vendors and suppliers who posted news and replies that were country or region-specific and were related to their store products and services. Thus, Apple's vendors and suppliers carried out sales promotions and conversations with their publics. In the case of Facebook, Apple took a similar approach as with Twitter by not participating at all but by letting its fans, vendors and retailers do the conversing.

BP was represented by its BP America Facebook page. BP America posted an apology by its former CEO, Tony Hayward in its Facebook page, which received considerable feedback and discussion. The publics that accepted Hayward's apology were double in number to those who blamed him for having to make the apology in the first place. The supporters expressed their backing of the CEO and BP. Other than the apology, however, BP America played a passive role in conversing with the publics through Facebook during the crisis.

Nokia's presence on Facebook was represented mostly by its products. These pages were created by users, fans and technological experts to discuss issues and information about a particular Nokia product. However, Nokia U.S. was created to represent Nokia as an organization. As with Twitter, Nokia promoted conversational relationship building activities on Facebook. It employed Facebook to converse with its publics by disseminating information and posting of questions that promoted discussion, initiating activities and commenting on publics' participation. These actions were notable in Nokia's communication with its publics.

Toyota's Facebook pages were also mainly created by its fans and dealers. Most of the topics were centered on its products and services and the recall crisis. Most of the comments came from Defend Toyota, a site created by fans in support of Toyota during the crisis. Participation was mostly by fans that supported Toyota, but there was also a handful that blamed Toyota.

Facebook is considered one of the most popular social media but organizations have yet to utilize it in its fullest interactive capacity (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Xifra & Grau, 2010). For this study, this view

was only true for some of the passive Facebook sites analyzed, as the creators of those pages did not make an attempt to interact with their publics and stakeholders. It was not giving the publics any feedback or updating the information on the page. It was found that a few of the Facebook accounts in this study were used as a promotional device without taking in to consideration the need for feedback, to communicate or initiate conversations with publics. Normally, these kinds of pages will fade away and cease to attract any publics. The majority of these sites were created by the organizations' vendors, dealers and suppliers with the exception of Toyota. For Toyota, the dealers acted as ambassadors and carried out the organization's promotional and public relations activities, managing the organizations' name and consequently, their reputation. They not only promoted conversations with publics but also were very active in customer relations activities such as "Sharing the Toyota experience", where the best story submitted would be rewarded and where advice was given about road driving and other activities.

Nokia's and Toyota's Facebook pages are country specific (Nokia US, Toyota USA, Toyota UK) but they had similar activities. These organization-initiated Facebook pages appeared to be active and alert to publics' needs. These pages were not only used to promote products and services, but also as public relations mechanisms where customer and community relations activities were conducted. The organization gave feedback, and questions were answered promptly and openly thus cultivating relationships with publics. The publics felt comfortable enough to use the site to discuss topics other than the products or services of those organizations.

There were attempts to ask questions that promoted conversations on Facebook than on other social media, which suggests that the likelihood for conversations to occur is greater on Facebook than other social media.

### **8.6.3 Discussion sites**

Apple has its own discussion site at [www.discussions.apple.com](http://www.discussions.apple.com) but it did not participate directly in the conversations and only monitored them. If a conversation were deemed inappropriate, it would be removed.

There was no BP initiated site that made it through to the research list. All the identified sites were either initiated by individuals or created by media organizations.

Most of Nokia's discussion sites were created by users, partners or the media to discuss Nokia's products, services and business decisions. Nokia's customer relations activities were carried out by experienced users, suppliers or media personnel who provided testimonials, reviews and feedback about its products and services.

Toyota discussion sites were initiated by users, fans, dealers and media organizations. One aspect to note is that, some discussion sites were started to discuss about older products rather than newer ones. These discussions revolved around modification and conversion of Toyota vehicles. There was also participation from across the globe in terms of comparing Toyota with other brands.

More discussion websites were analyzed rather than personal blogs following the results of search hits from Google (see chapter 3). This was because more publics participated in a discussion, rather than merely following a blog site. Publics are normally members of the discussion sites and have their own sub-culture that dictates how members converse with each other. Members support each other and the team dynamics and characteristics emerge and are visible in the conversation. One characteristic that stood out was seen in a few technical sites where they encouraged thanking the contributor as a mechanism for highlighting credence and reputation (see example):

*If you appreciate ANY help or Uploaded files from a member, then show it  
by saying it and clicking on the 'Thanks' button*



*Thanked 6,935 Times in 3,257 Posts*

That cultural system acted as either added or reduced capital that projected a person's reputation on that discussion site. Many discussions can go on for years and are revived depending on the relevance of the issue. A point to note is that an initiator can initiate a topic but then the topic, if it is prolonged, can turn into an entirely different one. For example, the start of a discussion can be a review of a product but as the discussion evolves, members talk about other products. Discussion sites in this study functioned as a place where publics went to search, discuss and sort information about products and services in detail. Publics participating in discussion sites are members and non-

members but they project a sense of belonging through their conversations and acknowledgments of each other. Lengthy conversations are promoted through these sites. This supported the idea of an imagined community as explained by Anderson in 1983. Drawing on Anderson's *Imagined Community* (1983), Gruzdz et al. (2011) described an imagined community where users in a virtual settlement could never know everyone but were certainly aware of other users' presence—similarly to what was happening on these discussion sites.

Organizations also used their own discussion sites to encourage publics to converse about their products and services. For example, Nokia released product features for publics to try and then asked for feedback. Apple followed a different approach. When they received a negative review of the iPhone 4 from Consumer Report, publics flocked to the Apple discussion site and discussed the issue and the review. The discussion was lengthy, and there were mixed reactions to the review. Apple was caught deleting the conversation because of the initial negative review and that angered the publics who then reactivated the discussion and continued discussing the issue rather than denigrating Apple's action in deleting the prior discussion. Although there were very few negative comments about Apple's decision to delete, they did suggest to others that the new thread would be deleted. Apple did provide an active, technical feedback mechanism where it chose to participate less in the conversation. However, that changed after the release of Consumer Report, where it was seen to exert dominant control of the conversation.

Park and Lee (2007) emphasize the importance of online forum discussions, particularly in a news forum, in facilitating positive perceptions because positive comments about an organization in an online news forum facilitate publics' positive perception of the organization in terms of its social responsiveness. They urge organizations to monitor and respond not only to the content of online news but also to the online forum discussion. Thus, online conversations are important indicators of an organization's reputation.

#### **8.6.4 YouTube**

Most contributions on YouTube were made by Apple advocates and antagonists. Apple did not participate in the discussion of the videos. Apple uploaded advertisements of its

products for the publics to discuss and download but not to converse with them. Publics discussed the content and the making of the videos. Most gave feedback about the products and the structure and content of the advertisement. Many publics uploaded videos about Apple that were a parody and some used Apple products in the video. The parody videos about Apple were so realistic that some trusting publics believed them to be true until told they were not.

