

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: CULTIVATING #CUPFUSION: AN
EXPLORATION OF THE UNINTENDED
CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNICATION IN
A PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN

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This dissertation is an exploration into the application of Merton's (1936) typology of the unanticipated consequences of purposeful social actions, to a public relations campaign. Merton gave consideration to using scientific analysis to understand factors leading to the unanticipated consequences of purposive actions, rather than attributing them to chance or fate. Four of his five factors, including lack of foreknowledge, habit, myopia, and values, have proved applicable to the public relations campaign examined in this case study. The case involves the 2016 Reese's #Cupfusion campaign. When news of a new Reese's product, Peanut Butter Cups stuffed with Reese's Pieces, was leaked on Facebook, the brand manager at Reese's and a small public relations team at Ketchum decided to "tease" the truth about the release of the product, rather than reveal the existence of the candy. Using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews,

organization-provided document analysis, and content analysis of the Reese's brand Facebook page, this researcher found that by using innovative public relations strategies, combined with a proactive relationship management technique which used social media to cultivate an existing relationship with Reese's fans on Facebook, the #Cupfusion team was able to cultivate an unintended "viral" outcome for their product roll-out.

Merton's typology of unintended consequences has application for public relations theory and practice. The concept of lack of foreknowledge has implications for both chaos and complexity theory, and how they can be applied to the digital environment and social media, including how organizations can respond to unintended consequences and crisis. This research also supports and adds to social media and strategic campaign planning practice, by providing a lens for the analysis and execution of both pre-implementation and evaluation of public relations campaigns.

CULTIVATING #CUPFUSION: AN EXPLORATION OF THE UNINTENDED
CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNICATION IN A PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN

by

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to the members of my family who never let me give up on my dream. I am especially grateful to my mother Patricia, who always knew I wanted to be a college professor in my heart, even if I had to start in middle age. And most of all I dedicate this to my wife Cathy, who has supported me through everything, helped me during my low periods, and kicked me in the butt when I needed it most.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

In 1936 sociologist Robert Merton gave consideration to using scientific analysis to understand factors leading to the unanticipated consequences of purposive actions. While noting that the subject of unanticipated consequences had been “treated by virtually every substantial contributor to the long history of social thought,” he remarked that it had yet to be considered in any “systematic, scientific manner,” and offered the following explanation:

The failure to subject this problem to such thorough-going investigation has perhaps been due in part to its having been linked historically with transcendental and ethical considerations. Obviously, the ready solution provided by ascribing un- contemplated consequences of action to the inscrutable will of God or Providence or Fate precludes, in the mind of the believer, any need for scientific analysis (Merton, 1936, p. 894).

Merton’s implication is that modern scientific methods of the study of human and societal behavior can offer some explanation of this phenomenon based in science rather than superstition. Since then, the concept has been applied in several fields (e.g., law, sociology, planning, public administration) to examine the unanticipated effects of well- intentioned policies (Ganapati & Frank, 2008), yet it remains virtually unmentioned in public relations theory. To illustrate, Garfield (2004) developed a *HistCite* database to track Merton’s 1936 article. Through the end of 2011 it had tallied nearly 21,000 citations of the article by 525 authors in 269 journals. Only one of those, *Management Communication Quarterly*, had communication in its title. The author actually departed

from Merton, using structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) as a framework to describe the unintended consequences of planned organizational change (Jian, 2007). No public relations journals were cited (HistCite, 2012).¹

Dozier and Lauzen (2000) argued after Paisley (1972), that public relations, as a complex, focal variable field (like journalism, business and political science) can borrow freely from any of the long-studied and more stable fields of social science (anthropology, sociology and physiology). As part of extending Paisley's research, Dozier and Lauzen (1998) offered separate definitions for public relations as a professional activity and an intellectual domain. As a *professional activity*, public relations is the management of communication to build mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and publics (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000). As an *intellectual domain*, public relations is the action, communication and relationships between organizations and publics, as well as *the study of the intended and unintended consequences* of those relationships for individuals and society as a whole (Dozier & Lauzen, 1998). Dozier and Lauzen (2000) argued that by operating at multiple levels of analysis, public relations scholars can examine professional practices from diverse perspectives. They assert that this kind of scholarship can benefit the profession more than scholarship dominated by a narrow professional preoccupation (p. 3).

¹ This statistic is remarkable but is slightly misleading. Merton's essay has been released as parts of collections (Merton, 1976) and republished in later works (Merton, 1957). Cho and Salmon (2007) published an article derived from Merton in the *Journal of Communication* but cited the 1957 work. Still, the difference in his influence inside and outside of communication journals is worth noting.

By borrowing from sociology, this study may not only extend the intellectual domain of public relations research, but benefit practice, as well. Using Merton's (1936) typology from "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action" gives me a lens from which to examine why public relations campaigns have unintended consequences. I can provide practitioners with new ways to describe the human and environmental factors that possibly influence the planning, executing, and evaluating of their campaigns. It also gives public relations scholars and practitioners a new perspective from a theory outside the public relations theory cannon.

This study explores an exemplar case of a public relations campaign with two areas of unintended consequences. In the #Cupfusion campaign, the standard rollout process of a new candy product for convenience store shelves, Reese's Peanut Butter Cups stuffed with Reese's Pieces, was upended when news of the potential new product was leaked on social media with a Facebook post from a food blogger. In reaction to this unanticipated event, Hershey's and the public relations firm Ketchum decided that instead of responding to the leak in a traditional "yes or no," they would "tease" their 11 million Facebook fans with an "is it real or not?" response. The campaign was called #Cupfusion, a play on the words "cup" and the "confusion" about the reality of the product. The campaign, initially relying solely on social media, had the second unintended consequence of going viral, driving intense media interest, and a never-seen-before demand for a candy that no one could acquire. The #Cupfusion campaign changed the way Hershey thought about how Reese's lovers thought about their products, and now serves as a model for promoting these type of consumer items.

Definitions and Delimitations

My focus on the practice of public relations (and its practitioners) has driven my choice of one word at the core of the subject: *unintended*. Its selection deserves some explanation. Koehn (2010) defines an unintended consequence as an “unenvisioned effect of a purposive act, law, or policy to which human beings and other organisms adapt their behavior” (p. 5). As a social theorist, like Merton, she narrows the definition to apply typically to *unforeseen* adaptive responses to deliberate human actions or interventions in nature or society, rather than natural events such as hurricanes or wildfires.

I deviated from Merton in my use of *unintended* rather than his *unanticipated*. The word *unanticipated* implies consequences that are “unforeseen; not expected or predicted” (Soanes, 2003). While this adjective describes the phenomenon in general, for this research I want to concentrate on the actions and intentions of the *sender* of the communication, as described in the classic informational models of Berlo (1960) and Shannon and Weaver (1949), rather than the *receiver* or other factors/noise found in transactional models. This does not imply that this communication is solely for publicity or informative purposes. Rather, this research is more concerned with mediated communication, which does not have the unconscious elements of face-to-face communication. Using *unintended* reflects the intention the organization’s practitioners chose their communication in order to have an intended result or effect. So if the results or effects were not as intended, what factors influenced the resulting consequences?

Merton (1936) defined and delimited the *consequences* of purposive social action to those elements in the resulting situation that were exclusively caused by the action-- they would not have occurred if the action had not taken place (p. 895). But he also noted that concrete consequences resulted from the interplay of the action and the environment,

and those could be examined in terms of “consequences to the actor(s), and consequences to other persons mediated through the social structure, and the culture” (p. 895). This idea, that a single action can resonate to a larger effect, will be discussed in more detail when discussing complexity theory.

Public Relations

Public relations has been generally defined as “the management of communication between an organization and its publics” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 6). This was the definition used in the landmark *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication* (Grunig, 1992, p.4). After a recent industry wide campaign by the Public Relations Society of America, the definition has been “modernized” as follows: “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA, 2012). This study will be examining public relations as part of a strategic management function, so I will use the PRSA definition. This definition also emphasizes the programmatic aspects of public relations as a professional activity, which speaks to implications on practice with this research.

Public relations campaigns

Public relations campaigns have specific goals and objectives. Any communication in support of these campaigns is deliberate. This study will therefore examine public relations campaigns, rather than communication arising from less deliberate sources, such as press conferences, or unprepared remarks. Campaigns do not always have behavior change as a directly-targeted outcome. Instead campaigns may

seek to create awareness, increase knowledge, change attitudes, or to increase empowerment.

Paisley (2001) conceptualized public communication campaigns according to the objectives, methods, and reform used by the organization campaigning: a group has the objective to change the attitudes and/or behaviors of another group, using a mix of communication methods (i.e., brochures, advertisements, workshops), to make society and its individuals have a better quality of life, in some way (p. 5). For this study, as a reference, I will use McQuail's (2005) definitions of campaigns as "the planned attempt to influence public opinion, behavior, attitudes and knowledge on behalf of some cause, person, institution or topic, using different media over a specific period of time" (p. 549). However, since this study focuses on a social media campaign a more specific definition is called for.

Social media

Carr and Hayes (2014) drew on existing definitions of social media and subcategories (e.g., social network sites) from public relations, information technology, management scholarship, and the popular press, to develop a definition of social media inclusive enough to describe the technologies of 2014, yet robust enough to remain applicable in 2035. The definition they developed is tool-centric: "*Social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others*" (p. 50). While this definition does account for a broader range of communication scholarship, this researcher is more comfortable with a definition out of public relations

scholarship. Kent (2010) defined social media as “any interactive communication channel that allows for two-way interaction and feedback,” further specifying modern social media are characterized by their “potential for real-time interaction, reduced anonymity, a sense of propinquity, short response times, and the ability to ‘time shift,’ or engage the social network whenever suits each particular member” (p. 645). A public relations campaign based primarily in social media will necessarily reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the media.

Summary of Literature Review

This dissertation is informed by five areas. First I will describe Merton’s (1936) theory of the unanticipated consequences of social action, and research inspired by his typology. Merton’s typology forms a solid base, widely cited and adopted by sociology scholars, but Merton reflects the state of theory in 1936, well before the introduction of the technological advances occurring in today’s global environment. The review will include research into the unanticipated consequences of new technologies an exploration of the typology in an Indian advertising campaign

I will then review four areas of public relations research which informs different aspects of his theory, and of my research. Chaos theory offers an explanation of the unstable areas of public relations, such as public opinion. Complexity theory specifically addresses possible explanations for the behavior of publics that is unanticipated. I will also review traditional methods of strategic planning for public relations campaigns, and finally a review of social media theory and strategic planning for social media campaigns.

Overall, public relations literature leaves gaps in our understanding of unanticipated consequences in public relations campaigns. The literature does, however

offer a framework where I can situate unintended consequences. By examining literature from researchers in other disciplines, I can learn from their experience and consider how their conclusions may translate into additions to public relations theory and practice.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of unanticipated consequences in a public relations campaign. I will examine the Reese's #Cupfusion campaign in detail. Specifically, I want to see if I can use Merton's (1936) as a base to explore a potential typology for the explanation of unanticipated consequences, that practitioners can use to reflect on past campaigns and guide the preparation and execution of new campaigns. This study proposes to borrow from sociology, specifically the study of the unanticipated consequences of deliberate social action, to inform current public relations theory and practice, particularly in the areas of strategic social media campaign planning and implementation. The concept of unintended consequences, particularly how unintended consequences are almost a certainty in the complex and chaotic environment of communication in a modern digital environment, can be useful in understanding and executing the practice of public relations.

Summary of Proposed Method

Qualitative methods will be used to collect and analyze data. Qualitative research provides an opportunity for researchers to go beyond numbers and gain individual and collective feedback regarding perceptions and ideas not easily obtained through quantitative research. When asking *how* or *why*, qualitative research provides a platform for increased understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Because this study asks the how and why questions, and is focusing on a contemporary phenomenon, the case study is an

appropriate research method to answer the research questions (Yin, 2009). Case studies can provide a researcher with a highly nuanced understanding of a subject. Case study research employs multiple methods of data gathering, including semi-structured, in-depth interviews, and content analysis of news articles, social media, and interview transcripts. By using multiple methods of data gathering, this study will triangulate data to increase internal validity and reduce researcher and participant subjectivity (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010).

In this study, the Reese's #Cupfusion campaign was studied to investigate the larger phenomenon (Stake 2005b) of unintended consequences. This case was chosen because it was revelatory. A revelatory situation exists when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to researchers (Yin, 2009, p. 48). The circumstances leading to the #Cupfusion campaign were unique to the Hershey Company and Ketchum. The participants had never granted in-depth interviews to a qualitative researcher. In-person, in-depth interviews, were conducted with every member of the #cupfusion team. This gave depth of analysis and a thick rich data set.

I also chose an embedded, single-case design rather than a holistic design. A holistic design examines only the global nature of an organization or a program (Yin, 2009). In this case, two embedded units emerged from the data—the #Cupfusion team, and the Facebook comment streams. The first was best analyzed using data from the in-depth interviews, the second through content analysis of the posts.

Implications of this Study

This study has both theoretical and practical implications for public relations. Paisley (1972) argued that borrowing from a long-studied, level field is one of the strengths of focal variable fields. It offers public relations theorists opportunity to leverage the research from those fields and apply it to our 40-year-old research stream.² It will draw from theory to update and refine Merton's typology to reflect modern society and technology. By examining unintended consequences of communication in this campaign, I can start the process of recognizing anomaly, which is the beginning of a potential paradigm shift, and essential to establishing new theory and advancing science (Kuhn, 1970).

Researching the unintended consequences of communication in this case will add to public relations theory. It also answers Dozier and Lauzen's (2000) call to extend the intellectual domain of public relations. Moreover, because problem solving and theory building are integrally related (Lewin, 1946), this research can facilitate the progress of theory of campaigns. It can help Cho and Salmon (2008) "gather and make sense of scattered evidence of unintended effects and to ground them in classical and contemporary communication and social scientific theories in order to build a conceptual structure."

McKinney (1966) noted that "developing a typology, may assist advancing the theory of campaigns. As a heuristic expedient, typologies can help reduce "two types of sterility: that of the trial and error of empirically random research, and the scholasticism

² *Public Relations Review* began publishing in 1975.

of system building in the abstract’’ (p. 41). McAuley (2007) asserted “Merton’s analysis remains the only established systematic attempt to structure the phenomenon of unintended consequences; and the five sources deserve further critical review and updating’’ (p. 397). So the calls come from not only public relations but other disciplines as well.

Finally, this research informs practice. This case is considered a model inside the Hershey company, as well as a highly successful alternative new way to go-to-market (Creating #Cupfusion, n.d.). It is an example of social media campaign that includes both rhetorical and relational properties of public relations. A partial typology based on Merton’s (1936) theory will help in the planning and execution of public relations campaigns. It is also an example of how embracing chaos and complexity theory can help organizations be ready for and act when confronted with an unanticipated situation.

Organization of the Dissertation

The next chapter outlines the literature that leads to the study’s research questions and methodology. The literature review includes three major sections: 1) Merton’s (1936) theory of the unanticipated consequences of social action, and research inspired by his typology. This section will be informed by Chaos theory and Complexity theory. The last two major sections involve 2) Strategic public relations planning models; and 3) Social Media theory and social media strategic planning models. The third chapter describes the qualitative methods that were used to collect and analyze data. Specifically, I will describe my rationale for choosing case study research in order to explore the unintended consequences of communication in a public relations campaign. Chapter three details the strengths and weakness of case study research, and my rationale for choosing interviews,

media analysis, and document analysis as my data sources. Data collection topics include: participant recruitment and sampling; informed consent; pre-testing; and confidentiality. Data analysis methods, as well as issues regarding validity, reliability, generalizability, and reflexivity are addressed.

Chapter four outlines the results of this study. It describes the #Cupfusion campaign from conception, through implementation, and finally, evaluation. Then each research question is addressed, as well as trends from the interviews and media analysis. The purpose of this section is to outline the results and allow the data to speak for itself, emphasizing description over interpretation. That is reserved for chapter five, in which implications for Merton's theory and implications for strategic campaign planning will be discussed, along with theoretical and practical contributions to the field. Finally, this chapter will note the limitations of the study and suggest possibilities for future research. Appendix A provides a draft of a semi-structured in-depth interview guide, Appendix B includes relevant IRB protocols and consent forms, Appendix C contains the initial recruiting questionnaire, and Appendix D is a summary of Facebook data.

Chapter 2--Literature Review

Chapter two provides an overview of the literature related to Merton's (1936) theory of the unanticipated consequences of social action, social science research inspired by the theory, and public relations research that provides context and theory to understand the possible application of Merton's theory to public relations theory and practice. First will be a thorough explanation of Merton's theory, and an explanation of the five parts of his typology: Lack of foreknowledge, habit, myopia, values, and self-defeating predictions. Then there will be an overview of social science, technology and communication research inspired by Merton.

Since two parts of Merton's theory, lack of foreknowledge, and self-defeating predictions, involve more abstract ideas of the unpredictability of consequences, I will augment their explanation with a review of chaos and complexity theory for their ideas on the causes of unanticipated consequences. Three parts of Merton's theory, habit, myopia, and values, are internal factors in an organization that can be informed by public relations theory that focuses on management. They will be reviewed in the next section. That will be followed by a review the role of public relations in current strategic campaign planning models. Finally, because this research examines a public relations campaign involving social media, specifically Facebook, I will review applicable social media theory. This review of the literature leads to two specific questions regarding the application of Merton's theory to the unanticipated consequences of communication in public relations campaigns.

The unanticipated consequences of social action

Merton (1936), applied a more scientific and systematic (rather than theological or teleological) treatment to the problem of the unanticipated consequences of social action. He put the following parameters on his theory. First, the theory must be limited to isolated or individual actions, rather than systems of actions. He feared that treatments of systems of actions would introduce “unmanageable complications” (p. 895). Second, he noted that just because consequences of actions might be unintended it did not necessarily mean they were necessarily *undesirable*, either for the actor, or from the perspective of outsider observers. Third, although the source of the consequence was isolated to the actor(s), the consequences could affect both the actor(s) and others, through interaction with the environment, and mediated through social structure and culture. Fourth, he noted that actions were deliberate, in that they involved motives and choices, not simply instinct. But he added that the purpose of a deliberate action might not be clear-cut—more often than not it will be somewhat nebulous or hazy. Finally, he stressed that the action did not necessarily have to be rational (as seen from an objective perspective) and that whether or not it was rational or irrational should not be identified with success or failure of the action (p. 896).

Merton also identified two methodological pitfalls common to any investigation of deliberate action. The first problem is causal. How can you determine, with any certainty, which consequences can be attributed to the action? This must be addressed and solved (or at least with an acceptable level of uncertainty) in every empirical case. The second problem is ascertaining the actual purposes of the action (p. 897). It is tempting, when conducting post-event analysis, to take an apparently unintended

consequence, especially if it generates a positive result, and say it was actually intended. Or in layman's terms "We meant to do that all along."

Having framed the theory, Merton (1936) identified five factors involved in unanticipated consequences. To eliminate misunderstanding, he emphasized these "are—precisely—factors, and that none of them serves by itself to explain any concrete case" (p. 898). They are: 1) ignorance (i.e., incomplete information); 2) error (in the appraisal of current situation, inference of the future, and the selection and implementation of a course of action); 3) imperious immediacy of interest (i.e., more concern with immediate consequences than that of future); 4) basic values (i.e., little consideration of further consequences because of espousal of certain fundamental values); and self-defeating prophecy (i.e., the prediction itself changes the human behavior).

McAuley (2007), updated Merton's terms to: Lack of foreknowledge, habit, myopia, values, and self-defeating predictions (p. 387). Here are expanded definitions of the sources of unanticipated consequences.

Lack of foreknowledge is concerned with the often limited ability to apply knowledge as the basis for future intentional action. It is by far the most obvious source of unanticipated consequences. Lack of foreknowledge, or inadequate knowledge, could lazily be used as the only reason for failing to anticipate outcomes, no one can predict the future with any consistency. Merton (1936) noted that most previous discussions of unanticipated consequences were limited to this explanation, read, in effect as "if only we had known, we would have known," which he dismissed as tautology (p. 898). He accepted that few situations are totally new however, and since actors' past experience is the guide to future expectations, the more exact one's knowledge of the details and facts,

the higher the probability for accurate prediction. For Merton (1936) though, knowledge is unlikely to be sufficient to ensure that action always results in anticipated outcomes, because “the interplay of forces and circumstances . . . are so numerous and complex that prediction of them is quite beyond our reach” (pp. 899 – 900). It is difficult to ascertain if Merton could have predicted the current communication environment of global instant messaging and the chaotic universe of social media. However, it is possible to review the public relations literature concerning Chaos and Complexity theory, to gain a better understanding of this factor in Merton’s theory of unintended consequences.

Chaos – Link to Lack of Foreknowledge

The idea of chaos can be upsetting in a public relations context, with its implications of loss of control, disruptions and crisis. But put into context, chaos can be useful in many public relations situations when perceptions or conditions may seem unmanageable. It is easy for those of us with a Western mind-set to adopt easy dichotomies, such as “good versus evil.” Similarly, it is easy to contrast order with chaos; chaos equaling disorder or even anti-order, and a synonym for randomness. The scientific definition is more nuanced. It sees chaos as ‘not-order’ (which is not equivalent to anti-order), and that chaos may contain and/or precede order (Byrne, 1998, p. 16).

Chaos theory deals with the idea of non-linear relations, the changes which do not fit into a linear law of a single cause and consequent effect over time. When viewed as a whole, chaotic systems manifest definite, observable patterns and structures

(fractals³ are one example, or a Nautilus shell, where if one looks at the whole, the repetition of the original form becomes evident). But at no single point could their future direction be predicted from their past history. So, for example, while it is possible to see an underlying order in public opinion over time, it is impossible to predict exactly what a given person will say on an issue, despite what they may have said on a previous occasion.

Chaos theory is a break from the base theories of the physical universe, as explained by Newton (1999) and Galileo (1989), for example, that have informed social science in the past. Their universe is a machine, operating under unchanging laws, so it is possible to go forwards or backwards in time, without change. This type of universe is what would be considered a *complicated* system versus a *complex* system. In a complicated system, like a car or a computer, there are thousands of parts in a system that work together, but each can be reduced to its single function. In a complex system each part may act differently each time, based on interactions with other members of the system, and the actions of a single part, as we have said, may not be predicted based on past actions. This is the universe of Poincaré (the discoverer of Chaos theory), Einstein, and Heisenberg (Erçetin, Açıkalin, & Bülbul, 2013). Chaotic systems can self-order and self-renew, with periods of stability punctuated with rapid change in often unpredictable, yet irreversible direction.

³ A [*fractal*](#) is an object whose parts, at infinitely many levels of magnification, appear geometrically similar to the whole.

Murphy (1996) examined the implications of chaos theory to public relations. After defining key features and terms from chaos theory, she notes that chaos “may offer new models for public opinion and to raise questions on how (or even whether) organizations can control public perceptions of issues” (p. 102). Chaos theory casts doubt about the very nature of the role of public relations professionals...because it emphasizes uncertainty, open-endedness, plurality, and change, chaos theory runs counter to the goal-oriented, certainty-seeking mode which many public relations professionals and their managements are currently trying to refine” (p. 102).

This doubt, however, is tempered by chaos theory’s usefulness in helping to describe unstable areas such as public opinion. And it implies that these unstable areas can be better studied using qualitative areas aimed at understanding, rather than quantitative methods aimed at prediction and control (Murphy, 1996, p.103). Chaos theory can provide researchers with insights into issues management by providing linkages between diverse areas that require a higher sense of sensitivity to their underlying context.

Interest groups, as well as issues, can be understood in terms of chaotic systems. These groups can originate from isolated individuals with similar issues who somehow find each other, then gather, organize and gain momentum. Gerlach (1987) observed that interest groups often resemble chaotic systems in that such groups are segmented (composed of multiple units rather than a single command center), polycentric (tied to many different leaders or centers of direction), and networked (linked by loose ideological ties). They appear to come from seemingly nowhere, out of nothing. So it may be difficult for public relations professionals to identify what the exact “issue” is, or

who to communicate with (Murphy, 1996). In fact, the chaotic nature of interest groups severely limits public relations ability to ‘manage’ such groups. Efforts to reshape a group’s perceptions, whether through education, negotiation, or coercion, often have little impact. But even non-linear, seemingly unpredictable systems have a deep, underlying structure. In chaos theory, this is called an *attractor*.

An attractor is an organizing principle, an inherent shape or state of affairs to which a phenomenon will always tend to return as it evolves, no matter how random each single moment may seem (Murphy, 1996, p. 98). Attractors resist change, regardless of outside pressures, because chaotic systems are inherently reflexive. The underlying order in a chaotic system may constrain the erratic behavior and serve as a regulating force on the system (Sellnow, Seeger, & Ulmer, 2002, p. 273). On the other hand, positive feedback--or accumulated dissonance within the system--constantly works against the status quo. As a result, after a number of symmetrical iterations, a chaotic system becomes vulnerable to destabilization even by very small changes--the classic “straw that broke the camel’s back” (Murphy, 1996, p. 105).

Attractors can also emerge during crisis in response to chaotic situations. Sellnow, Seeger, and Ulmer’s (2002) research on the 1997 Red River Valley flood found that agencies assisting with recovery and renewal were strange attractors. People coalesced around National Guard members, who appeared to offer comfort (p. 286). Sundstrom, Briones and Janoske (2013) found Twitter acted as a strange attractor, where the concept of interacting agents emerged as a key concept of relationship building, offering some degree of order and stability (p. 354).

Such systems follow their own logic; while their inherent instability makes change inevitable, external forces have limited power to affect the timing or nature of the change. Chaotic situations are characterized by *strange attractors*, where outcomes, while within a bounded range, are constantly wandering and behaving unpredictably (Sellnow, Seeger & Ulmer, 2002). The integrating ideology of an interest group acts as a strange attractor: a set of overriding ideologies, beliefs, values, and customs that powerfully govern the behavior of the individual members of the group. Often this strange attractor is discernable only after the fact; still, understanding that these strange attractors are key components to issues management allows public relations practitioners and researchers to look past short range or immediate challenges and look for the underlying attractors.

By helping to understand the nature of complex systems, systems that can self-destruct and self-renew, or organize around strange attractors, chaos theory informs the study of the unintended consequences of communication in public relations campaigns. Merton used the term *lack of foreknowledge* as being concerned with the often limited ability to apply knowledge as the basis for *future* intentional action. Chaos theory addresses the idea of predictability in chaotic systems. In chaos theory, measuring complexity is largely a function of perspective. Often, quantitative methods cannot manifest sufficient level of detail given the complexity of systems of human interaction. By measuring accurately at a small scale, using qualitative methods, one can discern patterns at a larger scale (Sellnow, Seeger & Ulmer, 2002). Merton noted that the more exact one's knowledge of the details and facts, the higher the probability for accurate prediction. Understanding chaos theory, then can possibly help public relations

practitioners from, in some instances, being “the straw that broke the camel’s back,” or the initiating factor in an unintended consequence.

Complexity – Link to Lack of Foreknowledge

To better understand the implications of Merton’s (1936) theory, one needs to probe more deeply into his idea “the interplay of forces and circumstances . . . are so numerous and complex that prediction of them is quite beyond our reach” (pp. 899 – 900). This is the domain of complexity theory.

The social scientist David Byrne, who wrote: “Every Ph.D. student in everything should get to grips with the ‘chaos/complexity’ program, not for reasons of fashion or even legitimate career building but because this is the way the world works and we need to understand that” (Byrne, 1998, p. 161), defined complexity as “the domain between linearly determined order and indeterminate chaos” (Byrne, 1998, p.1).

The post modernists’ idea that public relations is not static, but rather is in a state of constant change based on the environment, context or conflict, where outcomes are more difficult to predict, is well described by *complexity theory*. Murphy (2000) notes that complex systems are often discussed in terms of chaos theory, nonlinear dynamical systems theory and synergetics (p. 450). Murphy, however, uses the term complexity theory to describe the behavior of many individual actors, who by acting to adapt to their local situation, inadvertently accumulate into large scale patterns that affect the greater society, “often in ways that *could not have been anticipated*” (p. 450).

In complexity theory, one never attempts control, but rather a “mutual, constrained adaptation” (Murphy, 2007). Complexity does not assume the control is given up voluntarily; it takes an ethically neutral position with respect to mutual

influence. The individuals in complex systems coevolve based on history, norms, interactions, power and resources. Complex systems may remain stable for long periods, and then abruptly make a dramatic change. Complex systems always adapt (Murphy, 2000). Understanding complex systems would help mitigate the *lack of foreknowledge* factor as described in Merton's theory of unanticipated consequences.

Complexity theory and responding to unanticipated events

The majority of literature concerned with responding to unanticipated events in public relations can be found in crisis management (Barton, 2001; Benoit 1995, 1997; Coombs 2006, 2011, 2014; Coombs & Holiday 1996, 2002; Lerbinger, 2012; Lukaszewski, 1997; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2014). Gilpin and Murphy (2006) would assert that the underlying assumptions of those traditional approaches to crisis management are flawed, from their general/philosophical assumptions about the “way things work,” to their assumptions about organizations, and, finally, their assumptions about organizational crises and how best to prevent and manage them (p. 379). In the traditional crisis management paradigm, assumptions include: 1) it is possible to control events or perceptions of events; 2) ambiguity and uncertainty are undesirable; 3) there are clear boundaries between the organization and its environment; and 4) the best way to handle time-sensitive, important decisions is to follow a detailed plan prepared ahead of time. This approach attempts to eliminate or control ambiguity, paradox and uncertainty rather than accept these “as unavoidable and uncontrollable characteristics inherent in our world” (p. 379).

In contrast, complexity-based thinking posits a “recognizable but unknowable future and the absence of stability in any but inert systems” (p. 379). Reframed for

complexity, the assumptions become: 1) it is impossible to control events or perceptions of events; the organization can only control its own behavior and develop new patterns of interaction; 2) ambiguity and uncertainty are unavoidable, and should be accepted and embraced; 3) the organization is bound by fluid changing, social constructed boundaries; and 4) the best way to handle time-sensitive, important decisions is to develop the expertise necessary for skilled improvisation (p. 382).

Sundstrom, Briones and Janosky (2013) used complexity theory as a lens to analyze crisis communication among six non-profit organizations' responses to anti-abortion terrorism. They found that the organizations were able to self-organize in a complex crisis situation, using organizational, personal and social history as themes.

The complexity-based approach to unintended consequences is challenging to those researchers and practitioners used to thinking along traditional, more positivist lines. This approach poses a challenge to a theory of unanticipated consequences, for it is tempting to use the theory in a reductionist manner. However, by embracing complexity, it may be possible to develop theory or practice that can function in a complex world, i.e., the World Wide Web and social media.

Additional factors in Merton

To return to Merton's (1936) five factors, this paper now turns to the second factor, *habit*. For Merton, habit enacts the assumption that prior experience is relevant to the future, so that there is an expectation that if an action has been successful in the past, it will continue to deliver success into the future. The actor fails to recognize that just because an action worked in certain circumstances, it may not under any and all conditions. This can be an individual or an organizational factor. Its persistence in

organizations can be summarized in the acknowledgement that, “We’ve always done it this way,” is considered “one of the most dangerous phrases in the English language” (Hopper, quoted by Surdon, 1976). Habit is concerned with automatic responses, representing “rigidities in individual behavior”, which “block the satisfaction of old wants in a changing social environment” (p. 901). Another example is the actor concentrates only one aspect of the situation, because it is familiar, to the exclusion of other pertinent factors. This action can range from simple neglect to a stubborn or even pathological refusal to consider certain elements of the problem (p. 901). Merton (1936) considers this last type a subject for “psychiatric literature” (p. 901). Examples of this type of extreme adherence to habit include stories ranging from Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, to Churchill’s refusal to listen to council in the Gallipoli Campaign (Manchester, 2015), to the modern example of the Iraq invasion of 2003 (Isikoff, & Corn, 2006), where this type of extreme habit borders on *hubris*, or irrational self-confidence.

Myopia is McAulay’s (2007) way of encapsulating Merton’s third source of unintended consequences, or the “imperious immediacy of interest” (p. 891). Myopia concerns situations where the individual is so determined to satisfy present and local needs that the broader effects of his actions are ignored. Merton relates this concept to Adam Smith’s explanation of market forces, where self-interested individuals seek to create wealth in the short term but nevertheless support market forces which “promote an end which was no part of [their] invention” (pp. 891 – 892). These “ends” may or may not be in the long-term interest of the actor. Merton notes that it may be more rational to perform an objective analysis of the situation before acting, but ironically, the more intense the interest, the more likely the action will be taken without full consideration.

This factor of unanticipated consequences features the possibility that individuals may act with no concern for the consequences conceived outside a narrow definition of time and space; that individuals may be *myopic*. Merton (1936) uses the example of a couple practicing birth control out of economic interest may underestimate the influences the age composition and size in sibling relationships, and the profound consequences they can have on the psychology and social character of their children (p. 903)

Values, Merton argues, can contain within themselves the very conditions which undermine their own tenets. This is especially true when the people performing specific actions based on values aren't concerned with the objective consequences of their actions. Their only interest is the personal satisfaction of performance of their duty, whether it is family, community, country or god. He provides the example of the Protestant ethic and the argument that their ascetism paradoxically leads to increased wealth because it presumes adherence to the work ethic, coupled with a reluctance to spend the rewards of that work (p. 903). He notes that by acting upon a dominant set of values in a particular area, these individuals fail to take into the consequences they are having on other, interrelated areas. He notes this paradox: that often these other, interrelated areas will "*react* upon the fundamental value system...in a process of secularization...that causes the transformation or breakdown of basic value systems." In other words, "the realization of values may lead to their renunciation" (p. 903).

Finally, *Self-defeating predictions* constitute social knowledge which, by its very existence, changes the course of events in such a way that the prediction fails to materialize. In effect, "public predictions of future social developments are frequently not sustained precisely because the prediction has become a new element in the concrete

situation, thus tending to change the initial course of developments” (p. 893). Merton uses the example of Marx’s prediction of the progressive concentration of wealth and resultant misery of the masses was undermined by socialist teachings that facilitated the organization of labor, which in turn countered the developments which Marx predicted. Merton notes that predictions of social scientists often fail to include the effect their prediction will have on the situation. This example and this factor are more specific to social prediction and planning than communication. However, by communicating predictive information to a stable situation, for example, predicting a company’s stock price will rise by ten percent, may in fact see a rise of double or triple that amount.

Taken as a typology, Merton’s (1936) effort has been hugely successful, having been cited more than 20,000 times in books and academic journals (HistCite, 2012). Some highlights of research in sociology follow.

Research on the unanticipated consequences of social action

While, as noted earlier, there has been little published research into the unanticipated consequences of deliberate communication in public relations campaigns, there has been a great deal of research involving the unanticipated consequences of activist social programs, and the adoption and use of new technology in society. Edward Tenner (1996) noted how human society’s naïve trust in technological improvements to help us subdue nature has led to unanticipated (and undesirable) results in many cases, from agricultural/environmental disasters, including fire ants (pp. 110-113), carp (p. 127-132), kudzu (p. 145-147) and eucalypts (pp. 153-160) to “improvements” in protective gear, such as shoulder pads and helmets that have had the undesirable consequence of

causing an increase in serious injuries in American football, due to players feeling it is “safe” to tackle with their head (p. 219).

Tenner also notes how adoption of new technology, especially computers, has had unanticipated consequences. The transition to an information-based economy has reduced the number of production injuries but increased the number of injuries due to repetitive work syndrome, and health problems due to a sedentary workplace (p. 171). He notes, with irony, how the supposed paperless office has instead become a factory for the production of printed white office paper (p. 202). Tenner (1996) explains the unintended consequences of the explosion of software programs designed to increase communication and productivity, by noting that by giving managers the ability to write, print or send their own correspondence, the consequent reduction in clerical support staff actually caused a decline in overall organizational productivity (p. 208).

Resistance to technical change, or use of new technology in unexpected ways in organizations, is another unanticipated consequence of what is intended to be a positive change in an organization. McAulay (2007) used Merton’s typology to describe the implementation of computer-mediated communication in England. She studied the implementation of two technologies, videoconferencing and email. She explained that media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) suggested most managers and employees would consider videoconferencing an acceptable replacement for face-to-face meetings, yet managers had idiosyncratic reactions (McAulay, 2007, p. 391). Some loved the technology, some hated it, but she could find no underlying factor for the result. In regard to the introduction of email, she found that ease-of-use increased the total volume of correspondence. Managers adapted to the large amounts of email they were now

receiving by falling back on old habits, such as printing the emails, before answering (p. 392). They quickly adapted to the new electronic environment by sending out and expecting replies to emails outside normal business hours (p. 395). So the expected efficiencies of the new email system in fact had increased the overall burden of communication in the organization.

McAuley concluded that Merton's typology could be used to provide "a framework which can be used to explain in a systematic fashion important features associated with the implementation of computer-mediated communications" (p. 396). She noted that lack of foreknowledge in the way people reacted to the new technology made it problematic whether to make the changes or not. Habit, in particular, was detrimental to implementation of the email system in particular. Managers did not appreciate that electronic records were as permanent as printed ones (p. 392). However, she also found that as users experimented and grew familiar with the new technology on their own, they became more effective users. She appreciated both an interventionist and *laissez-faire* reaction to implementation of new forms of communication, recognizing that unintended consequences can be pervasive, but their impacts may not always necessitate intervention.

Gillon (2000), in his examination of the unintended consequences of activist social policy ranging from the Federal Welfare Policy of 1935 through the Campaign Finance Reform Act of 1974, noted how the unanticipated consequences grew out of "the peculiarities of American political ideology, or what Merton called "Basic Values" (p. 237). So, for example, it is impossible to fully understand the American approach to welfare policies without appreciating the American obsession with individuality and self-

help; just as is it difficult to reconcile the conflict between the public desire to limit campaign spending with the individual right to free speech (p.239).

Sherden (2011) used Merton's typology (1936) to frame the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He distills Merton's typology into the basics: "ignorance, error in analysis, and the overzealousness of decision makers too wedded to their plans to consider potential outcomes other than those they intended" (p. 5). Ignorance was evident in that there were no weapons of mass destruction, as claimed. The president seemed to have little awareness that the Sunni and Shiite Islamic sects had been in conflict for nearly 500 years. Error was evident in declaring premature victory. And continual pleas to stay the course years after conditions called for a new approach showed how the Bush administration was wedded to its original plan (Sherden, 2011).

Sherden goes on to expand and refine Merton, introducing eight social mechanisms that could help to describe and potentially foresee the possible outcomes of decisions. These social mechanisms are: 1) Organized Complexity; 2) Chain Reactions; 3) Reinforcing Feedback; 4) Balancing Forces; 5) Lock-In; 6) Adaptation; 7) Emergence; and 8) Disturbed Equilibria (p.6). He notes these social forces are in play whenever organizations or governments, large and small, deliberately attempt to alter natural and complex social systems, and they complicate the process of thinking about interventions in advance. He encourages small-scale experimentation before launching large-scale interventions.

Koehn (2010) divided unintended consequences in to those that she considered foreseeable from unforeseeable. Foreseeable consequences are those where people adapt to change in what seems a rational manner. For example, increasing the level of risk in an

organization will probably result in a change in the amount or type of reward people expect to compensate for that increased risk. For example, the Sarbanes-Oxley law imposed greater personal liability on board members. As a result, board members sought greater compensation to sit on corporate boards (p. 17).

Other changes to cost structures have similarly unanticipated but probably foreseeable effects. For example, Koehn (2010) noted that raising taxes on millionaires in Maryland, instead of raising revenue, as expected, actually cause revenue to drop, because millionaires moved out of the state rather than pay the increased tax (p. 19).

Koehn contrasts these foreseeable unanticipated consequences with those that are unforeseen. Unforeseen unanticipated consequences occur when people adapt in exceptionally brazen ways, such as acting illegally, or even with intent to kill. They happen when the consequences are incredibly far removed from the original intent; for example, mosquito nets donated to Zambia to stop malaria were repurposed as fine-mesh fishing nets, which caused overfishing and led to widespread hunger (p. 29).

Koehn notes that unanticipated consequences may happen as subtle but perverse by-products of choices. Her example is the rise in the use of index funds, promoted as safe, low-maintenance investment vehicles, which had the perverse effect of leading to increased losses to fraud among individual companies, who were now freed from the scrutiny of investors looking at the “big picture” (p.30).

In much of the preceding research from sociology, unintended consequences often appear months or even years after the initial action (Gillen, 2000; Sherden, 2011; Tenner, 1996). The unintended consequences of intentional communication often come much

more quickly (Penn, 2015). The next section describes efforts to use Merton's typology in communication research, and how it differs from research in sociology.

Unanticipated consequences in public relations research

Penn (2015) explored using Merton's (1936) theory of unanticipated consequences to analyze the case of the JWT India advertising firm's release of three "scam" ads, meant only to be entered in competitions (O'Sullivan-Gavin, & Amazeen, 2016). The ads were sent to Ads of the World (AotW), a web log repository for ad industry insiders, ostensibly promoting the size of the rear storage space of the sub-compact Ford Figo. Accompanied by the tagline: "Leave your worries behind with Figo's extra-large boot," (trunk), one of the posters featured a cartoon showing three bound and gagged women in the rear of a vehicle driven by Silvio Berlusconi, the former Italian prime minister. Another version showed the reality television star Paris Hilton using the car to abduct the Kardashian sisters and a third featured the Formula 1 driver Michael Schumacher kidnapping three of his rivals, Sebastian Vettel, Fernando Alonso, and Lewis Hamilton.

The images, especially the one featuring Berlusconi, went "viral." Within hours of its posting on adsoftheworld.com, the image was reblogged dozens of times, with mostly negative content (Stampler, 2013). The timing of the release was exceptionally poor, coming only two days after the Indian Parliament, in response to months of public outcry about the need to protect women from sexual violence, passed a new anti-rape law (Balchand, 2013). The release also increased tensions between Italy and India over the legal status of two Italian marines, who were serving on a cargo ship off India's coast in 2012, and were accused of shooting and killing two Indian fishermen they mistook for

pirates (Mezzofiore, 2014). On March 23, 2013, Ford India apologized for the ads, noting in their apology that the ads were never intended for release to the public (Mackey, 2013), which did little to quell the outcry. On March 27 both the managing partner and creative director of JWT India stepped down, and on March 28 the employee who approved the release of the ads was fired.

Penn's (2015) analysis found that Merton's typology of unintended consequences could: 1) be used to explain why the JWT India employees allowed their ads, never intended for actual commercial release, on the Internet; 2) be used to inform the worldwide media reaction and events that followed; and 3) be used to possibly avoid or mitigate the crisis. They didn't use *foreknowledge* to anticipate how the "viral" nature of the World Wide Web would spread the unanticipated reaction to a "scam" ad. These types of ads were common around award competitions and prior examples had received awards. They had a *habit* of creating these kinds of "edgy" ads for competitions, not considering that their posters had the potential to be seen and reacted world-wide. The blog curator, who had rejected campaigns in the past, thought these particular ads were just a bad joke. Other bloggers, operating in a world of instantaneous news and a desire for readership, saw the controversial content and passed it on, also possibly out of *habit*, but also because the violence implied in the images clashed with their *values* as curators of content on the Internet.

The JWT employees certainly displayed *myopia* or they could have imagined that by using the images of scantily-clad, bound and gagged women they could anger an activist public that had just succeeded in influencing the Indian Parliament to pass an anti-rape law. The terms "gang rape," "protests," and "December" (the month when a

young woman was raped to death on public transportation [Srivias, 2013]) were prevalent in the early news stories, tweets and web posts. The *values* they displayed by picturing a past-his-prime race car driver and a B-list celebrity getting rid of their rivals might be funny, especially to an industry crowd, depicting a politician accused of paying for sex with an underage girl with three bound and gagged women in the boot was crossing into more serious territory. The fact that the posters were cartoons, rather than photo shopped images, had little mitigation effect. Those outside the industry (and many within it) did not get the joke at all. The terms “sexist,” “misogynist,” “controversial,” “outrage,” and “tasteless” described worldwide reaction.

Penn (2015) concluded that understanding Merton’s (1936) typology could have mitigated the crisis. The “Excellent” practice of public relations uses communication to manage relations between organizations and their publics (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1999), manages that relationship with a global perspective (Bardhan, 2003; Grunig et al., 1995), and posits that public relations practitioners can perform a bridging role in that relationship (Grunig, 2006). So, in this case, having a public relations practitioner in JWT India who understood and could apply Merton’s typology to the release of the Figo posters would have been an “excellent” idea. By questioning the *habit* of releasing “scam” ads to AotW in a *myopic* intent to win an Abby award, the public relations practitioner could have scanned the current political and social environment in India and observed the tensions between India and Italy, as well as the climate of heightened sensitivity on the issue of violence against women and the recent events in Parliament. Armed with *knowledge* JWT could have questioned their *values* and decided that maybe

the posters weren't that funny, in context, and that putting them out *predicting* they would create 'buzz' could be *self-defeating* (p.21).

This initial exploration of the Merton typology was the only direct application in the public relations literature. Merton's typology has been used by other researchers in communication. Portes (2000) extended Merton's thesis to argue that multiple contingencies (e.g., concealed goals, midcourse shifts, unexpected effects) could lead to unintended policy outcomes. Cho and Salmon (2007) noted a case where, although changing community health policy was not among the list of intended outcomes, the Minnesota Heart Health Program unintentionally galvanized the political constituents in the treatment city of Bloomington to influence passing a city ordinance against cigarette vending machines (p. 298). Cho and Salmon (2007), also studied the unintended consequences of communication in public health campaigns, and developed a typology which extended Merton's (1936) typology, especially in the areas of *habit*, *myopia*, and *values*.