The only BP originated video that was captured by Google for this research analysis was the apology made by BP CEO, Tony Hayward. BP participated in the discussion by reminding the publics to be objective in their comments:

*We understand that people are angry; however, we ask that your comments follow our commenting policy, which is listed in full in our Latest News section on the BP YouTube Channel page. We ask that conversations on this page be constructive, respectful, and contain language that is appropriate for all groups and ages. Thank you.*

That message created uproar, resulting in even more negative messages from the publics.

The rest of the videos were parodies of BP's reactions, management and handling of the crisis. Most parody videos were based on humor and belittled BP's effort in handling the crisis.

Nokia uploaded product related videos and information about their products but did not participate in the discussions. The rest of the videos analyzed came from users, animators or organizations that had featured Nokia products in their videos. The publics highlighted the quality of Nokia products in their videos. Some individuals' videos showed what the product could do and in effect became an informal advertisement for Nokia.

All videos for Toyota products that were analyzed in this study were uploaded by advocates or media organizations. Like Nokia, Toyota did not participate in the conversations. Most videos showed Toyota products at their best, and the most popular conversation came from the BBC uploaded video of the durability of the Toyota Hilux after having endured a variety of tests from Top Gear hosts.

YouTube served as an advertising tool for most organizations in the context of this study. It was used by all four organizations to channel product advertisements, new product introduction and other product advertising strategies. None of the organizations made full use of the comments section of YouTube. Instead, this section was heavily used by YouTube viewers.

#### ***8.6.4.1 Depth, description and importance***

The viewer comments added depth, context and importance to the uploaded videos. These comments were extensive and publics gave them freely and openly. Some of the discussions went on for more than two years depending on how many times the video was viewed. However, there was a difference in participation as compared to the discussion sites and Facebook. A significant number of publics on the YouTube discussions were more vulgar and aggressive in their conversation than other social media users but they also provided a wider interpretation of the topic through the viewed video. This behavior can be explained by the presence of social media characteristics such as anonymity, user-generated content (USG) and word-of-mouth tactics, which have been abused not only by the publics but also by organizations to put forward their interests (Lim & Ki, 2007). Having said that, publics were also more interested in the technicalities of the video rather than the message it was conveying. A common question for most of the videos analyzed was “What is the background music?”. Overall, there was a lot of communication between the comment contributors and the video uploader.

Parody videos were also found for BP and Apple, where some publics used it as a feedback strategy by demeaning or mocking the organizations. The risk of these kinds of videos is that some publics believe them to be real and that the video was generated from the actual organization. For example, a parody was made by an organization called The Onion, which uploaded a video supposedly made by Apple, about a new incentive called “Apple friend bar”. In the discussion that followed the video, many of those who participated in the discussion, believed the video to be true until a handful of publics explained otherwise. The same was true with BP, as many parody videos surfaced in light of the crisis. These videos can reduce an organization’s value, increase reputational risk and affect its reputation when they are believed to be true. This can also cloud

publics' judgment on any issues set forth online and is in line with Lim and Ki's (2007) findings YouTube and its functions enhances some of social media's characteristics such as anonymity and user-generated content.

However, this study also found that some organizations did monitor and may have even participated in the comments accompanying their YouTube videos. Nokia and BP both monitored their YouTube sites judging from their comments and feedback to the conversations. BP reminded publics to be sensible in their comments whereas Nokia answered questions and comments about the videos. The former received negative comments but the latter received good and positive feedbacks from publics. Again, these differences in reactions to organizational presence in conversations generated and dominated by publics are possibly due to the crisis status experienced by the organization at the time and different strategic approaches to social media use. BP was already facing negative comments by publics for not being transparent during the crisis and the request to be sensible may have been seen as controlling on BP's part. Apple and Toyota uploaded the videos but did not participate in the discussions.

This study suggests that YouTube can be a powerful promotional tool for organizations provided the comments section is used simultaneously. The power of pictures and sound can encourage not only a lengthy discussion but also add depth, description and importance to organizational messages.

## **8.7 RQ 4: What are the key elements of reputational constructs for each organization based on the overall perceptions and reactions communicated by their publics in online conversations?**

### **8.7.1 Reputation constructs**

From the main themes derived, it can be deduced that elements of reputation were: a) products and services, b) points of comparison, c) implementing and promoting public-organization relationship through online conversation, d) management of crisis communication, and e) providing feedback channels for suggestions and reviews. Reputation is also specific to a public and the issues they deemed as important. In discussing these issues, the publics tended to compare and contrast an organization's reputation with another, be it a brand, an event, a product or another organization. All

these reputational components were evident in the conversations about the organizations.

#### ***8.7.1.1 Collective images over time***

Reputation is a collective of views or images by publics and stakeholders and this can be challenging for an organization as it can have differing and multiple images. For example, in Apple's case, advocates perceived Apple in a positive light when compared to the organization's antagonists. However, the key characteristic of reputation is that it is collective and long term, therefore it would consist of collective images, and not a single image.

#### ***8.7.1.2 Public and issue-specific***

Is reputation therefore public specific? When an organization characterizes a public based on its reactions towards an organization, it can gauge the public's perceptions and consequently its reputation specific to that public. This, to some extent supports Walker's (2010) view that

companies may have multiple reputations depending on which stakeholders and which issues are being looked at, but each reputation represents the aggregate perception of all stakeholders for that specific issue. That is, a corporation can have only one aggregate reputation for profitability, one for environmental responsibility, and so on. (p.370)

However, this thesis described publics by characteristics that emerged through the conversations. Therefore, an advocate will be someone that would have generally positive views about an organization as compared to an antagonist or angry public. Accordingly, when an organization faces an issue, it can gauge the publics' perception of its reputation by gauging the percentage of participation by advocates, antagonists or angry public. If there are many advocates then the organization may have a more positive rather than negative perception. Nevertheless, this will also depend on the organizations' responsiveness to the issue as an advocate can turn into an angry public.

### ***8.7.1.3 Inherently comparative***

There were many comparisons being drawn about the four organizations either between product brands, with other competitors, with past events, within the industry or against some other standard. Reputation of one organization sometimes depends on the state of another. In the case of BP, the Gulf of Mexico crisis was compared to the Exxon Valdez crisis and the way Exxon Mobil managed the crisis. Consequently, BP's reputation at the time was also compared to the past reputation of Exxon Mobil. It fell short of Exxon Mobil's standard. In contrast, the publics made a comparison of Nokia with Apple in terms of technology, i.e., software that was seen as superior, and therefore it was compared with a superior product and brand. Fombrun's (1996) definition of reputation included the idea that the reputation of an organization is derived from a comparison with its competitor. However, a reputation can be decided as a result of a comparison made on a number of possible standards (Walker, 2010). This study extended these criteria by adding that the comparative process can be made not only with competitor brands, products and services, past and present reputation but also against an event and with an entire industry's reputation. It can also be made against an existing standard (whether real or imagined), and either exceed, meet or fall short of that standard.

### ***8.7.1.4 Public–organization relationship and communication management***

Relationships are crucial in building, maintaining or improving reputation. The cultivation of relationships via online conversations is important to the longevity and reputation of an organization. Communication with publics on social networking sites has created innovative modes for engagement with the purpose of building relationships. However, it is evident that there is still room for improvement in managing these relationships online and engaging in discussions.

## **8.8 RQ5: How do online stakeholders' and publics conversations shape an organization's reputation? A theoretical explanation is proposed.**

### **8.8.1 Constructing the theory**

The last few chapters have presented the findings of analysis of each organizations (as reflected in Tables 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3) after a rigorous thematically analysis following a

grounded theory approach. The themes and each item in the tables summarize the array of conversational dispositions expressed by publics that were present in different contexts and topics surrounding the four organizations.

The theory constructed by the core categories and themes emerged as reflection of reputation management through relationship building and crisis communication within social media conversation with publics, and as reflection of the formation of an organization's reputation through online conversations that were initiated and participated actively by relevant publics. These publics are not those that are strategically targeted by an organization. Rather, they actively participate in and initiate conversations around an issue or topic of interest to them.

The desire to understand the contribution and participation by publics in online conversations provide the foundation for the proposed substantive theory. This substantive theory suggests that relationship building can start by understanding the important elements of reputation that the publics converse about among themselves and which they communicate to the organization.

Figure 8.1 summarizes the further analysis of these conversational qualities and characteristics that were shared in the social media conversations that were analyzed for this study. The characteristics that are considered important in shaping an organization's reputation were summarized in Table 8.2.

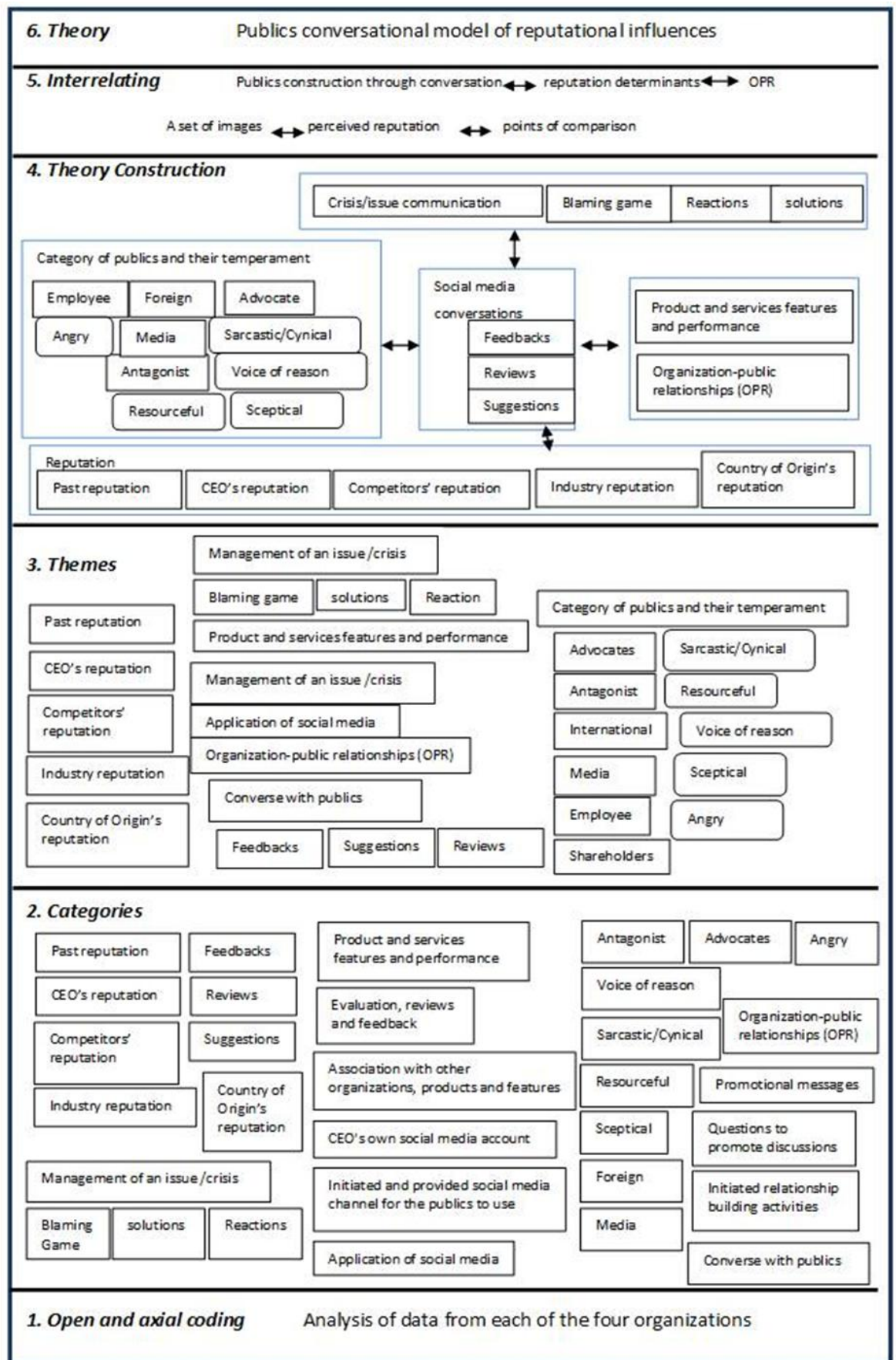
Figure 8.1 describes the process of constructing a substantive theory based on the grounded theory approach. The process starts with the coding process, and then moves to the identification of categories, the grouping of categories into themes, the theory construction, the interrelating of concepts with each other to determine fit and appropriateness. Based on this, a substantive theory is proposed, namely the Publics Conversational Model of Reputational Influence, which extends the concepts reputation, organization–public relationships and the concept of publics and their conversations on social media.

Reputation is seen as a set of images that the publics formulate in their conversation about an organization's identities, actions and activities. The second conceptual underpinning is the contemporary approach of organization–public relationships where

this study suggests not only the inclusion of publics' focus and inputs but also the recognition of publics as emergent around issues and events, acknowledging that they are active in and aware of relationship building attempts and reputation management activities. The third key concept is the notion that social media conversations are the conductors or conduits for images formation.

Figure 8.1 describes the stages of theory formation from open and axial coding to the actual theory. The interrelating of concepts as depicted in stage 5 illustrated the linking of the main concepts of this study. The formation of publics has given rise to the determinants of reputation, namely features of products and services, organizational and product performance and aspects of communication management.