Based on this explanation of Merton's (1936) theory of unanticipated consequences, and a review of literature from sociology, technology, public relations, and communication relating to Merton's theory, the following research question is proposed:

RQ1: How, if at all, does the process in which this organization developed and executed the #Cupfusion public relations campaign, and its resulting unintended consequences, reflect Merton's theory of unanticipated consequences?

This campaign contained two phases with unanticipated consequences. The first phase began as a standard product rollout which resulted in an unanticipated leak of information. The second phase was heavily dependent on social media, particularly

Facebook. This next section will review both traditional and social media models for campaign planning and supporting theory.

Strategic planning for public relations campaigns

In the mountains of literature regarding public communication campaigns, it is possible to find numerous examples of what a successful campaign looks like, but no unifying theory to unite them across the communication discipline. “Scholars in various sectors of the communication discipline have yet to define communication campaigns in terms that are sufficiently precise for the development of a system of formal propositions or theory” (Atkin & Rice, 2012). However, communication scholars have come to some consensus on what constitutes a campaign. Historically, the term campaign has its origins in the lexicon of the military—a campaign is a distinct phase of war designed to accomplish specific objectives. Now this definition has been broadened to encompass a wide array of communication strategies. A widely accepted definition goes as follows: “Public communication campaigns are defined as purposive attempts to inform or influence behaviors in large audiences within a specified time period using an organized set of communications activities and featuring an array of mediated messages in multiple channels generally to produce noncommercial benefits to individuals and society” (Rice & Atkin, 2009, Rogers and Storey, 1987). Working from this broad definition of campaigns this next section will review some common strategic planning concepts and models for public relations campaigns.

“Communication programs should begin with formative research, then develop achievable and measurable objectives, implement the program, and end with evaluation of whether the objectives have been met” (Grunig, 2009, pp 12-13). These four-step

processes, or some variation, are recommended by most textbooks dealing with public relations practice (Smith, 2013). Many stem from the popular RACE acronym (research, action, communication, and evaluation) developed by John Marston (1963) in *The Nature of Public Relations*.

For Marston, *research* meant: knowing your employer/client's mind; knowing the environment; and knowing "the opinions or attitudes currently held by the groups of people toward whom one wishes to direct persuasive communication" (p.163). He insists that only after a situation is really known can one move on to *action*, which is measured not only in words and writing, but by the physical acts one undertakes. "The public relations man thus becomes an expert not only in saying, but in doing" (p. 166).

In the RACE acronym the "C" is for communication. Marston (1963) notes a public relations communicator must be skilled both in understanding the nature of the many communication media that might be used, and understanding the communications process itself. For Marston the danger is falling for the "illusion of communication" in which volume is mistaken for comprehension (p. 167). Finally, Marston notes that *evaluation* is the step most likely to be omitted in practice. He contrasts public relations and its kinship with social sciences to the exact measurement and replicative nature of the physical sciences, and notes that when faced with statements or results that cannot be measured exactly, employers or clients may dismiss those statements as "mumbo-jumbo," which encourages public relations practitioners to skip the expense of evaluation and move on to the next job (p.168). He also notes that when done properly, evaluation closely resembles research, except it is conducted at the end of the job. His formula then takes on the shape of a spiral, with each conclusion leading to renewed action (p.169).

Crifasti (2000), felt that the RACE model left gaps in the strategic planning process. She coined the acronym ROSIE (research, objectives, strategies, implementation, and evaluation) to help clarify the planning part of the process. This process encourages gathering more basic research in the first part of the process about the client, publics and the environment before setting objectives and designing strategies.

These processes are important for this study because they describe how most organizations develop and execute campaigns. It is not the purpose of this literature review to conduct an exhaustive review of public relations textbooks. However, this review will include Smith's (2013) process as an example. His four phases of strategic planning include: Formative research (analyzing the situation, analyzing the organization, analyzing the publics); Strategy (establishing goals and objectives, formulating action and response strategies, developing the message strategy); Tactics (selecting communication tactics, implementing the strategic plan); and Evaluative Research (evaluating the strategic plan) (p. 14).

Hendrix (1998) and Hendrix and Hayes (2007), in their case-study approach, consider the public relations process as a "method for solving problems" (p.4). They use the ROPE acronym, which stand for: *research*, a process for identifying and learning about (1) a client or institution that has (2) a problem or potential problem to be solved, which involves (3) one or more publics or audiences; setting *objectives* to solve the problem, which might involve informing, influencing or modifying behaviors; planning and executing a *program* to accomplish the objectives; and finally, to *evaluate* the success of their solution, using monitoring and adjustment.

Kelly, (2001) considers the ROPE model flawed because it ignores ongoing relationships with strategic publics. She adds a fifth step to the process—*stewardship*, “which prescribes maintenance of relationships and makes the public relations process truly cyclical; that is, the process does not begin each time with completely unknown publics” (p. 279). In the ROPES process model, stewardship completes the process and furnishes an essential loop back to the beginning of the relationship being managed. The stewardship step in ROPES contains four elements: (1) *reciprocity*, where the organization demonstrates gratitude for support; (2) *responsibility*, where the organization acts responsibly to its supporters; (3) *reporting*, or being accountable; and (4) *relationship nurturing*, an ongoing process that supports ethical standards and behaviors by practitioners and organizations (Kelly, 2001, p. 283).

The last section of literature was focused how traditional public relations campaigns are developed and executed. However, the ubiquitous presence of social media in modern society has redefined how public relations campaigns must be approached. The next section will explore how social media has changed the nature of public relations campaigns.

Social media and public relations

From the point of view of interpersonal communications and relations, there is no doubt that digital technologies and social media have contributed to a major alteration in the way people communicate and relate to one another. The culture of increased connectivity, which allows anyone to be online and to connect to others, has made it easier to form online human relations, but at the same time limit direct human-to-human relations. Still, digital technologies have changed the way experience intimacy and live

social experiences (Turkle, 2011). The Pew Research Center (Smith & Anderson, 2016) indicates that 15% of American adults have used online dating sites or mobile dating apps, including 27% of adults 18-24. Another study conducted by the same organization (Lenhart & Duggan, 2014) shows that 25% of married or partnered adults who text, have texted their partner while they were both home together, that 21% of cell-phone owners or internet users in a committed relationship have felt closer to their spouse or partner because of exchanges they had online or via text message.

These results indicate that digital technologies are not simply tools that facilitate communications, they have a substantial impact on the way humans interact and relate to one another. So how might these possible changes in interpersonal relations and communications affect the way organizations and publics interact? What are the consequences for organization–public relationships? So, while there is ample knowledge that the onset of new and social media has influenced the practice of public relations, there is some disagreement whether this is a positive or negative development.

Kent (2010, 2013) notes that technology has changed the way publics obtain information. They no longer must rely on media gatekeepers, and now obtain information directly from organizations via social media and hand-held devices. This has disrupted the idea of shared public knowledge—people are now forced to individually decide what sources to pay attention to. Kent argues that citizens need to be informed about issues of public interest, not just their own private interests and personal entertainment, and that new technology has made this increasingly difficult. He sees a role for public relations researchers and practitioners to use new technology that both advances public discourse, democracy, and public relations (p. 340). He says that while public relations

professionals have been quick to embrace new technologies (Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008), the use of that technology has largely been as marketing and advertising tools (Taylor & Kent, 2010), rather than a potential to enhance relationship building, problem solving, and crowd sourcing by using dialogue and community (Kent, 2013). For Kent, the problem is not the medium (the Internet) but the way it is being used as a replacement for a weakened mass media. Kent states, “Because of social media technology, public relations professionals have regressed from our role as organization–public relationship builders and counselors, to marketers, advertisers, and strategic communicators” (p. 341). He calls for new spaces where individuals can communicate as individuals rather than customers, with clear rules for participation, and verified identities, where relationships can help build communities, not exploit publics.

Valentini (2014) questions the dominant assessment in public relations research that “using social media is good” (p. 171). She notes that research has shown that social media allow organizations to achieve a number of objectives, including: the ability to communicate directly with their stakeholders and publics (Kent, 2013; Wright & Hinson, 2014); to create dialogs and develop relationships with stakeholders and publics (Kelleher, 2009; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012); to increase organizational visibility and image (Gilpin, 2010; Yang & Kent, 2014); and to influence customer opinion on brands (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Men & Tsai, 2013).

Social media is noted for its ability to help enable more symmetrical, two-way communications between organizations and publics (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). But Valentini (2014) cautions that these types of communications can exist only if there is a *flow* of conversations between recognized voices within organizations and publics. This

is not just an organization posting content on social media, but a place where individuals create and share content, and respond with comments to created content. Research indicates that many organizations, and the public relations professionals who deploy their social media, use social media simply as additional channels for disseminating corporate information, rather than collaborative platforms for fostering dialog, collaborations, and building or maintaining relationships. In other words, these organizations seek their own direct access to communicate to, rather than with, publics (Wright & Hinson, 2014).

Valentini (2014) also cautions that the sheer volume of on-line content, and the awareness of “fake news” has created a skepticism among publics that the content they are consuming may have hidden messages and that organizations will have to find new ways to gain public trust. Kim (2016) call this the *crisis of trust*, defined as “the developing belief that organizations are deceitful or inauthentic in their communications and relationship with the public” (p.5). Bhargava (2012) identified this as the believability crisis. He noted that when propaganda and unethical marketing are used in mass media to overwhelm markets by those with the loudest voice, people are treated as commodities rather than as valued relationships (p. 17). Gaining attention from a distrustful and resistant public is a growing challenge for public relations professionals. Some organizations have been tempted to use unethical practices (Gallicano et al., 2013), which has only served to increase negative attitudes among publics. And once one has an individual’s attention, with the advent and increasing pervasiveness of mobile technology it is increasingly harder to keep that attention (Galloway, 2017).

Social media researchers are exploring and investigating how social media has influenced public relations, and public relations campaigns. Valentini (2014) notes that

social media is of special interest to scholars, as social media seems to reconcile the two different traditions of thinking about and discussing the core traditions and functions of public relations: the relational tradition where the main function of public relations is to help an organization build and maintain mutual and beneficial relationships with its publics (Ferguson, 1984; Ledingham, 2003); and the rhetorical tradition (Heath, 2001), which sees the main function of public relations is to create content, tell stories, and frame communication (Valentini, 2014, p. 174). The following examples show how some campaigns are successful in this bridging activity.

Social media and public relations research

Despite the challenges of “fake news,” questionable ethics and enormous competition, scholars are finding and examining examples of effective social media campaigns. Briones, Kuch, Liu and Jin (2010), found that the American Red Cross was able to develop two-way dialog with younger constituents, the media, and the community using Twitter and Facebook. While noting that a “trial and error” method of creating relationships was often the case, there were many areas where the organization identified social media as a channel to develop relationships. These included engaging donors, providing teachable moments, informing the community about services, developing a broader view of the community, and getting more people involved (p. 41).

Allagui and Breslow (2015) state that public relations scholars and practitioners agree that social media are changing the PR industry and increasingly laying a role in the business planning process (p. 20). In an attempt to address Valentini’s (2014) suggestion that current evidence of the use of social media for public relations remains anecdotal and depends on the specific case studied as well as current practices (p. 173), they employ a

collective case studies approach and examine four public relations campaigns that won awards in both public relations and social media categories. Their study was conducted across a variety of social media platforms in order to determine best practices, near-term trends, in “the effective use of social media for public relations” (p. 20).

In their examination of the campaigns, Allagui and Breslow (2015) discerned some best practices. They found that these effective social media campaigns employed digital storytelling techniques that were both immersive and emotive, and that promoted various forms of content sharing, which promoted creativity. All the campaigns involved using members of the target audience in at least one form of open-ended offline engagement that involves sharing behaviors like a contest or game. The content was also timely, and it was optimized for mobile display and use, taking advantage of “gesture-based” control functions. In these games, players use motion sensors, gyroscopes, and accelerometers to control the game by tilting and pitching their device, which the authors note is a more immersive experience (p. 25).

The authors note that although marketers think of social media in terms of brand awareness and reputation management, the effective use of social media in Public Relations campaigns can generate conversion, facilitate brand positioning, and maintain continued brand sustenance (p. 28). They also note that these social media campaigns are disruptive of the traditional public relations campaign cycle. In analyzing 420 award winning PR campaigns, Hardy and Waters (2012) noted that “special events are the most commonly used public relations tactic, followed by news releases and media kits” (p.898). None of the campaigns Allagui and Breslow (2015) studied used those tactics. Instead, the winning formula involved increasing interactivity and building relationships

across social media with the target audience. In the case of all four of the campaigns they analyzed, the huge number of media impressions in print and broadcast media was, in fact, driven by the media's coverage of the huge number of shares, retweets and online conversations generated by these tweets (p. 28). This implies that social media campaigns and their strategies and tactics belong to a very different campaign cycle.

Public relations and strategic social media campaign planning

Social media campaigns have special requirements for public relations practitioners and scholars. Unlike the traditional four-step campaign models discussed earlier, these strategic planning models incorporate more steps involving perception by, and involvement with, the target audience. Blakeman (2014) recommends the following: "To be successful, a social media promotional campaign must take the following into consideration: Listen, focus, be patient, share, trendsetters, discuss, respond, be available" (p. 128).

Barker, Barker, Bormann, and Neher (2013) posit successful social media strategies typically meet one (or more) of their PARC principles for success: *participatory* (interact with the target audience); *authentic* (conversing without forced attitudes or a false, or overtly commercial, demeanor); *resourceful* (provide audience with helpful information and, with respect to the use of social media, a variety of unique and entertaining and informative channels and methods of engagement); and *credible*.

Betteke van Ruler (2014) modifies the traditional public relations planning model to account for reflective communication. She considers communication in a digitized society in not so much communication between two or more actors, and its illusion of control, but a "multi-way diachronic process of ongoing constructions of meanings in

which one cannot foresee who is – or will be – involved, in what way, and what the results will be” (p. 187). She uses Smith’s (2013) strategic planning process (discussed earlier) and modifies it to be more “agile” (p. 190). Based on a rugby metaphor, in which a ball is passed within the team as it moves as a unit up the field, Scrum (Takeuchi & Nonaka, 1986, p. 137) replaces a sequential approach to developing new products with a holistic method. Popular in information technology and software development, Scrum is defined as a framework within which people can address complex adaptive problems and deliver high-value products in the shortest possible time (van Ruler, 2014). By allowing for constant reflectivity as a property in public relations, van Ruler proposes her model is suitable for the turbulent character of public relations in the digital age (191).

Kim (2016) proposes her four-step model as part of a way to approach today’s business environment. She sees it not as a static process that approaches key stakeholders in a mechanized way, with each department responsible solely for their area, but as a holistic organization with multiple departments connected with each other to respond to stakeholders (who expect to be related to and have their needs met). In her model, social media is how organizations establish frameworks within which they can operate in ethical and transparent ways (p.17). Kim (2016) also emphasizes the ideas of trust and authenticity when engaging within a brand community.

Kim (2016), while noting that each campaign should have its own creative aspects, also stresses that there are key elements and steps in social media campaigns. Her steps for engaging with publics include: *listening* (the research phase, but with an emphasis on the social media environment); *strategic design* (goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics are developed, ensuring they are wedded to a commitment to

quality and the value of relationships); *implementation and monitoring* (where engagement is continuous for the life cycle of the campaign, and two-way dialogue is protected); and *evaluation* (measuring across platforms to highlight the value of the campaign to the organization).

Each of these models stresses a more interactive, rather than sequential, approach to strategic public relations planning, with constant feedback and a concern for authenticity in their approach. Each of these models assumes that the organization is working toward a predefined goal with deliberate strategies. Chia & Rasche (2011) contrast this deliberate outlook on engagement with publics with the day-to-day management of relationships with publics, in which strategies emerge from reactions to events. This overall strategic vision reflects in part the concept of “organizational ambidexterity” developed by Bodwell and Chermack (2010), which they define as follows: “ambidexterity refers to how an organization ‘wears the hat’ of the job it does today while at the same time “wearing the hat” of the job it will do tomorrow” (p. 196). Organizations leverage their existing skills daily, based on current strengths, and can at the same time see possibilities for new opportunities. Charest, Bouffard and Zajmovic (2016) propose that to support this ambidextrous vision requires three skills for use in daily action: detection (sensing); appropriation (seizing); and reconfiguration (reconfiguring) (p. 531). This process of constant innovation in an organization’s planning and execution of public relations functions, like relationship management, during campaigns, and is appropriate for the ever-changing social media environment.

Another strategic planning model for social media focuses on the organizational activities during campaigns, especially regarding the creation and maintenance of trust in

relationships with publics, a core function of public relations practice (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Ertzcheid, Faverial, and Guéguen (2010) propose a strategic planning model based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid, which integrates the individual needs for trust, attachment, and collaboration. It consists of three hierarchical levels: (1) Developing the organization's trust capital by working on its identity and reputation through transparency and active listening; (2) Developing a sense of attachment and transparency in order to bring out ambassadors for the organization, who will assist in diffusing the organization's ideas; (3) Aggregating a community around a common project based on the nature and the objectives of the organization, for example, associating the organization with a social cause, aim for the co-creation of content, or promoting a particular lifestyle, or consumer product, like candy (as quoted in Charest, Bouffard and Zajmovic , 2016, p. 431). One important aspect to establishing and nurturing these relationships is for community managers to facilitate communication and conversation in an authentic and transparent manner (Charest, & Bouffard, 2015).

This literature informs the second research question:

RQ2: How, if at all, does the process in which this organization developed and executed the #Cupfusion public relations campaign, and its resulting unintended consequences, reflect current public relations models and theory regarding strategic planning of campaigns, especially social media campaigns, and the practice of public relations?

Summary

This literature review had two main areas of focus, which formed the basis for two research questions. In the first section it formed a framework by which an 80 year-

old theory taken from sociology could be framed in the context of current public relations theory and a current public relations campaign. Using Merton's theory of unanticipated consequences as a base, it drew from both conceptual and practical research. It illustrated that Merton's concepts of lack of foreknowledge, habit, myopia, values and self-defeating predictions, might be used as a lens to study and possibly explain unanticipated consequences of communication in public relations campaigns.

Lack of foreknowledge, the most conceptual of Merton's concepts, is driven by "the interplay of forces and circumstances . . . so numerous and complex that prediction of them is quite beyond our reach" (Merton, 1936, pp. 899 – 900). This complex interplay of forces and circumstances can be described with the aid of chaos and complexity theory. Chaos theory, while casting doubt on the ability to implement the goal-oriented, certainty-seeking mode many public relations professionals are trying to refine, is still useful for describing unstable areas such as public opinion (Murphy, 1996). It can also help in understanding of how groups form around issues, objects, or individuals they are attracted to (Murphy, 1996; Sellnow, Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Sundstrom, Briones & Janoske, 2013). This behavior can also be described by complexity theory, in which many individual actors, adapting to their local situation, inadvertently form into larger-scale patterns which can alter the communication environment in ways that often cannot be anticipated (Murphy, 2000). Complexity theory can also help in understanding how organizations can prepare for these types of unintended events, by accepting the ambiguity and uncertainty of the current communication environment and cultivating the expertise necessary for "skilled improvisation" when events inevitably occur (Gilpin & Murphy, 2006, p. 379).

Merton's theory, by providing us a scientific method, rather than an acceptance of fate, to examine the causes of unintended consequences, informed by chaos and complexity theory, could give us another lens with which to plan, execute, and evaluate PR campaigns. It can also be used during the evaluation of any unanticipated consequences or outcomes of the communication used during PR campaigns.

Merton's concepts of habit, myopia, and values can help to describe factors in the strategic planning and execution of public relations campaigns. Campaigns are social actions—they are designed to influence a number of individuals' beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors (Rogers & Storey, 1987). The sociologists noted in this literature review illustrated how Merton could be used to provide a framework to explain how activist social programs often had unanticipated consequences. Whether attempting to control or subdue nature, implement a “paperless society” (Tenner, 1996) attempting organizational change (McAuley, 2007), implementing campaign finance reform (Gillon, 2000), or invading Iraq (Sherden, 2011), those attempting social action, either through habit, myopia, values, or a combination of factors, have seen their efforts result in unanticipated consequences.

Some researchers have elaborated on Merton's typology or brought it to other disciplines, including politics (Sherden, 2011), finance (Koehn, 2010), advertising campaigns (Penn 2015), and health communication campaigns (Cho & Salmon, 2007). The second main section of this literature review was concerned with another area of campaigns, public relations campaigns, and how their strategic planning and execution might also result in unintended consequences. This part of the literature review began with an exploration of the origin and development of the traditional four-step model for

strategic campaign planning. These included the founding RACE model (Marsten, 1963), ROPE (Hendrix & Hayes, 2007), FSTE (Smith, 2013), and elaborations such as ROPES (Kelly, 2001), and ROSIE (Crifasti, 2000). These models account for the majority of current, traditional public relations campaigns, and are applicable to the first segment of the #Cupfusion campaign.

However, one must take into account the new models offered by social media theory and social media planning models. Valentini (2014) notes that social media is of special interest to scholars, as social media seems to reconcile these two different traditions of thinking about and discussing the core traditions and functions of public relations: the relational (Ferguson, 1984, Ledingham, 2003), and the rhetorical (Heath, 2001, 2006). There is reason to believe that social media are becoming a preferred channel of engagement between organizations and publics (Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012; Smith, 2013). Reviewing social media research shows that whether that is a “good” assumption for public relations has been questioned (Kent, 2010, 013; Valentini, 2014). Whether social media is good for public relations or not, this literature review has given examples accepted models of strategic planning in social media campaigns, as well as examples of good practice and execution in social media-based public relations campaigns.

Finally, this review also examined how the day-to-day management of public relations during the implementation of a social media campaign can lead to new and innovative strategies, that may not have been anticipated before the campaign began. Through the use of “organizational ambidexterity” (Bodwell & Chermack, 2010), organizations can leverage their current strengths into future opportunities. By practicing

active listening, maintaining trust through transparency, developing attachments to members of a community around a common theme, organizations and publics can work together to create content that can promote a particular lifestyle or product (Charest, Bouffard and Zajmovic, 2016).

To put it simply, the nature of the current (and for the foreseeable future) digital environment, almost ensures public relations practitioners working in social media are likely to experience unintended consequences in public relations campaigns. This study, by using concepts from sociology and public relations theory, proposes to help them understand why.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study will be to understand the context of environmental and human factors resulting in unintended consequences of communication in a social media-based public relations campaign. Based on the preceding review of the literature and theory related to unintended consequences, chaos and complexity, traditional strategic planning models, social media, and social media strategic planning models, and social media campaigns, the following research questions are restated:

RQ1: How, if at all, does the process in which this organization developed and executed the #Cupfusion public relations campaign, and its resulting unintended consequences, reflect Merton's theory of unanticipated consequences?

RQ2: How, if at all, does the process in which this organization developed and executed the #Cupfusion public relations campaign, and its resulting unintended consequences, reflect current public relations models and theory regarding strategic planning of campaigns, especially social media campaigns, and the practice of public relations?

In both of these questions, theory can serve as a lens for analysis. However, this was not necessarily a test of theory but an exploration into the possible causes of

unintended consequences. However, some theory did evolve from the data. To address these questions, a variety of research methods were used. They are discussed in the next chapter.

Note that these questions have evolved from the original prospectus. Those questions were based on a multiple-case study with primarily negative outcomes, so, for example, one of the questions asked how organizations could avoid or mitigate the effects of unintended consequences in future campaigns. In the months-long search for individuals or organizations who would agree to be interviewed about “failed” campaigns, the search eventually was allowed to change from focusing on negative outcomes to searching for positive outcomes and shifted to looking for interviewees from PSRA Silver Anvil Award-winning campaigns. Eventually I found an exemplary case in the #Cupfusion campaign and in February, 2018, petitioned my committee to allow me to study a single case and change the tone of the research questions. The methods I used to gather and analyze the data from that case are described in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 -- Method

My research attempts to understand the complex processes and effects underlying the unintended results of deliberate communication in public relations campaigns.

Qualitative research provides an opportunity for researchers to go beyond numbers and gain individual and collective feedback regarding perceptions and ideas not easily obtained through quantitative research. When asking *how* or *why*, qualitative research provides a platform for increased understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative research is advantageous to me because qualitative data are about actions, that carry with them intention and meanings and lead to consequences (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 11). By interviewing public relations practitioners about a case they were directly involved in or are knowledgeable about, I can further understand what actions or context may have contributed to the *unintended* consequences.

Qualitative research is an effective methodology for representing real life in natural occurrences and achieving richness and depth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). One of the primary goals of qualitative research is to gather thick description in studying phenomena and events. One advantage of qualitative data is the focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings (Cheseboro & Borisoff, 2007). Collecting data in close proximity to the specific situation gives the research *local groundedness*. The emphasis is on a specific case, bounded by its specific context and environment, so the specifics of the local area are taken into account (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). By conducting interviews with participants in a relaxed environment of their choosing, I can use my listening skills to increase the possibility for

understanding latent, underlying, or nonobvious issues (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014).

Assumptions

Through qualitative research a researcher engages in three interconnected activities. The researcher begins by approaching the world with a framework of ideas defining the research situation, specifies some questions for investigation, and dictates specific ways to explore those questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). I made two assumptions when approaching this project. First, I believed that through listening to my interviewees tell their story of the campaign that I could gain insights into their lived experience and understand the conditions for unintended consequences that resulted. Second, by analyzing the communication environment in which they were operating, I could gain additional insight on their lived perspectives. I achieved this through document and social media analysis.

My research direction was also informed by what I was learning about the differing concepts of the functions of public relations. On one hand the #Cupfusion team was performing some marketing functions; marketing communications scholarship considers public relations as publicity, promotion, and marketing support. But by using social media to communicate with their publics, the #Cupfusion team was performing a role more attuned to public relations scholarship, that being the role of public relations as primarily about cultivating stakeholder relationships. What I found exceptional about this case was how blurred the lines between marketing and public relations, between paid and earned media, have become.

Research Design

Denzin (2003) has argued that one of the commitments of qualitative researchers is to produce works that represent participants' worlds in a way that will effect change. To explore the idea of developing a typology of the causes of unintended consequences of deliberate communication in public relations campaigns, one must determine *how* and *why* the unintended consequences occurred. Because this study asks the how and why questions, and is focusing on a contemporary phenomenon, the case study is an appropriate research method to answer the research questions (Yin, 2009). The case study method allows investigators to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events—such as...organizational and managerial processes” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). Case studies can provide a researcher with a highly nuanced understanding of a subject.

Through case study research, the researcher uses a diverse set of research methods and considers as much as possible of available evidence in a research setting, which is a unique strength of the method (Yin, 2009). Case study research employs different kinds of information gathering, including interviewing, and documentation content analysis, to provide a multiple-point perspective on a process or event. Case study research can be used to observe processes as they unfold, and also allows the researcher to take into account activities that have already occurred. Case study research is commonly used in organizational settings (Yin, 2009).

In this study, the Reese's #Cupfusion campaign will be studied to investigate the larger phenomenon of unintended consequences. Yin (2009) argues that the multiple-case method may have an advantage over single-case method because evidence from a multiple-case study may be “more compelling” and therefore considered “more robust” (p. 53). However, Yin (2009) notes a number of rationales for single-case designs. These

include the *critical* case which tests a well-formulated theory; the *extreme* or *unique* case; the *representative* or *typical* case; and the *longitudinal* case. This case falls into a fifth category, the *revelatory* case. This situation exists when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to researchers (Yin, 2009, p. 48). The circumstances leading to the #Cupfusion campaign were unique to the Hershey Company and Ketchum. The participants had never granted in-depth interviews to a qualitative researcher. Today, the case is considered a model inside the company as a highly successful alternative new way to go-to-market (Creating #Cupfusion, n.d.).

The case study method is not without its limitations. Single-case designs require careful investigation to minimize the chances of misrepresentation and to maximize access needed to collect evidence. In this case I maximized the number of interviews to include everyone on the #Cupfusion team, from senior brand manager to every individual working as part of the creative process. Seeking depth rather than breadth, the sample size was commensurate with the qualitative research paradigm in which relatively small sample sizes are used to generate information-rich data (Patton, 1990).

I also chose an embedded, single-case design rather than a holistic design. A holistic design examines only the global nature of an organization or a program (Yin, 2009). In this case, two embedded units emerged from the data—the #Cupfusion team, and the Facebook comment streams. The first was best analyzed using in-depth interviews, the second through content analysis of the posts.

A second limitation of the case study method is cases do not permit generalization across other research settings. Yin (2009) explains that this form of generalization—

statistical generalization—is not appropriate in case study research, but rather, this method’s strength is in its analytical generalization. That is, case studies can be used to explore and evaluate theory, and the theoretical insights gained can be tested further. Another limitation of case study research is that it can lead to interviewer bias (Yin, 2009). As the researcher is immersed in the organization’s information and data, he or she can become too enthralled with the case organization in question.

I assumed earlier that it is possible, by interviewing public relations practitioners, that I can gain insight into their lived experience, and that their perspectives can represent and reveal the organizational processes that led to unintended consequences. At the same time, however, I also maintain the belief that participant perspectives may not be complete, and may not directly link to organizational processes. For this reason, in addition to semi-structured, in-depth interviews, I used additional research activities, including document analysis, to include content analysis of news articles, social media, and interview transcripts. By using multiple methods of data gathering, this study triangulated data to increase internal validity and reduce researcher and participant subjectivity (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010).

Interviewing

Rubin and Rubin (2005) state, “If what you need to find out cannot be answered simply or briefly, if you anticipate that you may need to ask people to explain their answers or give examples or describe their experiences, then you rely on in-depth interviews” (pp. 2-3). Interviews operate on the notion that the most direct way to understand reality is to engage in conversation with participants (Fontana & Frey, 2003). The qualitative approach using semi-structured, in-depth interviews is appropriate for this

study because this approach identifies participants who were part of the creation and dissemination of the communication under examination. It affords the opportunity for immediate follow-up in a nature that reduces uncertainty of response. Other advantages of structured interviews include the ability to narrow in on specific issues and the ability to gain detailed information on those issues (Klenke, 2008). In-depth interviews, conducted in real-time, can allow for “thick descriptions,” and a richness of data in relation to the contexts affecting individuals and groups in their decision-making processes. The semi-structured interview can allow participants’ voices to emerge and allows for more freedom in the discussion with participants; here the participant can guide the conversation to the elements that the participant finds most important (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Critics of qualitative interviews maintain that researchers who contribute their personal perspectives in interviews *bias* data and produce studies that lack *validity*. They also cast doubt on the ability for people to accurately recall events or even accurately express what they are, or were, thinking. They assert it makes interviews highly context-dependent, and therefore unreliable (Hammersley & Gomm, 2008). Fontana and Frey (2003) note that, “increasingly qualitative researchers are realizing that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (p. 62). With that in mind, I was careful to be reflexive about the role I was playing in the interview process. Acting reflexively enabled me to self-consciously consider my background, thoughts, and basic assumptions in relation to the interview and what knowledge the interview was generating as part of my research (Roulston, 2010).

This study will feature a semi-structured interview agenda using open-ended questions to encourage the participants to talk about their organization, and its processes. Specifically, these questions encouraged participants to talk about their personal experience with the specific case being studied, and prompted them to explain why they thought their communication had unanticipated consequences in their case.

Using an interview script creates greater consistency in data gathering for researchers (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This interview script involved questions pertaining to both their organization and the specific case, and asked them to describe the case in their own words. The interview schedule consists of four personal information questions and eleven descriptive questions (seven of which have follow-up questions) to inform the research questions. The full script can be found in [Appendix A](#).

In order to describe the process in which organizations develop and release communication that results in unanticipated consequences reflect Merton's (1936) theory (RQ1), questions such as "Could you describe the origins and intentions of the campaign?" helped set the stage for probing questions such as "What were your goals?" and "What were your strategies?" Further inquiry in to the organization's process were ascertained with questions such as "How did the campaign flow from inception to execution" and "How did you choose your target publics and platforms?" Details on procedures leading to the final release of the communication came from questions such as, "Could you describe in more detail the process you used to release the communication?" "Was the release based on any particular recurring event, such as a holiday or anniversary?" "Did you perform any last checks before final release?" and "If

you have a checklist, did you develop your own, or are you using one from another source?”

These questions, and focused follow-up questions, helped me determine how, if at all, the process in which organizations develop and execute public relations campaigns, and their resulting unintended consequences, reflect current public relations models regarding strategic planning of campaigns (RQ2).

To help put the entire campaign into perspective, I asked participants to speculate on how the different unintended consequences might have been avoided or encouraged, by asking questions such as, “In retrospect, is there anything you think you could have done to avoid (or enhance) this event?” “Have you made any changes in your processes in the wake of this event?” “What lessons do you think you and your organization have learned from this event?” and “Is there any advice you would give other organizations?”

I concluded each interview by asking if there are any written materials the participant could share to better describe the organizations procedures or how they responded to the event. I asked if there were others that would be willing to participate in my study, thanked them for their time, and noted that if they wished, they could review the interview transcripts to correct for any misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or unintended meaning.

Procedures

Case recruitment and participant selection.

Initially multiple cases were to be chosen from completed public relations campaigns since 2012, with a preference toward the newest campaigns. The four-year window gave me some flexibility in choices, and the cases were not so old that the

participants might not have been able to recollect their details. The cases would have been acknowledged, either by an award, such as a PRSA Silver Anvil, or Silver Anvil Award of Excellence. In particular I examined entries that in their description noted challenges or unintended consequences as part of their campaign. Choosing cases that have already been in the public relations media would also make it easier for me to recruit participants who are willing to talk about their organization, since the campaign was already public. The organization which planned and executed the campaign should also be accessible to me, for in-person interviews.

I naively assumed that organizations and practitioners who experienced unanticipated consequences in a campaign would welcome a third-party examination of their processes and what factors might have contributed to the unexpected outcomes. What I found was that they didn't want my investigation at all. If the campaign had a negative outcome there was no observed desire to re-live the event. If there was a positive outcome, the organizations were reluctant to share the secrets of success. After some months of pursuing potential cases, using a network connection and the good will on tap during the 2017 Grunig Gala, I was able to get permission to talk to Ketchum, Inc. about their #Cupfusion campaign, which fit my criteria exactly.

Ketchum is a global public relations firm, offering marketing, branding, and corporate communications services in the corporate, healthcare, food and beverage and technology industries. Founded in 1923, Ketchum has 74 offices and 56 affiliates in 70 countries, and over 2,400 employees. The PRSA Silver Anvil Award they won for the #Cupfusion campaign was one of their industry-leading 163 Silver Anvils (Ketchum About, 2018). I watched Ketchum CEO Rob Flaherty talk about the Creating #Cupfusion

campaign at the 2017 Grunig Gala. Both the unanticipated leak of a confidential trade photo and the unanticipated media frenzy over the resulting campaign met my case selection criteria. I was able to contact the director of Ketchum's Washington, D.C., Brand and Marketing Practice. From there, using snowball sampling was able to interview the Account Supervisor, Digital Strategist, and Creative Director from the team at Ketchum. They then referred me to the final members of the team, the Senior Manager of Brand Communications and The Senior Brand Manager of the Reese's brand at Hershey. The Hershey Company (NYSE:HSY), founded in 1894 by Milton S. Hershey, is an American manufacturer of food products, chiefly chocolate and sugar-based confections. It is one of the largest confectionary companies in the world, with a market capitalization of over \$21 billion (Jones, 2018). Hershey uses Ketchum to manage many of its over 100 products.

Interview Procedures

In-person, in-depth interviews, provided a complete survey of the creative and decision-making team. The potential interviewees were all approached by me by email, officially inviting them to participate in the study, using the solicitation script ([Appendix C](#)), which was approved by the university's [Institutional Review Board](#). Consent was obtained in writing by reply to the initial invitation and confirmed in writing prior to the interview. All interviews were conducted by telephone. Interviewing over the phone versus interviewing in person can influence and even limit research results. On the one hand, interviewing in person can be uncomfortable for participants who may feel an interviewer may be invading personal space, especially if the interview is conducted at the interviewee's office or residence. Telephone interviewing provides a remedy to this

concern, as phone conversations may be less intrusive on a participant's personal space. At the same time, however, a telephone interview can be limiting because it separates the researcher from the research participant, limiting the researcher's ability to take into account gestures and body language. I set up times whenever participants were available. Some were during office hours, many were held after hours, from where ever they felt comfortable speaking, either in their office, or in a neutral place. One participant held her child as the child went to sleep. The interviews took place in December 2017 – Feb 2018.

Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed using a transcription service. I then listened to and verified the transcriptions, filling in where the transcriber wrote "inaudible" or when they misunderstood industry jargon. Observer comments were added to the transcripts to include reflexivity, observations of general themes, weaknesses in the research process, and suggestions for modifying future interviews. Audio notes were recorded at the conclusion of each interview to record immediately emerging themes. Reflexive memos were written to reveal preconceptions and assumptions about the research and to highlight personal biases and possible limitations to the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Interview protocol

Interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol developed with open questions and follow-up probes ([Appendix A](#)). The interview protocol served as a guide throughout the interview process. All questions were asked unless the participant had addressed the question in an earlier answer and provided satisfactory depth of response. Due to the positive outcomes of the campaign, questions that used phrases like "avoid in the future" were modified to read "encourage in the future."

Pretests

As Hung (2001) states, pretesting offers advantages to researchers by helping them to prepare for fieldwork and eliminate inappropriate questions from the interview guide. To assist with development of the interview protocol, I conducted informal pretest interviews with colleagues from the University of Maryland and Towson University with experience at public relations firms, and used their feedback to focus the interview questions.

Member checks

Lincoln and Guba (2003) state that member checks allow researchers to verify their interpretations of the data with the participants after data analysis (in this case, transcription). This allows them to correct errors from misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or unintended meaning. I conducted member checks throughout the study. Member checks are procedures to ask members – or participants – to review the researcher’s end analysis to ensure the researcher accurately portrayed the participant’s data in the report (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 242). I performed member checks in two ways: during the interviews, I periodically “checked-in” with the participants to ensure I understood them correctly, and I recapped at the end what I believe I heard from them; I also offered participants a chance to review my analysis before the final write-up for feedback about the accuracy of my reporting. In this case two of the participants accepted my offer of a transcript. I received no additional feedback on the transcriptions.

Additional Approaches to Data Collection

Critics of case studies often accuse case study researchers of failing to develop a sufficiently robust set of operational measures and that subjective judgements weaken the

quality of the data (Yin, 2009). Case study evidence can come from many sources, including documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2009, p. 101). Using multiple sources of data contribute to *construct validity*. Documents can be used to corroborate and augment evidence from interviews, verify correct spellings of individuals and organizations, and, if the evidence is contradictory, provide avenues for further inquiry (Yin, 2009). This study used print and on-line periodicals, such as *PRNews* and *AdAge*, as well as social media, including websites, blogs, Facebook and Twitter accounts to gain perspective and opinion on unanticipated consequences at the local, national, and global level that resulted from communication in the cases being studied.

Documents

This researcher was fortunate that Ketchum and Hershey supplied internal documents that added perspective to my analysis of their planning and decision-making processes. These included their PRSA Silver Anvil application and supporting materials. From these I had access to target audience research, branding framework, and Ketchum's strategic integrated planning process, RISC (Ketchum, 2017).

Facebook comment streams

Facebook comment streams were a major source of data for the brand's social media environment. Each official Reese's Facebook post would generate 200-300 comments, which I would review and analyze for tone and language, and to see how the Reese's community managers responded. I went through each stream in its entirety, except for the final Facebook post where Reese's revealed that the #Cupfusion was real. This post generated over 6,200 comments. I limited my analysis to the first 300

comments, which confirmed themes I had noted in the first six Facebook posts. At that point Reese's was no longer responding in real time.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research suggests that a saturation point should be attempted, a technical postulate within grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This concept refers to the point at which each single interview no longer adds unique information to the collection of data. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), reaching this point can help the researcher gain completeness when each participant's responses are contributing significantly to answering the research questions. As the authors put it, "what is important is not how many people you talked to, but whether the answer works" (p. 73). Normally when I collect data, when I realize I am hearing considerably consistent answers from the participants, I will stop interviewing because my research questions are likely to have been answered since I may not be finding any new, significant information. However, in this case, because of the total inclusivity of my sample, I was able to have a distinct end to my interview gathering process. Even with a small interview sample, the consistency of the answers was remarkable. It was a testament to how closely the team was working together.

After each interview session, I recorded my initial reactions and feelings into a recorder, and then later transcribed them into a journal. In these entries, I wrote about the success of each interview, prevalent themes I noticed, and any areas I need to examine more closely or interview techniques to improve upon for the next interview. These are "reflective remarks" suggested by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) to "strengthen coding, in pointing to deeper or underlying issues that deserve analytic attention" (p. 66).

In the journal entries, I also reflected upon my fears, judgments, stereotypes, and anxieties about the study, topic, or participants. I used this as a way to clearly organize and understand my relationship to the topic, the study, and the participants, and to ensure that participants had the room to speak for themselves instead of my leading their comments, a goal of reflective interviewing (Roulston, 2010).

I manually coded interview transcripts, selected documents, and Facebook comment streams related to the case to develop themes using a modified version of grounded theory approach to data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Originated by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), a grounded theory approach allows for theory to be inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon. This study is not a Classic (Glaserian) Grounded Theory study (Simmons, 2010), because is not starting from nothing but an idea. It has a literature review, and it is answering some questions based on established theory. So I used the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis (Glaser, 1965), and coding methods as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008). NVivo 11 qualitative analysis software was used to assist in coding of the data. NVivo offered powerful tools for coding large amounts of data. NVivo Capture enabled me to capture web pages, Facebook posts and Twitter tweets. NVivo also allows for auto coding of sources. I found the interface somewhat counter intuitive and preferred to code manually, becoming more intimate with the data.

I used line-by-line open-coding procedures to look for emerging themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Then I used axial coding to determine how responses and themes related to each other as well as how the responses related to the variables and concepts informed by the literature review. Axial coding is part of the integration process of the

grounded theory approach, and it uses codes that form linkages across disparate but meaningfully-similar codes in order to dwindle down the number of codes and understand overarching themes more easily (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I developed a coding system around initial observed themes in order to reduce the ambiguity of the data collected and then combined the data to develop meta-themes in both the interview participants' comments, and the Facebook comments. These two "voices," combined with information from the internal documents provided by Ketchum, provided a form of *methodological triangulation* so I did not have to rely solely on claims made in the in-depth interviews (Roulston, 2010).

Gathered data was analyzed using a constant comparative approach to allow for the emergence of additional themes that contribute to overall understanding and exploration (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Interviews will be coded keeping the emerging themes from other interviews, as well as themes from the relevant documents, media, and observation, in mind. Open coding, is usually done through line-by-line analysis, paragraph analysis, or document analysis; using line-by-line analysis as my point of analysis allowed for a deeper, more thorough look into the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Emergent themes from the open coding were labeled as categories, based upon their properties and dimensions. Using axial coding, categories from the open coding were then grouped under similar categories based upon category dimensions. During open coding, the categories were fractured, and during axial coding, they were put back together again (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Axial coding helps to put categories with subcategories as appropriate and helps to identify the relationships between categories and their connections. The last stage in the coding

process, selective coding, goes one step beyond axial coding and is the final step to creating “theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Categories were then related back to the core category. When the overarching categories from Merton’s theory of unanticipated consequences or any other theories were found to be applicable, could be modified, or had to be discarded, happened here.

I was not testing theory, per se, but rather keeping my hunches about any applicability to my coding. Glaser (1998) noted the grounded theory researcher has three important characteristics: “an ability to conceptualize data, an ability to tolerate some confusion, and an ability to tolerate confusion’s attendant regression...those who can tolerate confusion and regression love the openness of grounded theory and the chance to really generate concepts that make sense of what is going on” (p. 838). As a researcher I believe I have these attributes, and can use them in this study to make some sense of unintended consequences. As the instrument of study, I strove to display craftsmanship in my work, ensured communicability to those I studied, and hopefully showed pragmatic validity by contributing to the wider body of knowledge available to the wider practitioner population (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

In my interpretation efforts, I sought to generalize “the story” of how #Cupfusion brought public relations practice into a new area, evaluating data against models that connect propositions, specify relations, and predict patterns (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). This process was also reflexive. I kept comparing data and themes in the back of my mind, and would write down notes on small notebooks around my house, office, and dining table.

I used collection, analysis, interpretation, and a little inspiration to evaluate the practice I observed with current theory to assess the concepts from the literature. Where the literature was not sufficient to explain my data, I combined my evaluative approach with a grounded approach, and was able to generate conclusions using my data as evidence.

Validity, reliability, and generalizability

In 2009 Denzin wrote about the “elephant in the room,” and how scientists from both inside and outside the world of the qualitative research method have difficulty describing what qualitative research is, and by what standards it should be judged. According to Kvale (1995), qualitative researchers must address the holy trinity of validity, reliability, and generalizability. In quantitative research, validity assesses whether a study investigates what it intends to investigate. Generalizability suggests that the results should be able to be generalized to the broader population.. Since these concepts emerged from a positivist research tradition, some scholars argue that they cannot and should not be applied to qualitative research, while others suggest that using these terms can bolster qualitative methodology in the social sciences (Guest and MacQueen, 2008). I would not expect my results to be generalizable, however, I hope in the future to continue to explore any theory that may evolve from my research with different cases, drawn from different populations, to explore the robustness of my theory.

Wolcott, (2001a) noted that validity is the extent to which the research instrument accurately measures the value of the unit of study. In qualitative research, the researcher becomes the instrument, bringing his or her skills in observing and interpreting to the data-gathering process (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Since validity considers the credibility

and accuracy of the research instrument, then the validity of a qualitative study tests the “trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and conformability” (Kvale, 1995, p. 21, citing Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the researcher to study exactly what he or she means to study.

The researcher should take as much effort as possible to display “craftsmanship” to the audience of the study, which is to continually check, question, and interpret the findings according to the theory used in the study (Kvale, 1995, p. 27). Kvale argued that the researcher should be aware of the validity question during each step of the research process, from the conceptualization of the research through to the reporting phase.