Figure 8.1 The steps of this grounded theory emergent



One of the main issues of this study was to dismantle the features and functions of publics in organization–public relationships. This was done by interrelating the emerged publics with their original function in the notion of organization–public relationships. Doing so has resulted in what will be called the public–organization relationship or POR. POR depicts that relationship building through social media (emphasizing the importance of each social networking site as they tend to produce a different outcome) conversations are initiated by publics and centered on publics’ needs and wants. POR also give rise on the formation of images through conversational reputation constructs that in time would form a perceived reputation of an organization. The perceived reputation was derived accordingly through constant comparison of multiple standards.

## **8.9 Summary**

In this chapter, some of the key findings presented in chapters 4 to 7 were discussed. . The discussion also included the emerged themes, grounded in the data. These themes formed the foundation of this study's substantive theory, which led to the Public Conversational Model of Reputational Influence, and the concepts embedded in the substantive theory were explain and discussed. The final chapter will describe the conversational model in more detail while identifying the contributions of this study and implications for academic and practice. The next chapter will also provide further recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

#### **9.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the research journey, starting from the initial motivation, through the preliminary literature review, the adoption of grounded theory methodology and finally the description of the substantive theory that was formulated based on the data and analysis. The chapter goes on to present the contribution and application of the findings to scholarship and practice. In addition, based on the research findings, this chapter highlights some recommendations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the research's limitations and the implications for future research for public relations scholarship, specifically in the areas of reputation and public–organization relationship.

#### **9.1 The research journey**

The current study began as an exploration into the formation of reputation in conversations among publics. The idea of gaining a better understanding of the concept of online organization–public relationship and the role of publics were the primary motivators of this study. Utilizing a constructivist grounded theory, enabled data analysis to be done concurrently with the data gathering and the use of the NVivo software (version 9) for analysis has assisted in the formation of nodes and concepts of the theory building (see chapter 3 for a detailed discussion).

The unobtrusive analysis of the conversation information obtained from four social media provided the framework for the study. The strategy for this research was to adapt the ‘interaction’ approach between the researcher and the secondary unobtrusive data, resulting in the interpretation of the conversations between publics about their organizations. The ultimate aim is to—through analysis—incorporate the aforementioned interpretation into the construction of a substantive theory about the constructs of reputation in the field of public relations. As is typical in a grounded study, the delayed literature review took place during the final stages of analysis. Chapter 8 provided a detailed discussion connecting the analysis data with relevant literature and to the proposed substantive theory.

This study is interested in describing how online conversations impact organizational reputation. It seeks to conceptualize constructs from online conversations between organizations and their publics, and specifically between publics about the organization. The purpose of this study is to explicate key elements in the form of issues and concerns that the publics deem important, and that can influence an organization's reputation within and outside of the social media environment. Thus, the research focuses specifically on publics' communication activities and how these activities affects reputation with aim of gaining a better understanding of reputation formation in the social media environment.

Following the processes of grounded theory methodology, several significant findings emerged from the data. The study (which began as an exploration into the formation of reputation in conversations among publics) ended with the realization that publics have a strong tendency to give feedback, reviews, offer suggestions and discussions about topics that they consider important about organizations. Further, these tendencies are reflected in formed opinions that are considered as images of an organization and, over time, its reputation. This revelation provides the foundation for this chapter.

The constant comparative analysis generated an initial range of categories that later were grouped into themes. These themes were subsequently compared, and linked in interactional sequences to form the substantive theory that showed the reflections of reputation through publics' assessment of an organization's reputation.

The analysis has given rise to three key propositions. First, publics are formed through conversations and then in turn—from the topics that they converse about—create images about an organization and its identities, actions and activities. Second, public relationship building is a conductor for reputation since relationship is an antecedent and consequence of reputation. It is an antecedent, as a good reputation will attract the publics to want to form relationships with the organization by conversing with that organization, purchasing its products and services, investing in it, and working with it. This relationship can, however, also be a result of an existing reputation, and therefore organizations need to promote, manage and enhance current or future relationships with publics. Third, online conversations for reputation management are important and should not be under-estimated. Social media are of great consequence in reputation

studies because they are not only channels for the dissemination of information from an organization to its publics, but they are places where an ongoing assessment of the organization happens. Thus, social media are places where publics share and formulate images and the reputation of an organization.

## **9.2 Conceptual identification in publics' conversations and perceptions**

The following are the conclusions from the analysis that have answered the research questions positively and that provided the introduction to the substantive theory and its formation.

RQ1: What are the discursive themes that emerged from the online conversations under analysis?

The discursive themes that emerged reflected the constructs of reputation that the publics considered important. Product features and their components are important aspects for the publics in this study when it comes to determining an organization's reputation. This aspect is crucial for an organization because it is the most frequent topic about which the publics converse. They put emphasis on products and services through feedbacks, reviews, suggestions and the discussion of issues. Therefore, assessment is also deduced to be of the constructs of reputation in that, in order for reputation to be labelled as either good or bad, there needs to be a point of comparison to assess whether the comments are favorable or not. The point of comparison exists not only at a particular time but is also evident in past actions, the present state and the future plans of an organization.

Therefore, this study has expanded the area of assessment of an organization's reputation as it is compared not only to a competitor's reputation or present events, but also to similar past events, the reputation of the CEO, the reputation of the industry and the reputation of the country of origin. Reputation also links an organization's past, present and future states. However, the assessment or points of comparison differ as not all publics share the same idea of what a good reputation is (Aula & Mantere, 2008). Regardless, this study proposes that points of comparison are important in determining an organization's reputation because they provide a measurement system where various standards are set according to different points of comparison in divergent issues or events.

The analysis also suggests that the central tenet of an organization's reputation is the management of public relationships, which can lead to positive, strong and resilient reputations. This is visible in the current study where the cultivation of relationships with publics through social media conversations is important to the longevity and reputation of an organization. Such online relationship building efforts have proven to be important for organizations such as Nokia but it can be inconclusive in organizations facing a crisis such as BP. In BP's case, the reaction of publics suggests that reputation management in a crisis situation cannot work without the consent and acceptance of the publics. However, social media are embedded with feedback mechanisms in realtime, which is needed in any crisis communication process. Therefore, providing communication or feedback is, however, not sufficient. The content of the communication also needs to be considered.

Ultimately, this study found that the participants gather around the issues they want to converse about and to a large extent, they create their own topics of conversation about an organization of their interest. The information gathered from the social media conversations has provided important insight into the constructs of reputation. Therefore, the public relationships theory and practice on social media should be expanded to a public focus. (Public–organization relationship = POR).

RQ2: Who are the publics that participated in the conversations analyzed?

Publics in this study were found to be aware and active. They were not passive recipients of information. In the era of advanced communication technology, they have become empowered to become active information seekers who wish to receive information instantly (Brown & Billings, 2012; Stephen & Malone, 2009). They are active brand storytellers and ambassadors who converse, discuss and contribute in shaping organizations' reputations.