Tactics he suggested include:

“...checking for representativeness and for research effects, triangulating, weighing the evidence, checking the meaning of outliers, using extreme cases, following up surprises, looking for negative evidence, making if-then tests, ruling out spurious relations, replicating a finding, checking out rival explanations, and getting feedback from informants.” (p. 27)

An important term in this collection of tactics is triangulation. In order to ensure the researcher is testing “a right interpretation” rather than “the right interpretation” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 240), it can be essential for the researcher to strengthen his/her argument for interpretation (Yin, 2009) by using multiple sources, multiple methods, or multiple researchers to evaluate the unit of analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Triangulation has the potential to reduce researcher bias that may influence the recruitment, collection, and analysis of data. In this study I combined data from in-depth interviews with two other data streams, the Facebook comments and internal documents,

provided by Ketchum, to provide a form of *methodological triangulation* so I did not have to rely solely on claims made in the in-depth interviews (Roulston, 2010).

Yin's (2009) four tests to validity and reliability meet what I consider workable principles. The tests can be summarized as: *construct validity*, or having rigor, a sound plan, and sound methods; *internal validity*, where the researcher establishes causal relationships, where certain conditions lead to other condition, and the results do not contradict each other; *external validity*, defining the domain to which a study's findings can be generalized; and *reliability*, where, as noted earlier, that some operations of a study—such as coding procedures--can be repeated with similar results.

Kvale (1995) expressed frustration with the idea of *construct validity*, but I believe he incorporated it in his notion of craftsmanship. In my study, I deliberate on craftsmanship in several ways. To increase rigor, I triangulated my study by incorporating multiple methods and sources. I wrote journal entries throughout my study in order to purge some of my biases toward the study, participants, and data. Writing journal entries gave me the opportunity to identify and manage my feelings about the study in order to remain faithful to my commitment to validity. I also provided as many details as possible about my study so that readers would not have many unanswered questions about my study, regarding either my methods or my position on any issues.

Internal validity is a concern for explanatory case studies, such as this, when an investigator is trying to explain how process x led to event y . There may be in fact some third factor— z , that may have actually caused y . There is special concern in this study, when complex social relations may make it difficult to determine with reasonable certainty a causal situation. I forced myself to answer questions such as, Is the inference

correct? Have all the rival explanations and possibilities been considered? (Yin, 2009, p. 43).

External validity has also been a challenge when doing case studies, with critics noting that cases, especially single cases, offer a poor basis for generalizing. Yin (2009) notes, however, that these critics are comparing cases with survey research, in which a sample is intended to generate to a larger universe. This comparison is incorrect, as survey research relies on statistical generalization, where case studies rely on analytic generalization (p. 49). In this study I am striving to generalize a set of results to a broader theory, in this case, Merton's idea of unintended consequences (in sum or in part).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a marker of craftsmanship (Kvale, 1995), which shows the audience of a study that the work is credible because the research instrument is valid. Wolcott (2001b) suggested beginning research reporting with telling the reader how the researcher came to experience the problem in the study in order to help readers understand the necessity of the research. Since I am the research instrument in this case, it is only proper I explain my interest in the current study.

I certainly believe in luck. I have met people that are just "lucky," or at least more lucky than most. But I don't believe luck or fate should be used as an explanation for unintended consequences of communication in public relations campaigns. One of the main reasons for my return to academia (aside for my love of teaching) was a desire to understand why the public relations campaigns we were developing and executing in my prior practice at the Air National Guard (ANG) Headquarters were not having the results we were expecting. The ANG response to Hurricane Katrina was the largest domestic

response to a natural disaster in US history, yet the US Coast Guard seemed to be the only service to get credit. Likewise, our attempts to inform the United States Air Force, Congress, and the general public of the ANG's cost effectiveness seemed to fall upon deaf ears.

My coursework at the University of Maryland introduced me to the concept of excellent public relations practices, which helped explain, to some extent, our failures. But when considering a topic for my dissertation I was drawn to the area of unintended consequences. Were they a result of flawed practice, or were there larger, societal forces at work? Inquiry into public relations literature led me to find very little research into the idea of unintended consequences.

Both my greatest strength and potential for weakness in my research is my ability to see patterns and discern key aspects of processes, often quite quickly. My initial insights in my studies are often to group data sets in ways that prove to be correct upon further collection. This initial grouping could be a form of bias for me. Once I have invented a mold it is easy to ignore any data that does not fit the pattern. Since this study will be less limited in time than my coursework, I will have the opportunity and the responsibility to put my data under greater scrutiny during the coding process.

Another area for concern for me is that I am far from an empty vessel when it comes to public relations experience. I must be cognizant that my experiences as a retired Air Force officer and high-level military public relations practitioner are not common to the people I will be interviewing. I must strive to be as reflexive as possible both during my time at an organization and afterwards.

I was inspired by Merton's (1936) theory and encouraged by Dozier and Lauzen's (2000) call to extend the intellectual domain of public relations. Drawing upon an 82-year-old theory from sociology as a base on which to develop a typology for public relations communication may seem like a quixotic idea. But I think that by drawing upon diverse theories and using them as a base for investigation, I can inform public relations research. In Merton's time it was fate, or the will of God that precluded systematic analysis of unintended consequences. Today it is Murphy's Law, "shit happens," or the overwhelming size and diversity of the Internet. Yet, other, more "mature" branches of the physical and social sciences have been able to apply scientific principles to this phenomenon. Understanding this phenomenon can add to the maturity of public relations theory. It also has implications for better public relations practice, especially in the planning and execution of public relations campaigns, and if things still go wrong, in issue and crisis management strategies.

This study has the potential to start a research stream based on the application of portions of Merton's typology (or some version of it) to public relations theory and practice. Any results drawn from this initial exploration can be used to examine different types of organizations, including government, military, activist, non-profit, local and international.

Chapter 4 -- Results

This chapter is to summarize the research findings. It describes the campaign, from conception, through implementation, and finally, evaluation. Then each research question is addressed, as well as trends from the interviews and media analysis.

The Reese's #Cupfusion Campaign

Bringing a consumer product like a candy bar from concept to convenience store shelf is normally a slow and methodical process. Every detail of a product is analyzed, there is consumer testing, and a communication plan, including a public relations campaign, is prepared for implementation when the product is available on store shelves. The Reese's Peanut Butter Cup stuffed with Reese's Pieces campaign was intended to flow from idea to market shelf in eight months. A public leak forced the initial public relations campaign to start four months before the product was going to be available in stores. In response to the leak, the #Cupfusion campaign was conceived, created, and launched in seven days.

Initial concept and leak.

The initial force driving the development of a new Reese's candy product was to fill "c-space," or shelf space close to checkout counters in smaller convenience stores. Products rotate in and out of those spaces and there was some seasonal availability. "But it wasn't supposed to be a big deal," the senior manager of brand communication said. "I think the original predictions on it might have been in the \$10-12 million range [of sales]." The brand needed some innovation, and on a train ride home from New York City in January, 2016, the senior brand manager came up with the idea of stuffing Reese's Pieces into Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. The original idea was thought of as an

“equity explosion.” The idea was pitched to research and development, and within seven weeks the product was being manufactured at the Reese’s plant in Hershey, Pa.

The original campaign plan was to introduce the new product at the National Confectioners Association’s Sweets and Snacks Expo, scheduled for May 24-26, 2016 in Chicago (Wohl, 2016). A few weeks prior to the expo, Hershey began telling some retailers about the new candy coming out that summer. On April 28, 2016 nearly four

weeks before the official introduction, a food blogger named Marlena Courchain, with the Facebook profile Marlena Rhody, and 808 followers, posted pictures of a version of the wrapper for the new pieces-stuffed peanut butter cups. The caption read “What a time to be alive...Coming out in July (so I hear).” No one I interviewed said they had talked to Courchain, and none of them said they knew how she obtained the photos. None of them anticipated the “leak,” or had experienced any event like this in their careers.



Figure 1. The original leak

Initial response.

Within a few days the original post had received nearly 10,000 “likes,” 40,000 shares, and 5,000 comments. For context, the average number of interactions (#Comments + #Likes + #Shares) for a Facebook page with 1K-10K followers is 22. The average number of interactions per post for Facebook pages with 10M+ followers is 25,808 (Ayres, 2015). While some of the comments were critical or skeptical, “Ugh, too much,” “I don’t want pieces in my Reese’s,” the clear majority were, “Yum,” “is this real?,” “where do I find these?” and “Can’t wait!” The social monitoring team at Reese’s saw the post and the subsequent reaction and alerted the team. Initial reactions at

Hershey's included: "I was kind of dumbfounded"; "How on earth did this get here?"; "Why did this happen?"; "Do we shut it down? Is this what we would call a crisis, or is this something that we can play with?" When they noticed the generally positive nature of the reaction, the brand managers made an unusual decision.

"We had a habit of not really wanting to talk about products very far in advance because the reality was that you couldn't buy them. And if you couldn't buy them how could you generate sales? That was the current mentality," the senior manager of brand communication said. "And we looked and said 'hey, what can we do, that's really different?'. So instead of saying that quintessential corporate BS of 'No,' saying whatever like this 'they're not commenting' or 'we're not commenting' or just telling them it would be out later. We decided to take a creative approach to this."

The senior brand manager noticed two things. First, that people were confused as to whether it was real or not, and second, that they were really hoping it was. He asked his team, "Is this PRable?", and the answer was, "I think this could work."

In an unusual decision, the brand managers decided to not give the campaign to the lead creative agency, but rather to work exclusively with the public relations firm Ketchum, which, according to the senior manager of brand communication, "is pretty atypical in corporate America. Good ideas come from everywhere and everybody believes that. Creative agencies still lead the bulk of that work. But this time, we made the decision to give it to the PR agency."

Ketchum assembled a small team, including a digital strategist, a designer, and an account supervisor to work with the brand managers from Reese's. They developed a

two-stage strategy. The first stage was to neither confirm or deny that the product was coming but keep the public in suspense until the second stage, which would be the reveal at the Sweet and Snacks Expo on May 24, 2016.

First Stage Strategy and Tactics.

Over the span of about a week the team created a series of initial social posts that played off the fact that Reese's may have this big secret. "It was just sort of like cajoling the fans more and more until they couldn't handle it anymore," the account supervisor said. Working with the Reese's color palette and an emoji that looked like a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup with Reese's Pieces for eyes and a sly grin (named Cupmoji), the design team decided to leverage two upcoming holidays: Cinco-de-Mayo and Mother's Day. "They were all alluding to the fact that there were pieces in the Reese's cup, but obviously nothing that was gonna give it away," the associate creative director noted.

The entire creative process was accelerated. The initial "creative," a Cupmoji piñata with what could have been Reese's Pieces falling out, was created on PowerPoint



Figure 2. Cinco de Mayo.

by the senior brand manager. "I sent it to the agency, so they could fix it, and they didn't. It has all these mess ups in it. Like the pieces aren't the right size, there's no shadow, and there's all these problems with it." Speed was of the essence. "So then you're watching this post and you're watching the comments come in and while the leak is big, the reality is it's small," the senior manager of brand communication explained. "Forty-one thousand isn't really a lot. It might sound like a lot, but when you sell a product that's a dollar, you need really in the twenty millions to kind

of generate reach.” In this Facebook post the team introduced the #Cupfusion hashtag. “It was two things. It was one, a play off confusion, people were confused if this was real, but it was also brand equity, that the fusion of two things together. So that's how you got #Cupfusion.”

Reese’s has more than 11.5 million followers on Facebook. Other organizations do promotions for Cinco de Mayo, so the logic was #Cupfusion could be considered as part of the holiday, with the added value of teasing if the product was real or not. The senior brand manager noted, “We almost needed someone to help spread the rumor for us, someone to see it and post, ‘Oh, I saw this image online. It was good. Thank you.’” The post received 12,718 engagements (a combination of likes, comments, shares and clicks). The team augmented the piñata post with a more explicit hint, “A cup can dream,” showing a Reese’s cup with a thought cloud showing the potential combination of Cup and Pieces. This posting received only 10,420 engagements, but the reach was growing, from 1,572,600 unique viewers to 1,732,883 unique viewers. Reaction in the comments was again mostly positive anticipation, with some anxiety, “Don’t play with my heart Reese’s,” and “don’t talk about it, be about it. Make it happen now.”



Figure 3. A cup can dream.

Cinco de Mayo was on Thursday. The team posted again on Saturday, May 7, this time leveraging the Mother's Day holiday. This time the theme was from the senior brand manager, whose mother would say "I love you to pieces" to her children. It was a short video showing a large cup with some pieces and the caption, "I could just eat you up." The pieces reply, "aw, mom, not again," whereupon they are rolled over and absorbed by



Figure 4. Happy Mother's Day

the cup, which says "yum." The caption reads, "This weekend, celebrate with the ones you love to Pieces #HappyMothersDay #Cupfusion." Again, because they were making the creative in real time, the graphics were off, and the design manager "had a heart attack."

But the senior manager of brand communication noted that "you learn in the retrospective, you learn it's okay. A general consumer doesn't care about that, what he cares about is 'Man, is this cup, is this product real?'" This post attracted a huge response, with over 648,000 engagements and a reach of 3,700,000. The #cupfusion was working. The senior brand manager was thrilled. "So they took the bait hook, line, and sinker. We're like, 'Oh my God, this would be the greatest thing to happen in the world.' And fans and consumers are so creative that they were like, whether it was gifs or just the stuff that they would write would be hilarious and really fun." The strategy was still to draw out the suspense until the conference. "We knew we were gonna do that for a while, but then as soon as it got to the point where that kind of joke played out, then we were gonna let them know." Reese's community managers were crucial to the strategy. The digital strategist explained:

“What we would do collectively as a team, we talked about from a high-level how we want to respond to things. We want to spur cupfusion and play on ... Instigate cravings around the product so we talked about it from a high-level. They dispatched their community manager to go in and respond to the comments. The comments were the lifeblood. Even from the viral posts, that was the lifeblood of the campaign.”



Figure 5. Where did they go?

On Tuesday, May 10, Reese’s posted another #cupfusion emoji with facial “features,” two Pieces for eyes a wry grin, and an arched eyebrow. “Cupmoji” had a thought cloud with the phrase “Pieces? I haven’t seen ‘em,” and the caption, “Where did all the Pieces go?” This post was able to build on the momentum of the campaign, with a reach of nearly 5,000,000 unique views. But the engagement was down, only 11,526 likes, comments, shares and clicks (Reese’s, 2016). And the comments were starting to reflect more impatience

and frustration. Commenter Ashley Wells wrote, “I wish you'd stop playing with my pregnant, craving emotions and release these to stores already.” There were also more posts critical of the product in general, complaining about the quality of the chocolate, the size of the cups, and their country of origin. One comment rang true to the team: “Are you finally gonna tell us whether it's true or not, or are you gonna continue to like not answer thousands of people's questions every day?” The atmosphere was changing. “It became pretty clear after like five days that people really wanted to know,” the senior

brand manager noted. “They were no longer enjoying our playing with them and denying it but kind of confirming it but kind of denying it at the same time.”

The team moved the timeline forward again, and again did the unconventional. On May 11 they posted to their Facebook account of Cups and Pieces around a conference table with a ‘Top Secret’ clipboard. The caption read: “Guess we’ve got some

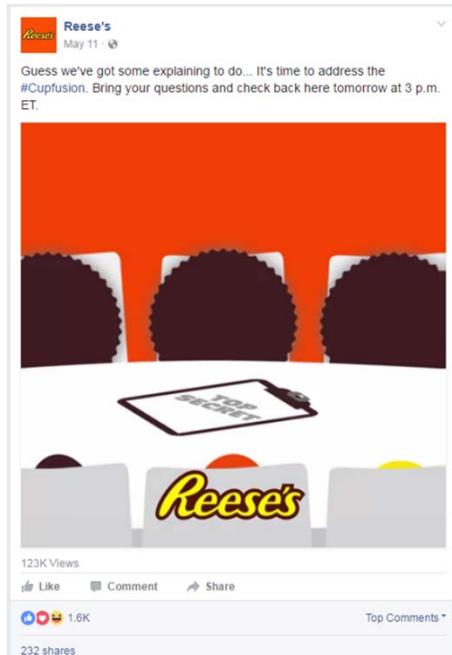


Figure 6. We've got some explaining to do.

explaining to do...It’s time to address the #Cupfusion. Bring your questions and check back here tomorrow at 3 p.m. ET.” This post attracted less attention than previous posts, with just over 56,700 engagements and a reach of only 380,000 (Reese’s, 2016). However, the unconventional setting for the “press conference” created additional media buzz.

Media recruitment.

The Ketchum account supervisor explained the team media strategy: “We laid the groundwork on social, and then as that started happening, we knew that this could be of interest to media. And it was really unique because most of the time when we pitch media, we're pitching them facts. We're pitching them an announcement, or a new product, or some sort of piece of news...And I say it was a risk because reporters can be pretty prickly about this type of stuff. They don't like QC (Questionable Content) a lot. They like to know, is it something that I can write about and can be verified, or is this something that I can't write about?” By being selective of who they pitched, not being too serious, and sending selected social posts and

conversations, they were able to create an atmosphere of “What’s going on?” Media outlets started posting their own stories on Facebook and Twitter to “check out” what was happening at Reese’s. “We were able to get solid media coverage about a product that hadn’t even been announced yet.” When the team moved the timeline for the announcement, they alerted all the media that had previously covered the story that there was going to be a “development” in this breaking news at 3:00 p.m. on May 12.

Reese’s teased the “press conference with a post reminding all of the announcement time and Cupmoji with cameras and recorders in his “face.”

Facebook News Conference.

To keep the announcement just as unusual as the rest of the campaign, the team decided to post the reveal on Facebook, and then have the social media team respond to comments and questions. In early 2016 the Facebook live streaming service was still in its infancy (Constine, 2016). To make the “press conference” as realistic as possible, the

announcement and responses would be in real-time. “Basically, I wanted something that was social,” said the senior brand manager. “I also know how awesome our fans are, so kind of packaging things up for like an earned media, like usually we’ve had a lot of success with getting earned media. They always show that relationship between the fans and the brand. They’re always showing Facebook posts, so I wanted to use Facebook and Twitter to draw out a lot of fans, so that the PR team could go and pitch this to the

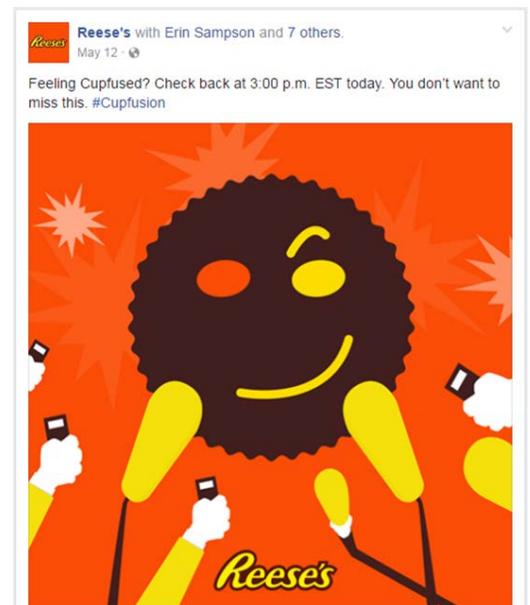


Figure 7. Press conference teaser.

various publications and online.” The post was quite simple and straightforward. It was a picture of the actual product, with “yup...it’s a thing.” The caption was, “The #Cupfusion is REAL.” “We invited all the media and consumers to attend this live Facebook press conference,” the senior manager of brand communication noted. “Where we literally, had a little script. It was a little short motion video and we confirmed that it’s real and it went crazy.” The post went viral, with more than 582,000 engagements, an astonishing 2,600 comments (the average for the first six posts was 215), and a reach of nearly 7,000,000 unique views on Facebook (Reese’s, 2016).



Figure 8. Yup...it's a thing.

Twitter.

On Twitter, where Reese’s footprint was much smaller (212,000 vs 12 million followers), the post “blew up.” Twitter engagements, a combination of likes, retweets, replies, @mentions, follows and clicks, slowly grew from the initial #Cupfusion post on Facebook, starting at 1,178 from the first post, to a small peak of 9,594 for Mother’s Day, slumping back to 2,811 for the “Where did all the pieces go” post. But pitching to mainstream media built a larger twitter presence. The “teaser” on May 12 received 3,400 engagements, versus only 1,371 for the “we’ve got some explaining...” post on May 10. The “#Cupfusion is real” post, however had 224,829 engagements, a wildly unanticipated result (Reese’s, 2016). The senior brand manager was pleasantly surprised. “It just blew up. It was before, really, Facebook Live, and right before we were going live, we were like, ‘Oh, man. Whose gonna be monitoring Twitter?’ We're like, ‘Oh my God, we don't have ...’ So that's how fast we were moving.”

Media reaction.

Within days there were 481 placements ranging from popular websites to magazines to local, cable, and national news. Demand for the product from mainstream media was immediate and intense. But there was no product in any quantity. “The samples were literally made in our R&D center in Hershey and wrapped in white packaging with a sticker of ingredients on one side and then we created these custom stickers, that had cupmoji on it and put them on the front and that was it,” said the senior manager of brand communication. “We weren’t prepared in the traditional sense of like, ‘Oh, here’s a sample. It’s gonna look great on TV because of this,’ the senior brand manager noted. “But I said, ‘guys...don’t worry about it. Let’s just go.’”

The announcement was on a Thursday, the product, white package and all, was on the Today show the next day, and Good Morning America the next Monday. Paula Faris,



Figure 9. Love child.

of Good Morning America, exclaimed, “If the Reese’s Pieces and Peanut Butter Cup had a baby...this is the most beautiful baby.” Reese’s quickly replied with a Facebook post. Reese’s claimed more than 1.1 billion earned media impressions from the campaign. Results were

tangible as well and included a tripling in sales projections. The #Cupfusion had been cleared up, but there were still weeks until the product hit the shelves in July.

Follow on campaign.

Reese’s continued to post clever Cupmoji-based images and short videos on Facebook to keep interest high. One particularly popular post was a composite video of

comments and gifs posted by Reese’s fans. Titled “Things #Cupfusion fans say,” it had over 530,000 engagements, a reach of 7.5 million, and over 11.1 million impressions (Reese’s, 2016), exceeding the most popular of the original campaign posts. When the product was finally released during July and August, the senior manager of brand communication noted, “Our sales went six-fold immediately because we had consumers asking customers⁴ if they could have it. The customers didn't have it, so the customers called us asking for it. We learned we could drive sales via our brand love.”

Research Questions

In this section each question will be examined for its relevance to the case.

RQ1: How, if at all, does the process in which this organization developed and executed a public relations campaign, and its resulting unintended consequences, reflect Merton’s theory of unanticipated consequences?

Before starting a detailed analysis of the five factors in Merton’s theory of unintended consequences, I wanted to ensure this case fit within the parameters Merton (1936) identified for the theory. I will discuss each in-turn before moving on to the five factors described in his theory.

The first parameter stated the theory must be limited to isolated or individual actions, rather than systems of actions. In this case the communication process was limited to a single process, the campaign in support of the release of a new Reese’s candy.

⁴ This is industry speak for retailers, like Costco and Royal Farms.

In the second parameter he noted that just because consequences of the actions might be unanticipated did not necessarily mean they were undesirable. The remarkable success of this campaign was certainly not an undesirable outcome. “I use the word monumental not in a hyperbolic way,” the account supervisor remarked. “I think it's actually been pretty monumental for the company.” This case fits the second parameter.

The third parameter noted that while the source of the consequence was limited to the actor, the consequences could affect both the actor(s) and others, through interaction with the environment, and mediated through social structure and culture. In this case the consequence has driven a change in the way Reese’s launches products. One team member noted, “I think a lot of what we did in #Cupfusion we've taken bits and pieces and reapplied them to recent work.” The senior brand manager said, “It's really changed how I do communication as a company. It has really changed how I do it, how the company looks at it, how the brands look at it. It's just really been a tremendous blessing.” In this case the Hershey company, the Reese’s team, and Reese’s social media followers were all part of the consequences of the communication.

The fourth parameter notes that these actions (communications) must be deliberate, in that they involved motive and choices, not simply instinct. The digital strategist explained the way the team deliberated:

“The way it works as far as process, we saw the opportunity. We sat back and said, ‘All right, we know Cinco de Mayo is coming up. We know Mother's Day is coming up.’ How can we get this relevant cultural holiday? That was sort of the thought process into it.”

While the team was operating “on the fly,” the posts and comments were made as the result of a deliberate, if hurried, decision making process. The choices were made to leverage holidays with the Reese’s brand voice to develop the graphics and comments that proved so successful.

In the fifth and final parameter Merton stressed that the action did not necessarily have to be rational (as seen from an outside perspective) and that whether it was rational, or irrational should not be identified with the success or failure of the action. The initial unexpected leak came about as an aberration in the normal marketing process. The second, successful unanticipated consequence was the result of a deliberate series of choices made by the team. In both instances the company was acting rationally.

Factors involved in unintended consequences

As stated earlier, Merton (1936), in terms updated by McAuley (2007) used the following five terms to identify the factors involved in unanticipated consequences: 1) lack of foreknowledge, or the inability to apply current knowledge to future events; 2) habit, or the assumption that prior experience will be relevant to the future; 3) myopia, or focusing on the short-term relief at the expense of longer-term effects; 4) values, when personal satisfaction (whether it be based on family, community, country, or god) overrules the objective considerations of actions; and 5) self-defeating predictions, when the prediction of a future social development becomes a factor in the situation, thus altering the environment and changing the outcome. I believe this final factor applies to longer-term social and societal issues. Due to the short time periods involved in the interplay between the communicators on the campaign team and their publics, I believe this factor in the theory can be disregarded for this case.

To put this analysis in context, it will be useful to identify what communication in the campaign resulted in unintended consequences, and what those consequences were. I have identified two consequences of communication that were unintended: 1) the leak of information that a new Reese's product might be coming to stores that summer; and 2) the viral reaction to the announcement that the product was real. The different nature of the process in which each communication was developed and delivered requires a separate discussion of how Merton's four remaining factors can be applied to evaluate them. I will analyze each unintended consequence in turn, using each of the factors identified in Merton's theory.

The leak.

The leak on Facebook came as a result of the normal process involved in a rollout of a new candy product. This product was part of a normal process within the Hershey company to fill shelf space with seasonal or occasional products. The Hershey company has been making chocolate since 1900 (Our Story, n.d.). Hershey's process has never been made public, and the Hershey company will not comment on the techniques used to make their chocolate (Moskin, 2008). Hershey's currently has 126 items featured on its website, 13 from the Reese's brand. Rollouts of new or seasonal products are a well-established part of Hershey's vision to be the "ultimate brand experience" (Hershey, n.d.). The philosophy behind new product rollout was to not "get ahead" of the product. A normal timeline could take a year or more. The senior manager of brand communication said:

“This product, if you know anything about product innovation, was not supposed to be the next biggest thing. It was supposed to take a spot on a c-store shelf.⁵ So it was developed originally, for the c-store panel. Things rotate in and out of shelves and there was space, and the sales team said, ‘Man, we really need some innovation.’ So the team came up with this idea on a train ride home from New York City.”

I was unable to obtain a copy of the Reese’s proprietary product rollout checklist or timeline. Studying other checklists (which can run upwards of 50 steps) for consumer releases, I found that one of the early steps in the standard product development and release checklists is to check if potential consumers like the product, or, that “market receptivity has been evaluated by key customer feedback...” (DRM, 2016). The senior manager of brand communication acknowledged this as part of the Reese’s standard process when she speculated on the origin of the leak. “We think, you know what happens is, when you share a lot of things with sales people in advance to get them excited to buy the product and that’s probably where it came from. We can’t confirm that, but it was an old image, an old rendering that we had, it wasn’t final product.” Since the leak did no damage to the Hershey company’s reputation, the team felt no need to pursue further contact with the leaker. I reached out to the blogger on social media but received

⁵ As explained to me, a c-store (industry term for convenience store) shelf is a spot near a checkout register where customers might see “impulse buy” items. New variations on classic products is one part of Reese’s sales strategy.

no replies to my friend requests or comments. With this context on the unintended leak of the product, I can now correlate the process with Merton's factors.

Lack of foreknowledge

No one had ever leaked a photo of this kind of product, at least not in the knowledge of anyone at the Hershey company. The senior brand manager was clear, "I was sitting at my desk and a woman that works for me said, 'Reese's Pieces cup has been leaked online.' And I said, 'Well, that's not possible. It doesn't come out for like three months.' And she goes, 'No, it's online.' I said, 'Well, it's not online.' I was just kind of dumbfounded." As noted earlier, Hershey's is tight-lipped about its products and its process. The relationship between Reese's and the sales people they use as part of their marketing assumed the "insider" knowledge of the next product would be kept secret. Social media had transformed the boundaries of what might be considered normal or proper behavior in this case.

In retrospect, it was unusual that this had not happened before. Leaks and teasers are normal for technical products from companies like Apple (Moorman, 2012). Movie trailers are common practice. One participant admitted as much: "Really, it felt super innovative to us, but at the same time...I think this notion of announcing things early has always been true." But to the interviewees announcing early, at the time, was not logical. "We had a habit of not really wanting to talk about products very far in advance because the reality was that you couldn't buy them. And if you couldn't buy them how could you generate sales? That was the current mentality," the senior manager of brand communication explained. According to Merton's criteria, lack of foreknowledge was a factor in the unintended consequence of the leak.

Habit

The “current mentality” attitude implied habit was very much a part of the communication process for the original campaign. The public relations firm didn’t have the product on their radar. The account supervisor noted, “it was not for several months that it was actually going to be released ... This was always meant to be a smaller launch as well, even as far as how they were going to make and distribute the product.” But this did provide an opportunity which led to the process which led to the second unanticipated consequence, to be discussed later. Habit was certainly a factor in this unanticipated consequence.

Myopia

Merton defines myopia as responding to or privileging short-term interests to the detriment of longer-term and ultimately more important goals. This communication was part of a standard marketing campaign communication. Reese’s was not putting short term interests ahead of longer-term objectives. The company was simply executing a normal product rollout process. In this first communication process and resulting leak myopia was not a factor.

Values

The Reese’s brand values were not a factor in the communication as part of the rollout process for the new product. The Reese’s team’s values were not in play at this point, except that they had conceived of a product that reflected the values of the brand—innovative and humorous. The Reese’s brand team was excited about the new product, and felt it fit with what consumers would want from a new product. A team member noted, “Reese's has a crazy fan love. It's almost like a cult product. It's probably similar to

brands like Oreo, or Harley Davidson, where it's like a fanatic feel for them.” The brand’s values were reflected in the product as it was being shown in advance to selected sales people. The excitement over the new product, combined with the easy access to social media may have inspired the Facebook post that went against industry protocol. Values were a contributing factor to the unintended consequence.

In summary, the first unintended consequence of communication in this campaign was a combination of a habitual rollout process that was upended by an overzealous fan. The organization might have anticipated the leak but did not. Lack of foreknowledge, habit, and values were all applicable in this first consequence, but they were more a result of Hershey’s process for product rollout as it existed at the time, rather than the communication process used by the Reese’s team *after* the leak. These three of Merton’s factors are only marginally useful in describing this case. For the next example I will be able to go into much greater detail.

Creating #Cupfusion.

The second unintended consequence of the #Cupfusion campaign was the viral amount of earned media coverage and boost in sales generated by the use of social media, especially Facebook, by the Reese’s brand and Ketchum public relations team. Analysis in this instance is challenging, because in this instance the team, in many of its choices, acted in the opposite way of the traditional interpretation of Merton’s factors of unintended consequences. The analysis can still be applicable to public relations research, for in the following example the intent is to examine how understanding and avoiding the factors that lead to negative unintended consequences, one might cultivate possible unintended, yet welcome, consequences.

Lack of foreknowledge

In his description of lack of foreknowledge, or ignorance, Merton (1936) notes that in complex systems foreknowledge is unlikely to enable an individual or organization to always anticipate an outcome, the more knowledge one has, the more likely the prediction will be accurate. He also notes that few situations are actually new, so past experience is a factor in how actors make decisions. This was an experienced team, with an average of eight years of experience in public relations. They were making educated guesses in their communication choices, combining a consistent brand voice with the prevailing atmosphere of the online environment. The senior brand manager: “Basically, we had never really announced that we were doing a product so early, but we said, ‘We have this momentum. People are talking about it. Let's just try something new.’” One speaker noted that she used experience from other cases to inform the way she acted in this case. The creative director: “I technically made decisions as we were going along with things that might be considered something that went poorly in other cases, but we really took advantage of it.” The team monitored the online conversations and comments on the Reese’s Facebook page, and knew that the anticipation was building to make an announcement of whether the Pieces-stuffed Reese’s Cups were real or not. They adjusted their announcement in reaction. The creative director:

“We felt like conversations were petering out a little bit. We went back and we evaluated, so the validity of the whole way that we function on this was very, very, very open-ended. If we felt like another post would just end up turning the conversation to frustration or so-on, then we made the decision so that that was when we made the decision to kind of come up, do the press conference.”

The team was taking “a calculated risk” in using Facebook for a real-time “press conference.” Live-streaming on Facebook was still very new (Constine, 2016), so the team was going to be responding to written questions with comments as answers. While not as dynamic as a traditional press conference, for the senior brand manager, the decision was tactically the right choice:

“I wanted something that was social. I also know how awesome our fans are, so kind of packaging things up for like an earned media, like usually we've had a lot of success with getting earned media. They always show that relationship between the fans and the brand. They're always showing Facebook posts, so I wanted to use Facebook and Twitter to draw out a lot of fans, so that the PR team could go and pitch this to the various publications and online...I just knew that that was the right place to do it for this campaign because I wanted that dynamic reaction.

When you were trying to confuse them at the beginning, you needed to have the ability to have that interaction. I knew that that interaction, along with it being a new product, was what was gonna get us the earned media.”

Still, the 582,000 engagements, 2,600 comments (the average for the first six posts was 215), and a reach of nearly 7,000,000 unique views on Facebook caught the team by surprise (Reese's, 2016). There was very little actual product, and no package design, but the traditional media was clamoring for the product. The senior manager of brand communication recalled:

“So for the first time ever, we actually sent white packaged product with a sticker on it. My heart attack, I'm having a heart attack, right. So as a publicist, you want everything to be beautiful and perfect and you want this. And we sent it to press.

We only had, I want to say a hundred, literally people were cutting them up, sharing them. I was on every major media, sometimes twice, broadcasts went online and kind of, it went crazy. And this all happened over the course of 10 days max, 7 days. And in May. The product wasn't launching until August.”

In this case, the unanticipated response by multiple media outlets, and millions of viewers, to a tease based on a leak initially seen on Facebook by only forty thousand Reese's fans, was partially based on a lack of foreknowledge. The team did not anticipate the intense demand for information for a product that may or may not have existed, and that fans could not acquire for months.

Habit.

In contrast to the Hershey corporation's habit of introducing new candy products to stores in a standard timeline, with standard communication, the Reese's team chose to compose “on the fly.” For Merton (1936) habit is acting under the assumption that because an action has worked in the past it will work in the future. Habit, taken to excess, causes an actor to reject changes in the current environment to act in their comfort zone. Another example would be to grasp one, familiar aspect of a situation, and act to the exclusion of other relevant aspects to a problem. The Reese's team used the experience aspect of habit to great advantage. The digital strategist: “We literally just came in as a creative community and really just tried to pull all of our insights, ideas, and things together and work as it goes.” And the team did not attempt to latch on to any familiar aspect of the situation: “We weren't married to any idea. We just wanted what works best.” In fact, the team acted counter to the corporate habit of reacting to a leak. The senior manager of brand communication noted: “So instead of saying that quintessential

corporate BS of ‘No,’ saying whatever like this ‘they're not commenting’ or ‘we're not commenting’ or just telling them it would be out later. We decided to take a creative approach to this.”

Not relying on habit was also part of the creative and communicative processes the team used. A common product communication process involves multiple teams and approvals. The digital strategist noted: “If you had a long process set up, which some brands do where you have multiple layers of approval processes. Maybe someone give it a week or two weeks. You can lose out. You really can lose so many opportunities.” The senior brand manager also noted a traditional social media communications team can be cumbersome: “It's a challenge when you have a PR agency, a design agency, an ad agency all in the mix. Even when they're all doing everything and trying to be as collaborative and helpful and play nice in the sandbox, it's just hard to have a lot of different creative people involved in one project. It's just a real challenge.” The #Cupfusion team streamlined the normal team structure by limiting the team to just the brand core members and the public relations team from Ketchum. The senior manager of brand communication: “We made the strategic decision to not give it to the lead creative agency at the time. They had other [priority] work and we didn’t want to distract them. And we just thought this is hyper-opportunistic, so [we] made the decision to give it to the PR agency instead.”

The team also streamlined the decision-making process. The digital strategist:

“The great thing about this campaign was that it was a total collaborative effort.

Literally every day, sometimes multiple times in a day, we would have sort of like a huddle where'd we say, ‘All right, this is where people are moving now.’ We

would develop a social media post from there... We were in that creative bubble. Everyone was on the same level. Obviously, he had the final say in what direction we would go in, but we all collaborated together.”

The hierarchically flat team structure contributed to the fact that there was no developed process for how the team operated. In this case, there was no process. The senior brand manager for communication noted, “We were all kind of working in rhythm. This wasn't written in a book and we didn't say, ‘When something's leaked, this is what you do next.’” Habitual methods of communication were discarded. “So, it's interesting, in the day and age where we get hundreds of emails a day, we got off email, and we kind of huddled together and we did this plan piece by piece.” The normal corporate approval process was minimalized: “In terms of the approval process, it was just us and the Brand Director at Reese's. ... this was one those rare projects where because of the timelines, the approval process was basically for us to use our gut and go straight to the Brand Manager.” The cupfusion team, based on prior experience, knew how a traditional campaign operated. However, they adapted to the unanticipated event of the leak by modifying their decision-making and creative processes to meet the extremely accelerated timeline of this, up until now, unique experience.

Myopia.

Myopia, or as Merton (1936) originally framed it, “the imperious immediacy of interest” (p. 891) concerns situations where actors are so focused on satisfying current and local needs that they ignore the broader and longer-term effects of their actions. It is impossible to know if Merton, for all of his insight, could have predicted the instant global communication network of 2016. However, though timeframes for action may be

accelerated, organizations still make what can be considered myopic decisions in public relations practice, such as failing to disclose a security breach, or raising the price of a much-needed pharmaceutical product (Rodriguez, 2016).

The #Cupfusion team was on an accelerated decision-making cycle. In this case the entire initial campaign, from leak to viral reaction, took just over one week. The team had to consider the short-term implications of how they would respond to the public reaction to the leak about the Pieces-filled Reese's cups. They also, according to Merton, needed to consider the broader outcomes of any actions. In this case, the senior brand manager weighed the risk and rewards, and decided the unconventional campaign was worth the chance to pitch to Hershey: "Basically, from the get go, I kind of spelled out to her why I thought this was a big idea, what I thought was the upside, and what I thought was the downside. When she decided that, 'Yeah, there's a lot more upside,' then she was like, 'You go for it. Run it.'" The senior brand manager also noted that as long as they kept it light and funny, there wasn't really much risk: "I think people overestimate risk. If we put out a post that no one liked it or no one took the bait, it's like, 'That's okay.' What's really the downside? It was like, 'Oh, that's a cute post about Cinco de Mayo' or, 'That's a cute post about Mother's Day.' No big deal." In this case the short-term interests of responding to the leak aligned with the long-term goals of the Reese's brand, which is to stay engaged with their loyal fan base. This conflation of goals may have been a contributing factor to the huge success of the campaign. The #Cupfusion team avoided the negative effects of myopia in this case.

Values.

Merton (1936) argues that values can result in unintended consequences when actors behave in a manner that satisfies their personal interests, rather than take into account the objective consequences of their actions. Whether they are acting to satisfy devotion to family, community, country, or God, does not matter, all that matters is their personal ethical code. Merton does not imply that acting according to one's self interest is right or wrong, only that not considering the objective outcomes of one's actions can have unintended consequences. In this case, the personal values of the #Cupfusion team were aligned with the desired outcome.

For example, the team had to work very quickly. The chosen form of communication, Facebook posts, went from conception to execution in hours. The team found it liberating. The digital strategist: "I definitely think the timing of this worked in our favor. It pushed us. It stretched us beyond what we thought our capabilities were from all sides. It pushed us to think smarter. To think more efficiently. We were able to leverage momentum." The creative director had similar experience: "The entire thing, every single part of it was just liberating and amazing... This was really something that really channeled a really fun and fantastic playful source of voice that was just a lot of fun to play with." The uncertainty of the process was an inspiration to the senior brand manager: "All of these decisions are evolving and taking place, but there is a lot of art to this. That's what I love. I love the art. Science is fine, but a lot of people can do science better than me, but art is the one that, there's a certain magic to it that, when you find a team that really [gels], I think it's really inspiring." The fact that the values of the

#Cupfusion team complemented the nature of the campaign was a factor in the unanticipated success of the campaign.

In this second unintended consequence, Merton's theory can be used as a frame for analysis. There seems to be a relationship between negative outcomes when Merton's typology is seen as a limiting factor, and positive outcomes when his factors are considered and accounted for.

RQ2: How, if at all, does the process in which this organization developed and executed a public relations campaign, and the resulting unintended consequences, reflect current public relations models regarding strategic planning of campaigns, especially social media campaigns, and public relations practice?

As noted in the literature review, most public relations models regarding the strategic planning of campaigns use some variation of the four-step model, most commonly referred to as RPIE, which stands for research, planning, implementation, and evaluation. In modifying the model for social media campaigns specifically, Kim (2016) used the circular model of listening, strategic design, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation, with evaluation informing the next cycle of listening.

The initial part of phase two in a traditional public relations strategic planning process involves setting goals and objectives (Smith, 2013). Goals can be defined as "broad, summative statements that spell out the overall outcomes of the program" (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 270). Goals should align with the purpose or vision of the brand. The usual goal of a consumer marketing campaign is to generate awareness for a new product. This case was unique at the time in that the initial leak had already generated awareness, of a *possible* new product. The overall goal remained the same, but the rest of

the process had been usurped by the leak. Once the situation developed, and the team noticed the overall reaction to the idea of a Reese's stuffed with Pieces, "I think our goals shifted," the account supervisor said.

"This was very much like a [you] hold my hand, I'll hold your hand and we'll figure this out together, because we all sort of knew that this was lightning in a bottle and we needed to be open to pivoting to make sure that we were doing what was best.

I think the first goal of it was, let's see if we can do something unique and different without just shutting it down and seeing this as a negative. And then as the program, as a strategy was set for more or less, more or less set, and the goal became to how can we continue to get, to make consumers interested in this? And continue to sort of tease this out as long as possible so that way we get that sort of maximum impact when we actually go come clean with it?"

The team did not lose sight of the original goal, but modified it to a unique situation. This flexibility is a theme of the campaign that will be discussed in more detail.

In a traditional social media campaign, an organization sets SMART objectives.

Common definitions for the acronym include:

Initial	Common Definitions
S	Specific, Strategic
M	Measurable
A	Achievable, Attainable
R	Relevant, Realistic
T	Timely, Time-bound

Table 1. SMART Definitions

When asked if the Reese's/Ketchum team had set objectives as part of the process for their campaign, the answer was no. The senior brand manager explained that it was happening too fast for that level of detail. "We were just...We had the strategy, at first confuse and then tell them the truth...We didn't have everything worked out, but we just knew this strategy. We were gonna let the energy of the crowd, we were gonna play off of it and let that go where we wanted to go." The traditional strategic planning process was too structured for a campaign being developed in the space of hours. Still, the team had structure that they could potentially use to respond to the rapidly developing situation.

Ketchum defines and divides the strategic design portion of Kim's (2016) four stage cycle into a strategic planning process called RISC. The process is described as intuitive, and the reward in following risk "is insight-fueled programming clients demand. No RISC, no reward."



Table 2.. RISC Strategic Planning Process

In this case the team did not have time to follow this process in the usual manner. The digital strategist noted that usually they would have more time to really find a

cultural truth that was more specific to a demographic within the brand. #Cupfusion was happening in real time.

“With this [campaign], the social insight was something that was evolving. It was something that required ‘always-on’ RISC state. That was sort of the thing. A constant sort of pivot. Once you found the insight that was all right, fans are into us losing them. How can we lean into this more? They're saying it was all a dream. What kind of creative can we do for that? How can we confuse them even more in a way that plays off what they're saying?”

Using a simple two-part strategy of first confuse, and then tell the truth, the team got into a rhythm of listening and creating. To describe what Kim (2016) would call the listening phase, Ketchum uses what they call “story work,” a proprietary name that describes “real-time listening.” Normally this would be done in preparation for a launch and in the initial response. For this case the team did a version called “catch-up story work,” which the digital strategist explained was “real-time listening and developing creative and strategy on the fly of what you hear and what you see.” The next section will explain that process in more detail and identify some themes that emerged from the data.

The #Confusion Team Process

The #Confusion team took what would normally be a weeks or even months-long process and compress it into hours. The senior brand manager put together a small team consisting of himself, a senior brand communications manager, and four members from Ketchum, a vice president of communications, an account supervisor, a digital strategist and a designer. They then worked collaboratively in what would be considered a very flat, versus hierarchal, structure. From the digital strategist:

“The brand manager at Reese's, he was our fearless leader from the quiet side. He didn't give us total free rein, but he definitely sand-boxed with us as a completely collaborative, creative atmosphere. We would sit and talk about fans starting to get antsy. What do you think we could do? What could we say? We were in that creative bubble. Everyone was on the same level. Obviously, he had the final say in what direction we would go in, but we all collaborated together.”