This study has identified many influencers in the categories of publics, such as the advocates, media, employees and antagonist. The sense of pride and confidence in promoting the organization during a crisis provided the organizations concerned with a type of buffer to defend the organization from negative perceptions or images. The publics in this context were influential when it came to constructing the organization's

reputation. These influencers display different emotional temperaments such as being angry, the voice of reason, sarcastic/cynical or resourceful. Therefore, these dimensions support the proposition of this study that a public forms around an issue, and changes its personality, or expression thereof, according to the degree of changes of that issue.

RQ3: What is the significance of each social medium as it contributes to an organization's reputation?

The social media used for the conversations also played a role in enhancing different aspects of the conversations and issues discussed. Conversations were more likely to happen on Facebook and organizations tended to use Twitter as a one-way tool for information dissemination. Alternatively, discussion sites were used to discuss issues at length with the risk of the issue turning into a completely different one. Organizations were most likely to overlook the discussion section in YouTube, which this study found to include significant opportunity for sharing of information and feedback not only about the uploaded video but also about the organization and its views, goals and directions. In other words, YouTube could provide an alternative avenue of sharing organizational reputational information. All these functionality aspects of social media are important considerations when conversing with the publics. Therefore, the appropriate use of a social medium can add depth, description and importance to organizational messages.

### **9.3 Publics' conversational model of reputational influence**

RQ4: What are the key elements of the reputational constructs for each organization based on the overall perceptions and reactions communicated by their publics in online conversations?

RQ5: How do online stakeholders' and publics' conversations shape an organization's reputation?

The above research questions will be answered through an explanation of the proposed model.

The model blends three important concepts to the scholarship, namely a) public relationship, b) reputation as a sum of perceptions that is derived from stories and conversations and inherently comparative, and c) publics and their formation in online conversations. Building on the fundamental premise that quality relationships are the key-precursor of a favorable reputation (Fombrun, 1996), the model proposes the

concept of publics–organization relationships (POR). As explained in Figure 9.1, OPR describes the substantive Publics Conversational Model of Reputation, derived from the analysis and conclusions drawn in this study. POR explains the process of reputation formation, its landscape and key constructs.

There are three parts to the model. The first part is the publics' area, shown in the oval shape on the left–hand side. This is where a public is formed in the conversations participated by individuals. In these conversations, the publics are characterized based on their dominant characteristics and disposition that emerged during those conversations. Hence, nine groups of influencers were identified.

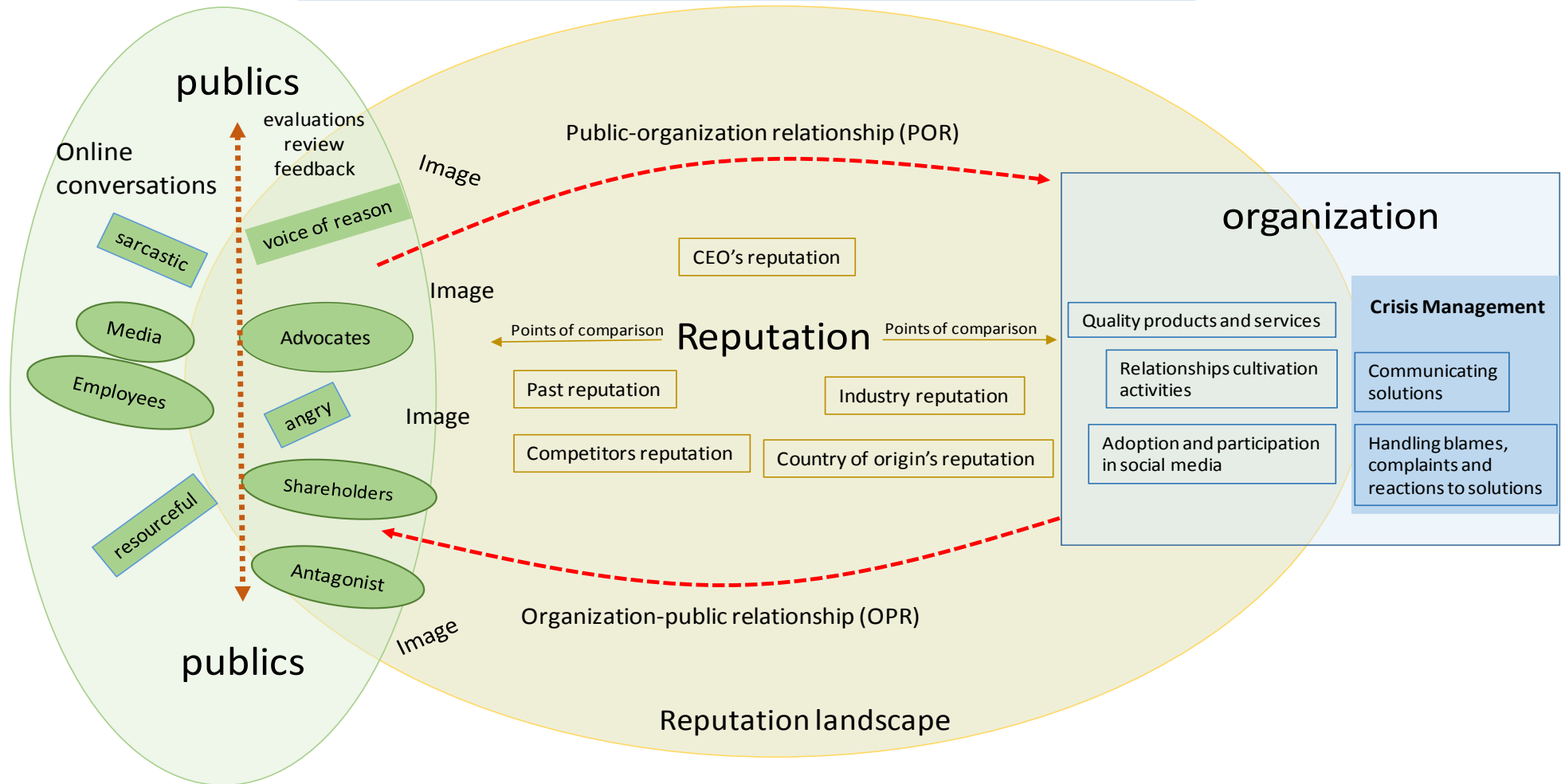
The model highlights the publics differently, based on their influence on organizations' reputations. For example, the research revealed that advocates, employees and shareholders were analyzed as having a positive influence on the organizations' reputations. Advocates were those public that will stand by the organization through good and bad occasions. Their remarks and feedback are intended to show their devotion towards an organization, just as their criticisms are intended to encourage the organization to improve rather than to condemn the organization.