The creative director echoed this feeling:

“In terms of the approval process, it was just us and the Brand Director at Reese's... This was one those rare projects where because of the timelines, the approval process was basically for us to use our gut and go straight to the Brand Manager, which was pretty intimidating, I would say at first. But, it ended up doing us a really great open line to collaborating with Hershey's on it.”

In addition to the creative team, there was someone they considered an important, if not critical, partner in the process. The final component of the campaign was treating, as almost of member of the team, the Reese's fan base, by interacting with the brand, and each other, on social media. One team member noted, “You know how you see the memes and the GIFs⁶ that say, ‘I'm just here for the comments.’? Really, everyone was here for the comments. Comments from the fans. Fans were so colorful. Fans coming in and just saying the craziest things ever. We thought about how about we bottle this up and share it out.” The relationship between the Reese's brand and the brand community

⁶ Graphics Interchange Formats

was reflected in the comments section of each post. This real-time dialog was crucial in the unintended viral success of the campaign.

Brand community conversation.

As noted earlier, every post during the campaign received comments. The number of comments varied due to the type of post. The initial and holiday themed posts received between 173 and 417 comments (Reese's, 2016). Unrest peaked on May 10 with over 900 comments, with the trend of commenters becoming more frustrated. When the #Cupfusion team moved the release date forward and posted the "we've got some explaining" and "press conference" posts, they recorded comments numbering below 100 (Reese's, 2016). The actual announcement, however quickly generated almost 2,600 comments, and as of March, 2018, the comment count is 6,200 (Reese's, 2018). The #Cupfusion team was proactive in ensuring the brand responded to comments immediately after each post. The creative director explained that part of their process:

"We actually used one of their pink agency's account for its internal or external community management. What we did was preemptively helped them to have a bank of types of quotes that we would be doing or their icon or practice posts and so on. And we basically, vote when you have a base of the type of responses that we would want to give to certain sentiments and so on, so that way we could kind of arm them with the tools that they needed."

Reese's responses to comments varied in response to the nature of the comment. The tone remained consistently upbeat, and if the comment was negative, the tone became apologetic and informative.

This researcher categorized comments from the Reese's Facebook posts (Reese's, 2018) into eight groups, which be further termed as either positive, negative, or neutral. The positive comments fell into four categories: 1) enthusiastic (I love this and can't wait); 2) bring back a product I love; 3) I can't find a product I love; and 4) How about a new product that uses this? The negative comments were concerned with either: 5) the taste and quality of the product; 6) that they weren't made in the USA; or 7) that they aren't made with healthy ingredients. The final group, neutral, were simply 8) is this true or not? To illustrate the groups, I will give examples of each.

- 1) **Enthusiastic.** This group showed intense, positive interest in the potential new product: "Omg Reese's pieces inside a Reese's cup!?!?" In these instances the Reese's community managers matched the enthusiasm. "WE KNOW RIGHT!! How excited would you be if this dream came true!?!?" They even go as far as using double and triple exclamation points and question marks, which not only echo the tone of the commenter, but accept that it is all right to use slang punctuation.
- 2) **Bring back a product I love.** Almost as enthusiastic as the purely positive group, nearly one third of the comments involved previous products: "I miss the Elvis Reese's cups! Will those ever come back?" "If Reese's whips could Come back, I'd have a favorite candy again." "I would love Reese's Swoops again." In these instances the Reese's community managers had similar, if slightly different responses: "Thanks for letting us know what your taste buds are missing, Dawn! We'll certainly add your vote to bring back this perfect combination!" "Thanks for letting us know they were a fan favorite, Katie!

We'll surely add your vote to bring them back!" "Those were great, Matthew. Consider your vote counted for their return!" In each case the community managers acknowledge the commenter *by name* and validate their comment by noting they have tallied their comment as a vote to bring the product back.

- 3) **I can't find a product I love.** A small number of the comments seemed to be from people taking advantage of Reese's #cupfusion posts to inquire about other products: "Haven't seen in a while, Reeses Dark P.B cups?? are they still out??" "I can't find my Dark Chocolate Reese's anymore. 😞:(I used to get them at Five Below. I would eat these if they made them though. Lol." For these inquires the community managers had a standard response. Again they were consistent in using the commenter's name: "We're here to help, Rich! You can try using our product locator to find a store that carries our REESE'S Dark Peanut Butter Cups near you: <http://bit.ly/10OpIPh>. Have a perfect day!" "Sorry to hear you're having trouble locating them, Desiree! You can try using our product locator to find a store that carries our REESE'S Dark Peanut Butter Cups near you: <http://bit.ly/10OpIPh>. Have a perfect day!"
- 4) The final type of positive comments were suggestions for new products, or **"how about a new product that uses this?"** The ideas varied from the simple to the outrageous: "Instead of putting the Reese's Pieces inside of the Peanut Butter Cups, you should just put the candy coating from the pieces on the cups. Candy coating, chocolate and peanut butter = yummy." "Why don't you guys make buttercups that contain JELLY (a million different flavors can be had) and call them "Reese's PBJ's" duh 😊😋." In each case, the

community managers would offer encouragement and a link to the Hershey's suggestion site on the internet. "Sounds perfect, Heather! You can visit our Ideas website to submit your product suggestion: <http://bit.ly/VuaBiB>." "We're always open to hearing what perfect combinations our fans are seeking, Joe! Just head to our Ideas website to submit your pb & j suggestion: <http://bit.ly/VuaBiB>." Again, the community managers encouraged identification with the commenters by using their name and using complimentary adjectives such as "perfect."

- 5) **Negative comments about the taste and quality of Reese's.** These types of negative comments were uncommon, as were negative comments in general. but the community managers took them quite seriously. "I wish you'd fix the taste of the regular peanut butter cups. They used to be good, now they taste like chemicals." "Reese's Cups in my opinion aren't even good anymore. They are flavorless and waxy. Probably due to their trying to makes cheaper made product. Used to be my favorite but not any more. Quality 🍌👎." Reese's responses to complaints of this kind strike a sincere and/or apologetic tone. They also ask that the unhappy commenter continue to engage with the brand. "This doesn't sound like the experience that we aim to give our fans, Rachel! Give us a call at 1-800-468-1714 or send us a note at <http://bit.ly/1riBFaF> so we can get some more information." "We're sorry to hear your cups haven't been as delicious as they should be, Kathy. If you could, give us a call at 1-800-468-1714 or send us a note at <http://bit.ly/1riBFaF> so we can get some

more info.” The URL redirects to a “Contact Us” page where customers can email, call, or tweet questions to Hershey’s.

- 6) **Products not made in the USA.** A small percentage of comments objected to where Reese’s products were manufactured: “I’d love to try it if they were made in USA. I will not buy Hershey products when they outsource jobs to Mexico.” This type of comment brought out the longest reply of any found in this content analysis. “We’re sorry for any confusion, Chris. We want to let you know that our factories are still up and running here in Hershey, PA. Our factory in West Hershey has expanded, making many of your favorite HERSHEY’S candies, and we also have plants located throughout the US in Lancaster, PA, Hazleton, PA, Stuarts Draft, VA, Robinson, IL, Memphis, TN, and Ashland, OR. We also still have our REESE’S Factory in Hershey, PA! To make our labeling consistent, we recently changed our packaging to read “Dist. By” for all products made in the US. If a product is made in another country, it will be indicated on the package. You can find more about the products made at our various plants on our website here: <http://bit.ly/HjpDpT>. Thanks for taking the time to write.” The link directs to the Hershey company website, where one can learn that Hershey’s products are manufactured in Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, the Philippines, and the United Arab Emirates. The notation concerning Mexico has a positive tone, with not only a nod to Mexico as the birthplace of chocolate, but an acknowledgement that Hershey has been manufacturing

“high-quality chocolate, beverages and grocery products in Mexico for more than 40 years” (Global Locations, n.d.).

- 7) **Hershey products are unhealthy.** Though small in number, these types of comments were found in the comments section of every post. “Please remove the partially hydrogenated oil from Reese's Pieces. So bad for you.” “When are you going to start making Reese's with no artificial flavoring?” And they consistently drew a quick and measured response from Reese’s. In these two examples, the response to the criticisms were identical, except for the name: “Hershey takes an apologetic tone in its response: Thanks for reaching out, Alice/Haley! We hear you, and want to let you know we are moving our product portfolio to simpler ingredients. This will take time and as part of that journey we will be sharing more about what’s in our products, and how they are sourced and manufactured. Please visit our website for more information around our simple ingredients: <http://bit.ly/1BWsxpt>.” The link directs to the Hershey “food philosophy” web page, and links to videos featuring Hershey’s commitment to using only cocoa, nuts, milk, and sugar in its products by 2020 (Simple Ingredients, n.d.). These responses were on comments from different days, so it is unlikely the identical nature of the response would be noticed.

One other feature of these comments, and the other negative comments in general, was that other commenters would come to Reese’s defense, with comments such as: “don’t worry, I can eat my weight in Reese’s,” “It's candy!! You know what you're getting yourself into when you eat candy!” “...how am I supposed to eat my way into an early grave if people keep calling

for healthier junk food?” and, “I’ll never give up my Reese’s PB cups!!

Yummmmm 😊;-)” The last comment in particular, illustrates, with a winking emoji, how in-tune the community was with itself. The Reese’s Cupmoji, with its sly grin and arched eyebrow is reflected in the give and take between the brand, and in and among the brand community.

8) Is this true or not? As noted earlier, the #cupfusion campaign had two simple strategies, first confuse, then tell the truth. The first official Reese’s post on the subject was a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup in bed with a thought cloud of a Cup + six Reese’s Pieces = a Cup with Pieces inside. (See Figure 3). Some of the 266 comments were straight questions, like, “Is this really happening?” or “Is that dream about to become a reality?” Many were demanding, for example, “MAKE THIS HAPPEN REESE!” or “Don’t talk about it be about it. make it happen Reese’s. I want some right now.” The third large group of comments were people talking about what they would do if the dream was real: “I would break my no sweets diet to try this,” or “I swear if this happens I’ll bungee jump off a building in Dubai.” In their early replies the community managers were cryptic, with responses such as: “Perhaps. Perchance. Maybe”; “We donno, is it?”; “Anything could happen”; or a simple “#cupfusion.” In one eight-comment exchange, a commenter who said her father worked for “reeses factory in hershey,” reported she was told they were coming in July. The brand response was “#cupfusion.” That comment thread ended with an “OMG YAY” but others did not seem to catch on to the supposed confirmation.

As the campaign progressed, is it true or not comments became more demanding. One insistent commenter leveraged her pregnancy: “I wish you'd stop playing with my pregnant, craving emotions and release these to stores already” was a top comment, with 283 “likes” and further comments from another pregnant woman: “Same here. Currently 8 months pregnant & I eat Reese's on a daily basis. I just want these already 🙏🙏.” The community manager response was sympathetic and in character: “We're always here for you, even in those times of #Cupfusion. Trust us, it will be worth the wait. 😊.” The winking emoji was a common, shared part of the ongoing conversation in the Reese’s brand community.

The #Cupfusion team’s brand community conversation was a symbiotic relationship. The team would initiate a conversation, moderate it, and then let it guide the next communication. The focused process of listening to what their audience was saying and responding in a creative way that emphasized the Reese’s brand voice was key to the unanticipated response to the #Cupfusion reveal.

This method of adaptive listening takes the standard four-step model of public relations strategic planning, and compresses the planning, implementation and evaluation steps into 24 to 48-hour periods. The implementation and monitoring step of Kim’s (2016) model for social media campaign planning is modified to the extent that the team is not simply monitoring but is significantly altering objectives “on the fly.” The senior brand manager explained why the team departed from the usual process. “Most marketers hate that. They wanna know exactly what they're gonna do, when they're gonna do it, what the message is. To me, as long as you have a general understanding of your strategy, if you know who you are as a brand, then it's not terribly difficult to figure out

where to take the story. That's what we did.” Though the #Cupfusion team would not have given their process this label, they were practicing the type of “organizational ambidexterity” described by Bodwell and Chermack (2010).

This idea of fluid strategy will be explored further as part of the next section of themes revealed during the in-depth interview process and data analysis. I explore these to consider how this case helps understand the causes of unintended consequences in public relations campaigns. Understanding what factors are responsible for unintended consequences in public relations campaigns has two major benefits. First, it can help organizations in evaluating campaigns, to collect lessons learned, and to consider these factors in future campaigns. Second, understanding these factors can be used either prophylactically, to prevent or be ready to respond to unintended consequences, or proactively, to encourage the kind of viral positive response the cupfusion campaign achieved.

Additional themes from the #Cupfusion campaign

As noted earlier, this study is not a Classic (Glaserian) Grounded Theory study (Simmons, 2010), because it is not starting from nothing but an idea. It has a literature review, and it has answered some questions based on established theory. However, since a grounded theory approach allows for theory to be inductively derived from the study of a phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I think it is important to note some additional themes observed from analyzing the data, even if they do not necessarily directly support my research questions. In this section I will concentrate on the strategic planning and implementation processes the #Cupfusion team used in the immediate period after the leak implying there was a new Reese’s product. Listening to the members of the

#Cupfusion team, and analyzing their story, I was able to identify several themes that were important parts in the unintended success of the campaign. Themes included: brand voice; interpersonal relationships; risk-taking behavior; and the exploitation of the unique aspects of two-way communication on social media sites. In some cases, these themes confirm theories of social media campaigns, and are part of accepted practice. In other cases, they have not been noted in the literature, or are a first in this type of campaign. I will take each in turn.

Brand voice

The Reese's confection brand is the largest convenience store brand in the United States—62% larger than the next brand, M&M's (Andrews, 2017). "Reese's is a brand that is talked about all the time. They're constantly visible as an iconic brand that comes up very organically in social conversations from influencers or on television shows or whatever it is," said one interviewee.

Every interviewee stressed the importance of the Reese's brand voice. They were quick to point out that the Reese's voice was special. The digital strategist noted: "The brand voice is devilishly charming. That's the Reese's brand voice in general. Just the type of comments allows the brand to play up that a lot more. That kind of devilishly charming persona is something that we carried throughout all different parts of the campaign. That was an established voice already." Introduced in 1928 (Reese, 2008), the Reese's Peanut Butter cup is the best-selling candy in the United States (Upton 2013). The senior manager of brand communication echoed public feelings toward Reese's: "I think what you learn is that if you have a brand that has this blatant love, that people have tattoos of, they name their children, they have a wedding, or the baby shower, they pick a

car, all these things we collect and learn, you can drive significant excitement and demand.” The #Cupfusion team took this into consideration as they quickly created the campaign, noting that understanding the brand voice and engaging with the consumer appropriately. The account supervisor explained the fine line the team was walking:

“One of the reasons why we thought this would work so well is because the Reese's consumer and fan is incredibly engaged. They love to hear from the brand. They love the cheekiness that the brand employs, and it's the type of person that responds to that. So this approach would not work for every brand. You definitely need to have the right brand voice in order for you to effectively have this sort of play with your fans on social. We were able to understand how to speak in the brand voice, how to make sure we weren't crossing that line of being mean or too rude, or whatever it was. But just enough of that little bit of an edge that we know that the consumers would respond to.”

The #Cupfusion team knew, in general, how far they could push the envelope of uncertainty about whether the product was real or not. This was one aspect of a larger understanding of what subjects are appropriate for a brand to talk about.

This larger understanding of brand voice was articulated by the senior brand manager:

“So our brand has a kind of fun, cheeky personality, so I kind of thought, ‘Well, this is fun.’ We're a fun category. Let's just play around with this. Let's tease our fans about whether this is true or not. There is notion, and it's true, you do ... I kind of look at it as we all play a role. There's a brand voice and what we're

putting out and we stand for, but how people interpret that and how people want to feel about that, that's their own right and prerogative.”

In this quote, the senior brand manager is expressing two important concepts. First, he is expressing his confidence in the brand voice, and that fans would be comfortable with the initial “tease.” Second, he is explaining how important it is not to try and control what people are going to say about the brand. So, while it is his “right and prerogative to buy media and to tell you what I want to tell you...how you feel about it, I respect that.” By letting people think and say whatever they like about the brand, “it brings a lot of energy and fun and dynamism to the brand.” The senior brand manager finds inspiration in the community of Reese’s “lovers.” Rather than fear not being able to control the outside voices, “he loves and embraces” them. The digital strategist agreed: “Don't be afraid of negativity. Just play into it. Humor wins all.”

A final component to brand voice team members expressed was to be discreet in their choice of engagements. Team members noted that “knowing your voice” lets the brand know where the right fit in conversations exists. It helps the team members know “what culturally relevant conversations are right for that brand.” But the digital strategist warned, “Otherwise, you just sort of can jump into anything. It can turn south really quickly.” This idea was echoed by the senior manager of brand communication: “If your product is not at the center of things, you're inserting yourself and that's a much riskier, dicey game, that most times does not pay dividends because you're trying to basically jump into a conversation you weren't invited to.”

The senior brand manager had strong opinions on this idea of where the brand voice fit into the larger social media environment. He noted the brand voice needed to be

kept in perspective. “It’s candy, right? It’s candy. There’s other things that are probably a big deal in other categories, but we keep it light and fun ‘cause that’s what our brand is.”

He was clear about where the borders of conversation lay:

“People don’t want to hear Reese’s be serious. Right? What do I have to say about global warming or climate change or Republicans and Democrats? People don’t wanna hear from a candy company about that. You know what I’m saying? It’s not like Reese’s is weighing in on health care or the Russian memo. Right? I mean those are political things that have nothing to do with the brand. I think it’s always important to only pursue topics that are relevant to your brand and that people wanna hear.”

Within the borders of its’ circle of engagement, Reese’s official voice interacts with its different publics, whose various attitudes and opinions were noted earlier. Outside the circle, Reese’s monitors but does not engage. The senior brand manager defined extent of the border as not only knowing your brand personality, but a very important factor was waiting to be “invited into the conversation, and saying ‘Oh, I have something to say *that makes sense coming from me.*’”

The way the Reese’s brand voice interacts with its’ social media fans is illustrative of the two-way nature of communication in social media, and how platforms like Facebook must be treated differently than traditional media. The next section will discuss that idea and the lessons the team expressed from this campaign.

Aspects of two-way communication and the social media environment.

I observed three trends in listening to the #Cupfusion team talk about active engagement with their Facebook fans (or critics). The first involved how engagement

with the fans was taken for granted, or even expected. Once the team began to tease their fans about #Cupfusion, the fans responded very strongly, with a large increase in likes, shares, and comments. But the planned two-week timeline became problematic. For the senior brand manager, “It became pretty clear after like five days that people really wanted to know. They were no longer enjoying our playing with them.” The public was not only expecting engagement, but a certain specific content from the engagement. The digital strategist: We just went one week. Then, it shifted from we're excited, tell us is this happening to getting uneasy. All right, guys come on. We immediately knew it was time.” The #Cupfusion team was adept at reading and responding to the prevailing atmosphere in the brand voice environment. In fact, they often let the public shape that environment.

The second trend I observed from interviews with the #Cupfusion team was the ability to generate interest and excitement by listening and learning from fan comments, “The comments were the lifeblood. Even from the viral posts, that was the lifeblood of the campaign,” the digital strategist said. “We really allowed the users to help us with our strategy on what to create.” The team leveraged the creative ability of fans to build interest in the campaign. She added:

“Fans were so colorful. Fans coming in and just saying the craziest things ever. We thought about how about we bottle this up and share it out. I think the insight from there is it's not always about you pushing out what your creative ideas are. Sometimes, it's about elevating what the crowd is saying. Honestly, I think that is some of the sweetest thoughts for content. People can take it in a place where you can't.”

Also important was to not try to control comments or discourage them. The senior brand manager noted, “Your brand lives in their heart and minds, and they talk about it with their friends and their family, and they talk about it on social, so I’m kind of okay with the notion that you can’t control the message.” The digital strategist held a similar view: “You have to realize that you don’t know everything. You don’t own it. You’ve got to listen. That was the one takeaway. You really have to listen. Listening will tell you everything.”

This was the third insight the team had on engaging with their fans in social media. Fans don’t want to be told, they want to do the telling. The digital strategist noted, “People don’t really want to be told. They want to have a conversation. They want to laugh. They want to feel smart for their friends.” She added a further insight: “If you give them the power, they can elevate your brand beyond what you can ever do.” The team had a phrase for creative fans on their social media platforms, *micro-influencers*.

Micro-influencers differ from the popular idea of social media influencers who are either celebrities, or sports stars, or popular YouTube content creators with thousands or even millions of followers (Newberry, 2017). The senior manager of brand communication was more interested “in the micro-influencers, who are very authentic, who speak the love of the brand, who has that authentic approach. I find them to be the best seeds.” The team integrated these strategy into the campaign, which was innovative at the time for a c-store marketing campaign.

Interpersonal relationships and organizational structure

To work effectively under extremely tight deadlines, the #Cupfusion team was built to be quick, responsive, and creative. The small size of the team came to be seen as

an asset by the senior brand manager: “Sometimes it's a challenge when you have a PR agency, a design agency, an ad agency all in the mix. Even when they're all doing everything and trying to be as collaborative and helpful and play nice in the sandbox, it's just hard to have a lot of different creative people involved in one project.” He considered size a key to their unexpected success: “If you want me to be nimble and fast and single-minded, you can't have too many cooks in the kitchen.”

The small size streamlined the creative decision-making process as well. The digital strategist noted that “If you had a long process set up, which some brands do where you have multiple layers of approval processes,” decisions take much longer. “Maybe someone gives it a week or two weeks.” In this campaign that would have been a fatal mistake. “You can lose out. You really can lose so many opportunities.” She attributed the campaign’s success to its speed of execution: “I think that was a big part of the recipe to have a client that was willing to go as fast as we needed to go.”

According to the digital strategist, the team worked in “a completely collaborative, creative atmosphere. We were in that creative bubble. Everyone was on the same level.” The creation to release decision process happened in close to real-time. “We would draft who would take the lead in creative ideas. We would always do several options. Then, [the senior brand manager] would weigh in on it with the team. If he had any revisions, we would just talk about it on the call.” Instead of using email, the team used conference calls or in-person meetings. The creative director noted “this was one those rare projects where because of the timelines, the approval process was basically for us to use our gut and go straight to the Brand Manager.” The senior brand manager had streamlined his approval process as well:

“It was very limited. So I'd check in with my boss and get her opinion and stuff, but it wasn't like there was a lot voices on the call. I would make the decisions, and they would hear my voice. I knew when I needed to get alignment from my boss. I knew when I wanted to solicit or elicit other people's opinions. So we could move fast. Having just really one agency involved made it a lot faster, too.

The combination of a building a small team, using a single agency, and a streamlined creation and approval process were factors in the unanticipated success of this campaign.

The tight deadlines were also seen to be an advantage in idea development. The digital strategist said: I definitely think the timing of this worked in our favor. It pushed us. It stretched us beyond what we thought our capabilities were from all sides. It pushed us to think smarter. To think more efficiently.” It also forced the creative team to be “completely honest with each other.” In more than one case the creative director would tell the digital strategist one of her ideas “really doesn’t make sense.” But rather than be upset, the digital strategist explained:

“All right, cool. What do you not like about it? All right, I see. Let's crack it. Let's do this. I think that sort of push and pull and just that honesty. I mean, we were honest, and we were relentless. We failed internally a couple of times. But...we stayed committed to it. I think that was part of the success too. Again, we weren't married to any idea. We just wanted what works best.”