The explanation of each emerged publics was explained in detail in Chapter 8(section 8.5). The identified characteristics tended to transform to emotional personalities according to the situation and the development of the conversations. The publics constructed the organization's reputation through the online conversations in which they participated with other publics. Publics in these contexts were fluid, and changed, based on the actions and reactions of the organizations and other publics. Importantly, however, these conversations gave (and give) rise to perceptions about organization which are turned into various images in the reputation landscape.

Next, the second part concerns the organization; the square on the right side of the model represents components of reputation that were discussed by the publics but were oriented and connected to the organizations. The components such as quality products and services, online crisis communication and cultivating OPRs through social media were closely linked to organizations. These components are also those that the organization considers important and explicitly engages in. The square represents the

organization's initiatives and identity that are disseminated to the online sphere, and were picked up by the publics in their conversations.

Figure 9.1 Publics conversational model of reputational influence



Therefore, it is suggested that the publics will converse on issues that they deem relevant regardless from where the issues originate. This implies a) that an organization only has limited control over how its identity is perceived and received by publics and b) that it cannot (and should not) control conversations as publics will discuss the issues they deem important regardless of the organization's attempts to direct the discussions. It is therefore recommended that the organization not only be part of the social media but be active in disseminating relevant information about the organization because the information has a chance of being discussed rather than not participating at all. However, equally, if the information is faulty, the inaccuracy will be exposed through these online discussions, and meanings around the organization's intentions, directions and offerings are likely to be developed.

The third part of the model is the reputation landscape, which connects the two parts discussed above. It is shown as the shaded horizontal oval space named 'reputation landscape'. This is where dimensions of reputation exist as the creation of public images and the organization's self-presentation through its identities and actions. By identifying and including the components of reputation that emerged from the conversations and against which the organization's reputation is assessed, the reputation landscape of organizations is widened. By doing so, current understanding of reputation is expanded, and thus this becomes the most important contribution of this research.

When the publics converse with each other, they review, evaluate and give feedback. They do this through comparing and contrasting the organization with perceived standards. They compare the organization with its CEO, its past reputation, its industry's reputation and other organizations. The results of these comparisons provide information publics need to make judgments about an organization. This is where images and self-presentation from the organization are reflected in the publics' conversations (in this model represented in the first part, the oval shape on the left) and where these were compared and contrasted with other features of the organization's reputation.

Past reputation of an organization can either strengthen a reputation or diminish it, depending on whether the past reputation was positive or negative. In Toyota's case, its past reputation helped during its product crisis because most participants believed in its past reputation, rather than giving into the reality of the crisis. For both Apple and Nokia, past reputations helped justify some of the decision they made about the product and services development and business directions.

Industry reputation was also an important factor as in the case of BP, where participants used it as a basis against which to judge BP negatively. Industry reputation can have either a positive or a negative implication for the existing reputation. In the other organizations (Apple, Nokia and Toyota), their industry reputation did not influence their current reputation although their prior reputation in the industry lingers in their current ones.

Competitors' reputation is a common comparison made in the conversations analyzed, especially when references were made to an organization's product and services. Assessment made against a competitor is a common denominator and were present in all organizations in relation to their products and services. Thus, it is proposed that an organization should always be aware how it compares to their competitors in terms of services and products.

A country's reputation can also have an impact on an organization, and in particular the organization's country of origin when operating in a host country. For example, Japan was perceived as having a good reputation in car making technology and for producing reliable and sturdy vehicles. Toyota U.S. benefitted by being linked with Japan's reputation of making good, reliable, quality cars. While this aspect does not apply to all organizations, it does have a significant impact on multinationals wishing to improve, develop or maintain their reputations globally.

A CEO's reputation is an essential factor in a crisis situation as his/her leadership at that particular time tends to be linked to the organizations' reputation. Therefore, a CEO's reputation can affect his/her organization and could result in an 'instant reputation' during a crisis. This instant reputation is judged based on how well he or she handles the crisis, and is directly linked to the organization's

actual reputation. In a non-crisis situation, the CEO's reputation will only be impacted if he/she is well recognized by the media for his/her actions.

To restate, the Publics Conversational Model of Reputational Influence was constructed using concepts of reputation, public relationships and social media conversations. The theory describes how publics' social media conversations can give rise to the determinants of reputation through a more contemporary version of OPR in which it is suggested that reputation is relationship management. The underlying assumption of relationship management is that relationships are built through communication among and with publics. These communication activities are highly effective when using a medium such as social media because the two-way communication function is already embedded. The conversations also project images and identities from the organization. Hence, the theory proposes that relationships are formed through the interactions and communications among publics and through the projected communications from the organization and the consequently projected images and identities. The images and identities are submitted through processes of assessment and comparison with multiple dimensions of reputation. The proposed theory also shows how online general publics can be grouped according to their emerged characteristics and dispositions in relation to the context of the topics being discussed. These publics may change in terms of their main projected characteristics in accordance to the development of the conversations, issue and organization's actions. Thus, the characteristics are dependent on their participation in the conversations as well as on the changes in the issue and organizational actions. Therefore, the proposed model places an empirical emphasis on communication between publics as one of the determinants of reputation.

#### **9.4 The contribution of the study to scholarship**

This section evaluates the implications of the four outcomes of this study to the scholarship of reputation and public relations, namely a) the discursive themes as reputational constructs, b) the role of publics in reputation formation and management, c) social media platforms as conductors of conversations in which

reputation is constructed, and d) the provision of a theory emphasizing the role of publics and their conversations in reputation development.

#### **9.4.1 Discursive themes as reputational constructs**

Reputation is a collective of views or images by publics and stakeholders and this is challenging for an organization because it can have differing and multiple images. Different publics can view an organization differently. For example, in Apple's case, advocates perceived Apple in a positive light when compared to its antagonists. However, the key characteristic of reputation is that it is collective and long term and therefore it would consist of multiple images over a period of time. This study showed that images are formulated from the discursive themes that emerged. These themes have been described as a focus on product and services through feedback, reviews, suggestions and the discussion of issues, the comparison with other dimensions of reputation, online relationship building, crisis communication and management.

The research supports crisis management processes to gather more perspectives from the publics, not only for the benefit of developing the body of knowledge in crisis communication but also to link it to changing innovative social media usage (Schultz, Utz, Goritz, 2010; Schwarz, 2012). Thus, this study contributes to the body of knowledge specifically in terms of crisis communication by capturing publics' perspectives as well as by explicating social media use during crisis. Prior research regarding crisis communication parallels many of the concepts and components that emerged from this grounded theory analysis. The crisis responses that were identified in this study mirrored the scholarship of crisis communication literature, particularly in reactions to the crisis, solutions and reactions to the solutions, and to the extent that the solutions were implemented. A further contribution of this study lies in the identification of personalized narratives using a conversational human voice that not only promotes collaborative relationship building with publics but also could mitigate negative emotion. The emphasis on online relationship building is another important contribution, in that social media conversation is the precursor to relationship formation and it is in this formation process that reputation is formed through conversations and discussions.

From the main themes derived, it can thus be deduced that the key elements of reputation are products and services, points of comparison, implementation and promotion of the public–organization relationship through online conversation, management of crisis communication, and providing feedback channels for suggestions and reviews. Furthermore, reputation is specific to a public and the issues they deem as important. In discussing these issues, the publics tend to compare and contrast an organization’s reputation with another, be it a brand, an event, a product or other organization. Hence, the contribution of this grounded study is that all these constructs are discursive elements in a public relationship. Therefore, this study has provided an empirical link between public relations and reputation studies.

#### **9.4.2 The changing role of publics in reputation formation and management**

The current study has defined the publics on social media according to the characteristics and temperament they portrayed in their conversation. The contribution of this study lies in addressing the disconnect between relationship management and the identification of publics. This disconnect has led to a gap in public relations research concerning the theory of publics. Traditionally, the two areas of research (relationship management and the identification of publics) have remained separate and few attempts have been made to connect the two in order to advance theory and research (Ni, 2012). This is especially true for publics formed on social media. The present study has shown that the publics in this new technological era not only can be defined but can be identified by the characteristics and emotions they project in online conversations. Thus, the study supports the fundamental principle that publics are not to be created but that they arise on their own when there is an issue (Grunig& Repper, 1992). The publics in the online conversations analyzed in this research were active and participated in topics they initiated about the organizations. They are therefore aware and active publics, and hence can be identified based on what and about whom they are conversing.

By identifying publics by their characteristics, it is easier for the organization to decide how to act in communicating with that particular public at a particular point of time. Organizations should consider that not only are these publics aware and active, but they set the reputation agenda on social media platforms. Monitoring conversations on social media is therefore a crucial aspect of reputation management while at the same time organizations need to acknowledge that controlling reputation on the online environment cannot easily be achieved. The only "control" is by actively participating in the discussions, not by deleting unfavorable opinions or discussions.

#### **9.4.3 Social media platforms as conductor of conversations in which reputation is constructed**

All four organizations used social media with the only difference being the degree of use, the choice of social media and the conditions under which they were used. In this study, social media played a role in enhancing different aspects of the conversations and the issues discussed by being a channel for the dissemination of information, used to discuss issues in length, and more importantly, having significant information and feedback functionalities. The latter are important because with the appropriate use depth, description and importance can be added to organizational messages, which over time will establish a more meaningful reputation.

#### **9.4.4 The provision of a theory emphasizing the role of publics and their conversations in reputation**

This study's main contributions are twofold. Firstly, it contributes to the public relationships scholarships through the identification of communication between publics and their conversations as important aspects in reputation formation and management. Secondly, the proposed Publics Conversational Model of Reputational Influence provides a description of the reputational process, its players, the key components and the social media as a suitable avenue to promote and manage reputation.

The study of reputation in public relations is enhanced and expanded by this study by emphasizing that reputation is inherently comparative, has many versions and different publics will emerge with different characteristics and emotional dimensions that can change depending on the results of communication among them and with the organizations. Thus, it shows the complexity of reputation management is often ignored in traditional reputation management studies.

This study has provided an alternative view of the aspects of OPR by placing more emphasis on publics' role and function in the theory, highlighting that they are active and aware as opposed to strategically targeted and passive receivers of organizational messages and identity management attempts. The results of this study indicate that publics will not only react to issues and events but also have a tendency to change according to how the issues and conversations develop, and the proposed model therefore provides a better reflection of the online reputational setting. Furthermore, the notion of a publics–organization relationship (POR) instead of merely an organization–public relationship, where the focus remains on the organization, is an important contribution to the public relations body of knowledge, and specifically to the study of reputation management and social media. The proposed substantive model emphasizes a) the importance of conversations in forming online relationships formation, b) relationship management as reputation, c) a public's role in reputation construction and d) the dimensions of reputation.

Thus, through this grounded study the theoretical aspects of reputation studies and the theory of public's have been extended. The study also explicitly links the research of social media communication with reputation studies, and has demonstrated that conversations within and beyond the confines of an organization's social media is one of the most important constructs of reputation. It has empirically described reputation as a narrative and communicative construct that is developed through conversations with publics, and among publics about organizations (see Aula, 2011; Bruning, Dials & Shirka, 2008; Carroll & Combs, 2003; Mahon, 2002; Mahon & Wartick, 2003; Popescu & Mitrook, 2007).

While the organizations in this study display substantial differences, it is these differences that allow the proposed model to be applicable in many different settings and organizational types. Consequently, it is these differences that enhance the generalizability of the theory in different settings, demonstrating general theoretical utility in publics' driven conversations and situations.

A further contribution to the scholarship is the identification of the reputation landscape where multiple dimensions of reputation are recognized. This implies that reputation formation is not confined to the setting of organizations and their publics, but also includes their industry, country, players in the organization and the organizational history. Thus, the organization needs to look beyond merely constructing a corporate identity and communicating it but it should consider its identity and reputation in the wider context in which it operates. It also means that some aspects of its reputation (e.g. the country of origin's reputation) may be outside the organization's immediate control.

## **9.5 The implications of the study for practice**

The implications for practice are multi fold and can be explained in terms of publics' conversations, their formation, the reputational constructs and the proposed theory.

The managerial contribution is that the study provides a better understanding of how important conversations between publics are for an organization's reputation. Moreover, it recognizes social media's function in providing feedback and

information channels not only for the use of managers to disseminate organizational messages to the publics and gauging the sentiment towards the organization, but also for the publics to select and discuss topics they deem crucial for an organization to consider, evaluate and act upon. It is a complex, multidimensional environment and more than merely a tool for the dissemination of information. In this environment, the publics converse with each other about aspects that shape and inform the organization's reputation. A key contribution of this study lies in the identification that of all the topics discussed about the organization, the most common topic was the organization's products and services. Publics compared and contrasted the products and services with those offered by similar organizations, and did not hesitate to point towards defects, improvements or uses. Managers of reputation need to understand that quality products and services are part of reputation building. Much of the organization's reputation is built on their core service or product, and their record of accomplishment. On social media conversations the past, present and future collide.

By focusing on the public–organization relationship, the central axis of communication between publics and organization is changed, and this may be difficult for organizations to accept—they (the organizational managers) cannot control every aspect of reputation. If its core services and products are no good, it will be difficult to build a strong reputation. Thus, managers need to become comfortable with the idea that publics in this case determine the agenda for discussion and will engage, defend, promote, condemn any organizations as and when they felt like it. In this sense, they decide which organization they want to converse with and about what they want to communicate. The publics will decide the reputational constructs they will consider in their online conversations. Organizations cannot stop this from happening—in fact, any attempt to delete, hide or control the conversation is to a large extent futile and may do more harm than good.

The concept of interactivity was also introduced and highlighted (see chapter 8) to emphasize the fact that organizations need to engage in conversations and continuously interact in order to cultivate relationships. According to Avidar

(2013), responsiveness does not necessarily involve interactivity, because responsiveness exists when one person reacts to another's request even though the response is not interactive; however, in order to have interactivity, there must also be responsiveness, or else the communication will break down. This study has added to this proposition by revealing how interactivity occurs. It has demonstrated in detail, through specific examples from different organizations, how responsiveness and interactivity are crucial in relationship cultivation activities between an organization and its publics, and both are important for forming reputation. Thus, organizations should make an effort to continuously cultivate online communication. As found in this study, these activities promote relationships with publics and encourage the publics to communicate with the organization.

Because the organization's reputation is not independent from the industry's or country of origin's reputation, its CEO's reputation, or its history or past events, organizations may need to look beyond their immediate context and target public relations activities towards improving the reputation of the industry, CEO or country of origin. They may also need to explain past or current events to ensure that they do not tarnish the existing reputation or are unfairly used as a point of comparison during crises.

Moreover, with POR (public–organization relationship) organizations need to communicate consistently through social media as that is where the conversations are taking place. Communicating is not enough in itself however; organizations need to promote online communication through activities and questions provoking conversations to ensure continuity. This also means that organizations must identify publics according to what is being discussed, and be aware that the sentiments of these publics may shift. Thus, publics are fluid "targets" and the activities should be adjusted accordingly. Organizations must not assume that an advocate will remain an advocate, for example. These publics must be nurtured for the important role they can play. Equally, an organization should not assume that an antagonist would always remain an antagonist. Alternatively, the media and employees can help extend an organization's reputational messages during a time of need. However, the majority of publics will be present in most

conversations, and organizations should not overact when an antagonist or skeptical public weighs in on the conversation; these occurrences are natural. Therefore, organizations should listen, converse, and act strategically with publics such as advocates, media and employees through social media relations to promote and protect their reputation.

Social media are platforms through which organizations can gauge the publics' perceptions towards them. Organizations need to decide strategically which platforms to use for which purpose. This study found that for news-related information or any information that would lead the reader to the organization's website, Twitter is the best platform to use. Thus, it is recommended that CEOs of an organization should have an active Twitter account, because publics tend to retweet organizational messages and information from credible media. Risks to reputation because of (public) lapses in judgment can be mitigated by training CEOs in the purposes, context and content of their accounts.

On the other hand, Facebook is the best platform to use for engaging in conversations with the publics, especially when dealing with a specific event/project. Organizations need to identify with the publics through continuous building of social media relations, with the sole purpose of promoting their reputation. Each organization needs a team of communicators to execute this efficiently because the communication needs to be enduring and reliable. Organizations should fully utilize all the functional capabilities of social media especially the discursive function because this is where they can gauge the perceived reputation.

YouTube, however, is not fully utilized by organizations, and specifically its comments section, which offer a reflection of their reputations. Therefore, an organization needs not only to use YouTube as an advertising tool to promote its products and services, but also a powerful channel to promote its reputation through participation in the comments section, because it can provide depth and description to organizational messages.

Furthermore, organizations need to communicate their reactions to the conversations as demonstration that they are listening. This is especially true and

important in a crisis situation where consistent and continued communication about every organizational action is required. In such cases, publics can be reached using most social media platforms to ensure that the main message gets through.

Consequently, with the advancement of communication technology, organizations need to incorporate online crisis communication strategies in their reputation management because online channels are actively used by publics to compare and contrast organization's images before deducing a reputation. Organizations need to be part of this process in order to promote a good reputation and improve poor ones.

## **9.6 Limitations and recommendations for future research**

This research has provided a much-needed theoretical link between public relations and reputation scholarship. It has also suggested some aspects for future studies on reputation and OPR, and provided several crucial recommendations on how an organization can use social media to communicate with its publics to garner positive relations and secure a positive reputation. Moreover, this study used a grounded theory approach where as a research strategy, it is under-utilized but potentially important in public relations and marketing communication research as it holds great potential for tracing communication processes in their context (Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

Nevertheless, the study has its limitations. The main limitation is the use of unobtrusive data and social media data where the demographics of the sample are unknown. Therefore, future research that incorporates the same objectives but uses specific samples such as youth, adults, men or women would generate more targeted results and would allow for further generalization of the findings. It will also provide the opportunity to test the applicability of the model to these specific samples. Furthermore, future research can expand and further explicate the specific characteristics of the publics involved.

Another limitation is the period of the research; a longer period may have provided more themes that could inform reputation constructs. This study investigated a snapshot in time, which generated a wealth of data for theory

generation, and certainly sufficient for a grounded theory study, such as the study reported here. A longitudinal study, however, may provide a clearer picture of the changing patterns in the characteristics and sentiments of publics, showing how and why they are formed.

While the organizations were chosen to represent Fortune 500 companies that had an online presence with little consideration of the industries they represented, these variables were also limiting. Given the findings of this study that industry reputation impacts on the organization's reputation, future research should focus on organizations from similar industries to develop a more industry-specific model that would generate more focused reputation constructs and reputation landscape specific to that industry. This would provide an opportunity to test the proposed model and substantive theory's relevance to various industries. Moreover, there is an opportunity to explore how an industry's reputation affects its member organizations.

Thus, future research could be undertaken to test the proposed model using different research strategies, i.e. qualitative or quantitative. In particular, quantitative research can be used to test and prove (or disprove) the framework using focused hypotheses. Statistical modelling, for example, would expand this qualitative study and provide further evidence for the existence and impact of reputational constructs.

Reputation is generated through stories, conversations, discussion that are being reflected in forms of opinion, attitudes and beliefs held by internal and external publics such as employees, customers and communities. Comprehensive research using social media focusing on specific stakeholders such as employees and customers, for example, would be an excellent area for future study. The new NVivo version 10.0 would be helpful in analyzing the data because this new version has more capabilities to capture specific details on social media such as demographic details. Such details can aid in better informing future research. Comparative studies can also be carried out by gathering data directly from organizations and their publics. In particular, further research could also be

undertaken to gauge how describing a country's reputation might further extend this model.

## **9.7 Summary**

This final chapter of the research summarized the research experience as a whole, starting from the motivation of this study to the learning of grounded theory, analyzing phases and finally answering the research questions. The chapter presented the contributions to knowledge and practice specifically in public relations and reputation studies. Most importantly, however, the chapter introduced the Publics Conversational Model of Reputational Influence to emphasize the importance of public conversations on social media. Several key constructs were identified in the reputation framework such as reputation being inherently comparative, the existence of many versions of reputation according to specific publics, the emerged publics according to issues and crisis and the relevance of each social medium in conversations that can influence an organization's reputation. In conclusion, this study has made a significant contribution to the study of reputation in public relations, hopefully signaling a new direction in and approach to understanding the formation and management of public relations.

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