Finally, in terms of interpersonal relationships and organization, leadership was a key factor. The members of the Ketchum side of the team acknowledged they “had a very smart and savvy client,” “a fearless leader” who created “a completely collaborative, creative atmosphere.” The digital strategist noted: “They understand real-time

opportunities and how to move. I think that was gold for us because for something like this to work we had to move within minutes.” And the senior brand manager had a positive attitude to the process and the team:

“All of these decisions are evolving and taking place, but there is a lot of art to this. That's what I love. I love the art. Science is fine, but a lot of people can do science better than me, but art is the one that, there's a certain magic to it that, when you find a team that really has that, I think it's really inspiring.”

Risk-taking behavior

The decision to launch the #Cupfusion campaign to tease fans as to whether the product they heard about in the Facebook leak was real or not, rather than respond with a normal, “corporate” response, was one of a few “risky” decisions made by the #Cupfusion team. These risky decisions were factors in the unanticipated results of the campaign, so understanding the context in which they were made can theoretically help public relations practitioners either mitigate or cultivate these kinds of results. The #Cupfusion team made three decisions that were firsts in the history of how Reese’s products were marketed for convenience store shelves. First was the decision to “confuse” consumers about the reality of Pieces-stuffed Reese’s cups. The second was to have a real-time press conference on Facebook to announce the product. The third was to send out the product in generic packaging. I will analyze each of these decisions in turn.

As noted earlier, the initial leak was met with surprise and disbelief, but after the initial shock, the senior brand manager noticed that “to get 40,000 shares from a woman that was a blogger, who I'm sure was not putting significant money behind it, was like unbelievable and huge.” And the majority of the 5,000 comments had two themes, first,

that people were confused if it was real or not, and second that they were really hoping it was real. The team had two choices. The Hershey Company had never attempted to market a product to convenience stores that the stores could not have available to sell. There was no history. They could, as the account supervisor noted: "If we were thinking about this in a very one-dimensional way, it would be we respond back to consumers, 'We are not able to release this product at this time.' Or something kind of bland and corporate, and then move on from there." The digital strategist noted that strategy would have been the end of the opportunity offered by the interest in the leak: "If we would've confirmed it, we would've killed it immediately. The conversation when have been over. Dead. If we would've went and just denied it, it would've just [as] bad. Social media is merciless." Instead, after consulting with the team at Ketchum the Senior brand manager decided: "We have this momentum. People are talking about it. Let's just try something new."

The team knew that 40,000 shares for an unsponsored blogger's post was a great opportunity, but its reach fell well short of the millions a company needs for a product launch. The team needed a way to effectively bring the leak to a larger public. The senior brand manager decided to use the Reese's Facebook page, with its 11 million followers, to "pour gasoline" on the rumor. He believed that was the right forum for the campaign because he wanted a "dynamic reaction." "When you were trying to confuse them at the beginning, you needed to have the ability to have that interaction. I knew that that interaction, along with it being a new product, was what was gonna get us the earned media." To build momentum the team used the next holiday on the calendar, Cinco de

Mayo. This was the first use of the official Reese's brand voice to hint at the possibility of the new product. But the senior brand manager was not worried:

“I was like, ‘Guys, let’s just go for it.’ I think people overestimate risk. If we put out a post that no one liked, or no one took the bait, it's like, ‘That's okay.’ What's really the downside? It was like, ‘Oh, that's a cute post about Cinco de Mayo’ or, ‘That's a cute post about Mother's Day.’ No big deal.”

The senior brand manager was able to frame the risk in the context of his confidence in the relationship with the fans and the brand. He was also “going with his gut...and that all humans want to solve a mystery.” This issue will be discussed further in the next theme.

The second “risky” decision was to announce the product in an on-line “press conference” on Facebook, where after the initial reveal, all further interaction would be Q&A on the comments stream. The goal with this tactic was to not only generate a huge amount of earned media, but to have the mainstream media pick up on the story as well. The Reese's team was counting on two outcomes. First, they were counting on gifs, pictures, witty comments, and repartee within the dynamic brand community to generate content. Second, they were counting on the PR team to pitch that content to publications, broadcast media, and other on-line communities. As noted, the first outcome was well in progress. Community managers, with their guidance from the #Cupfusion team, were able to keep conversations going. With the groundwork laid on social media, media interest was possible. However, this second outcome involved risk. A normal media advisory involves facts. It is an announcement of an upcoming event, a new product, or

other newsworthy event. The account supervisor explained why this advisory was different:

“This was interesting because we took a little bit of a risk and we just basically pitched them a story that was like, have you seen what's going on, on the Reese's channel? And really leaving it at that and almost treating them as we treated our consumers and saying, ‘This could be true. This could not be true.’ And I say it was a risk because reporters can be pretty prickly about this type of stuff. They don't like QC (Questionable Content) a lot. They like to know, is it something that I can write about and can be verified, or is this something that I can't write about?”

The #Cupfusion team was able to mitigate the risk of putting off media outlets in two ways. First, they were able to leverage the nature of the product, candy, which was not too serious. And they pitched selectively at first, to reporters who would be receptive to that sort of outreach. Those reporters could then take some of the better social media posts and refer to them in stories, encouraging people to investigate the conversations surrounding this new Reese's product that may or may not be real. The unusual campaign worked. “We were really able to get solid media coverage around a product that hadn't even been announced yet,” the account supervisor said. So, the second outcome was growing more successful. Media outlets were interested, and the team was able to generate further interest by giving notice to outlets that had previously covered the story that there was going to be a development in this breaking news.

At 3:00 p.m. on May 12, only seven days after the Cinco de Mayo post, Reese's used its Cupmoji icon to announce, on Facebook, that #Cupfusion was real, and Reese's

stuffed with Pieces were coming that July. The post went viral, with 7,000,000 impressions and nearly 2,600 comments (Reese's, 2016). The announcement went viral on Twitter, with over 225,000 engagements (Reese's, 2016). After this announcement, the PR team was able to go out to a much wider list of media, who then immediately demanded samples, as part of what the account supervisor described as a "huge media blitz about the new product." An unusual and unanticipated aspect of this tactic was "we were able to generate two waves of media coverage in a span of a week with, essentially, the same product announcement." "We were trying to draw this out for 4 or 5 weeks. We just wanted to test people," the senior brand manager for communication said. "But people were like 'I want to know now.' So we had this little short motion video and confirmed that it's real and it went crazy."

This sudden unanticipated demand for the new product created the third decision that involved some risk to the team. "We didn't have product made at the time," the senior brand manager for communication explained. "We had it made in white packaging, which was sterile looking and from the R&D center, it's terrible. We had a sticker of ingredients on one side and an Cupmoji sticker on the other and that was it." The senior brand manager had the final decision: "You're making these decisions and you just have to kind of weigh the risk and reward like we do anything else in life. I said, 'No, send them the white packaging and put a sticker on it.'" The team only had about 100 samples, and they were sending them to major media outlets including Good Morning America and the Today Show. The senior manager of brand communication was in a viral whirlwind:

“People were cutting them up, sharing them. I was on every major media, sometimes twice, broadcasts went online and kind of, it went crazy. And this all happened over the course of 10 days max, seven days. And in May. The product wasn't launching until August. It wasn't even produced at this point in time.”

Looking back, the senior manager of brand communication was able to explain why the risk was worth it: “Our design manager had a heart attack, but you learn in the retrospective, is you learn it’s okay. A general consumer doesn't care about that, what he cares about is ‘Man, is this cup, is this product real?’”

The senior brand manager in his role as the team leader, explained the risk-taking philosophy of the #Cupfusion team, which in this case led to unanticipated success:

“I think it's just be brave. Yeah, the PR's always scary 'cause you don't know, but be brave and it's okay to fail, it's not okay to not try, I guess. That's that way I always look at it. And don't overestimate risk. If nothing's really that scary about it, right, then go for it.”

Each of the themes identified in this section were factors in the unintended but welcome success of the innovative #Cupfusion campaign. Some were notable for being excellent execution of recognized social media methods. Others were exceptional in that they were the first ever attempts at this type of campaign strategy with this type of product. The effects of this historic campaign, and what these results mean for public relations theory and practice, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 -- Conclusion

In retrospect, my initial ambition to research a multi-case study of public relations campaigns that had negative unintended consequences, in order to develop a typology based on Merton's five factors, was quixotic at best, and naive at worst. I learned that organizations don't like to talk about their failure. Even after changing tactics and inquiring about unanticipated positive campaigns, I found that when organizations succeed, they don't necessarily like to share their formula for success. But I was fortunate, in the case I did find for my exploration, to discover an exemplary process for developing a public relations campaign. In response to an unanticipated event, the #Cupfusion team made innovations in the way social media can be used to cultivate an existing relationship on a social media platform. They have changed the way organizations develop and implement candy and chocolate product launch campaigns.

This paper asked and answered two research questions, and explained some additional themes that evolved from the data.. These next sections will discuss my concluding thoughts of each, including possibilities for future research.

Implications for Merton's theory

First, Merton (1936). The limited results I found in this case do not deter me from thinking that just as Merton attempted to bring scientific inquiry methods to sociology and the unintended consequence of social actions, we can do the same with public relations campaigns. It is (myopic) to accept unintended results of public relations campaigns with the simple explanation, "well we just couldn't anticipate that result," when there is a typology available to use *post-mortem*. There are two areas where Merton's typology can inform public relations theory and practice. The first concerns

Merton's concept of *lack of* foreknowledge, and how it can be related to the current digital environment. By accepting lack of foreknowledge as a given in the Internet environment, integrating the principles of chaos and complexity theory into public relations functions, including campaign planning and relationship management, has potential to improve how public relations can be practiced using social media.

Implications for chaos and complexity in Merton

No matter how thoroughly a campaign is researched and how many times an organization asks, "what if?" unintended consequences happen. Merton (1936) accounted for this by noting "the interplay of forces and circumstances...are so numerous and complex that prediction of them is quite beyond our reach" (pp. 899-900). Understanding and accepting the complex nature of our society is uncontrollable lets us plan for the inevitable unintended consequences. Gilpin and Murphy (2006) posit that it is impossible to eliminate or control ambiguity, paradox and uncertainty in the world, but rather to accept these "as unavoidable and uncontrollable characteristics inherent in our world" (p. 379).

This case has two implications for chaos theory. First, it illustrates how a small event, in this case, a Facebook post from a food blogger with a modest following, can have a ripple effect that ends up attracting more than a billion media impressions and change the way a 122-year old, multi-billion-dollar corporation brings its products to market. However, in dealing with this transformative event, the #Cupfusion team worked accurately, at a small scale, by listening to individual comments, and discerning the larger picture of what was happening at a larger scale (Sellnow, Seeger & Ulmer, 2002), were able to cultivate an unexpectedly positive outcome. Second, this case illustrates how

individuals can be attracted to an issue, gather, and gain momentum. Murphy (1996) noted that the chaotic nature of interest groups may make them difficult to “manage.” The #Cupfusion team did not try to manage the group, but rather, through listening and conversation, was able to create a strategy that resembled Charest, Bouffard and Zajmovic’s (2016) strategic planning model. Understanding how groups form in the chaotic digital environment that is social media, and how relationships can be nurtured in that environment, supports new practices in the relationship management area of public relations practice.

Complexity-based thinking posits a “recognizable but unknowable future and the absence of stability in any but inert systems” (p. 379). Complexity theory assumes: 1) it is impossible to control events or perceptions of events; the organization can only control its own behavior and develop new patterns of interaction; 2) ambiguity and uncertainty are unavoidable, and should be accepted and embraced; 3) the organization is bound by fluid changing, social constructed boundaries; and 4) the best way to handle time-sensitive, important decisions is to develop the expertise necessary for skilled improvisation (p. 382).

This study supports complexity theory’s guidance on how to prepare and respond to a crisis, or an unintended consequence. In this case, the potential damage to the organization was minimal “It’s only candy, right? It’s only candy.” But the way the team responded to the leak supported Gilpin and Murphy’s (2006) prescription. They accepted they could not control events, they embraced ambiguity and uncertainty, they worked within fluid, socially constructed boundaries, and they demonstrated the expertise necessary for skilled improvisation.

In addition to raising new possibilities to think about the concept of lack of foreknowledge, three more of Merton's five factors, *habit*, *myopia*, and *values*, have shown to be applicable in this case.

While the first unintended consequence, the leak, could be considered partly the result of the habit of informing selected customers about upcoming products, the second unintended consequence came from avoiding the usual actions. In this case the #Cupfusion team went off-script, took a calculated risk, and reaped a large reward in media impact and resulting sales. Therefore, even when the factor is shown to be part of a positively-perceived result, an organization or individual can conclude, it was good they didn't follow their usual habit in that case. account supervisor the senior brand manager for communication noted, "If we would have sat on our heels and tried to have the plan perfect and everything beautiful, the opportunity would have walked out the door. And for me, that's a big learning."

The #Cupfusion team avoided negative consequences and enjoyed unanticipated success by avoiding myopia in their process. Their success seemed to derive from their constant focus on their brand voice. Through constant monitoring and engagement with Reese's fans, within the confines of the brand's cultivated environment, the #Cupfusion team made calculated decisions in compressed time frames, and they could "trust their gut" in what they posted and how they responded to fan comments. Their short-term and longer-term interests could be satisfied simultaneously by remaining true to their established brand persona.

This persona and its fans shared values as well, which was a factor that contributed to the unanticipated success of the campaign. Both brand and fans shared an

intense affection for Reese's. Consequently, the #Cupfusion team could act to satisfy the needs of the team, which was variously described as expressing the team's creativity and satisfaction with being able to develop and release posts and replies that built upon an existing and evolving situation. The senior brand manager explained, "We were gonna let the energy of the crowd, we were gonna play off of it and let that go where we wanted to go, which I love." Therefore, Merton's idea of values being a factor in unintended consequences can still be applied in evaluation. When values are in line with the objective environment, negative consequences may be avoided.

During my search for cases to use for research, I identified a factor that could be considered part of both of Merton's factors, *habit* and *values*. In some cases, the *hubris* of leadership in the organization seemed to be a factor in unintended consequences. Organizations proceeded with public relations campaigns based almost solely on an idea from the top. The Starbucks "Let's talk about race" campaign is an example that showed promise for investigating this idea further. Without the ability to interview participants in the decision-making process, unfortunately, this remains speculative.

Implications for strategic campaign planning

This study adds value to the current public relations strategic design process. Applying these three aspects of the typology as part of the evaluation phase of the standard four-part campaign process could add value to an organizations ability to develop and conduct future campaigns. These factors help ask and answer the "why" questions. It goes a level deeper than "well this happened" to "why did this happen?". Conceivably, these factors could also be applied to the second, "planning" stage of the strategic design process. By adding a few questions to the steps between planning and

implementing a campaign, an unintended consequence might be avoided. Or, by asking some of the following questions, an organization might be less surprised when outcomes are unanticipated. Examples considering each factor could include:

Habit: Are we doing it this way because this is the way we always do it? Or is the environment different now versus the last time?

Myopia: Is this communication just a short-term fix? Are we looking past this situation to our longer-term goals?

Values: Are we doing this just to satisfy ourselves, or are there other, objective realities we need to consider?

These sorts of questions should already be part of a well-designed and implemented public relations campaign. Thorough research should encapsulate all the objective realities in the current environment the organization is communicating in. Well thought-out campaigns should reflect the organizational vision and its long-term goals, as well as its values. And an organization's values should be part of a shared reflection of not only the leadership of an organization, but its employees, including those developing the campaign. And yet, there is a cottage industry of publications and web sites that continue to document public relations disasters (Story, 2017). Public relations practice could benefit from adding these questions as part of a final "review before release" checklist.

This study serves as an example of an effective social media campaign. It has elements of both the rhetorical and relational traditions of public relations. The campaign was based on a story—a mystery—is it real or not? The content created by the #Cupfusion team was framed around recognized holidays that kept the suspense going, until the suspense was too much to sustain, and the secret was revealed. The content was

consistent, yet creative, and used a recognizable emoji as a virtual spokesperson. The story was relatable, and encouraged dialog with fans. The brand communicated promptly and in a consistent brand voice, which helped sustain and grow an already established community of Reese's lovers. And while this campaign did not solve the problems of our democracy, Kent (2013) can appreciate that Reese's has built an engaged, creative community. The flow of the conversations on the Reese's Facebook page was an example of an organizational voice being responsive to all comments, positive and negative, in a manner that encouraged further engagement. The fact "comments drove the campaign," as noted by the participants shows that the organization has developed "organizational ambidexterity," as argued by Bodwell and Chermack (2010).

In spite of being of such short duration, this campaign meets some of Allagui and Breslow's (2015) criteria for best practices. It was uniquely disruptive of the traditional public relations campaign cycle. The initial leak was unexpected, but garnered interest. Social media was used exclusively until broad, intense media coverage, which was driven by media coverage of the large social engagement on Facebook and Twitter. The Facebook real-time "press conference" had never been tried. The "on-the-fly" nature of the campaign illustrated how effective use of social media can reinvent a traditional public relations planning process.

The #Cupfusion campaign also met the PARC principles for successful strategies. It was participatory, with constant interaction with the audience; it was authentic, with an easy style and not too commercial demeanor; it was resourceful in that it provided helpful information in unique and entertaining ways; and finally, it was credible, in that the product was, in fact, a real thing. Though the planning cycle was highly compressed, the

#Cupfusion team used highly tuned listening skills and a very efficient planning process to respond in near real-time to the conversations happening in cyberspace. They were always true to their band voice and acted accordingly.

In many respects the #Cupfusion team was performing some marketing functions; the marketing scholarship considers public relations as publicity, promotion and marketing support. But with their exceptional use of the both the rhetorical and relational aspects of public relations, the team was performing roles encouraged by public relations scholarship. One regret the account supervisor shared was that while the amount of earned media reaction was exceptional, they could have made more use of paid media to make the impact even greater. The lines between marketing and public relations, and between paid and earned media have become blurred. The increased sales of Reese's resulted from a team cultivating a relationship with a fan-enthused public.

Implications for social media theory

This study does not refute Valentini's (2014) assertion that current evidence for the use of social media for public relations depends on the specific case. This is certainly a very specific case. "This was one of a kind. Impossible to duplicate" one participant noted. But its uniqueness should not diminish its value for study. One aspect of its uniqueness was that it had never happened before. No one had conceived of driving demand for a candy that you couldn't buy. Candy was not the next blockbuster movie, or smart phone. The #Cupfusion team discovered that a public can have the same intense brand love for a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup as other fans have for the Star Wars franchise, in that they are willing to speculate about products that may or may not even exist, to create memes and gifs expressing their anticipation, to participate in on-line

media events, and to drive demand for the product in retail outlets. Social media theory exists in an environment that is complex, even chaotic, and impossible to control. Public relations professionals must overcome skeptical publics, unethical competitors, and the sheer weight and volume of on-line content. By practicing active listening, maintaining trust through transparency, and developing attachments to members of a community around a common theme, the #Cupfusion mystery, this organization was able to work with its publics to create content that was overwhelmingly able to promote a product (Charest, Bouffard and Zajmovic, 2016).

The #Cupfusion team was able to overcome these challenges of an unanticipated and never-seen-before event. They stayed true to their brand voice and used it to create dialogue with their publics. They kept a small team and communicated well within that team. By using their understanding of the social media environment around their brand, they were able to work within that environment, take well-considered risks, and create a unique campaign “on the fly.” This is a capability of social media that should be researched and studied more.

In Summary – Theoretical contributions

This study adds to the utility of Merton’s (1936) theory of unintended consequences of social action by extending it from its roots in a long-studied, level field, sociology, to the relatively youthful field of public relations, which is one of the strengths of focal variable fields like public relations (Paisley 1972). This study, in a limited way, responds to Dozier and Lauzen’s (1998) call to study the action, communication and relationships between organizations and publics, not just as practice, but to *study the intended and unintended consequences* of relationships between individuals and larger

society (in this case, the World Wide Web), as part of the *intellectual domain* of public relations. This study supports using chaos and complexity theory to aid in understanding that, in the chaotic world of digital media, unanticipated consequences are an almost inevitable result of communication in public relations campaigns. It supports the use of chaos and complexity theory in response to those unanticipated events (Liu & Fraustino, 2014). Also, using chaos and complexity to understand how groups form and act on social media can help in the management and nurturing of on-line communities.

The phrase “unintended consequences,” or “unintended results” wasn’t mentioned in any of the strategic campaign public relations planning models examined for this study. Considering the “what if” scenario in campaign planning models could help organizations be better prepared for the possibility of unintended consequences in campaigns, especially in the digital environment and using social media.

By helping make sense of the evidence of unintended effects, this nascent typology has made a contribution to public relations campaign theory. By providing a framework for campaign development, campaign analysis, and relationship management, Merton’s factors can be considered part of a conceptual structure for future campaigns and the everyday practice of public relations.

This study also contributes to social media strategic planning theory that emphasizes organizational ambidexterity (Bodwell and Chermack, 2010) and building trust and attachment through transparency, active listening and co-creation of content (Ertzcheid, Faverial & Gueguen, 2010; Charest, Bouffard & Zajmovic, 2016).

In summary – Practical contributions

This study has contributed to practice by providing an example of best practice in a social media campaign. The way the #Cupfusion team reacted to a never-before seen occurrence showed creativity, and a deep understanding of the relationship between the Reese's brand and its fans on Facebook. The team's lean and flat organizational structure is a model for future campaigns that must respond to a fast-moving scenario. By using active listening, and not attempting to control the situation, the #Cupfusion team discovered an entirely new way to bring a confection to market shelves.

This study also contributes to practice by providing public relations practitioners with a practical step to add to both their campaign planning and evaluation process. Before implementing or communicating, an individual or organization can ask these three questions: "Am I/are we doing this out of habit?"; "Is satisfying this immediate need going to hurt the organization in the long term?"; and "Am I/are we satisfying personal, or organizational, values?" These subtle checks on the process, if they are not already in place, can contribute to a more successful campaign. Asking these same questions, *post facto*, can be a tool for analysis as well.

Finally, this study illustrates how understanding the complex and chaotic nature of the social media environment can aid in other aspects of public relations practice, such as relationship management and crisis communication.

Limitations and future research

Though the findings may be significant in a practical and a theoretical sense, there are limitations that need to be considered. First, as a study of one case in one organizational arrangement – the #Cupfusion campaign for Reese's and Ketchum – the

findings are specific to this campaign. However, this is a prime example of an organization successfully using social media, and the #Cupfusion team's efforts, especially in the way the team listened and related to their online community, can be used as a model for other organizations. The results found here could be developed into a survey to further inquire if other organizations have had similar experiences in a larger sample. However, this study and any future study of unintended consequences may suffer from a lack of a willingness for organizations to talk about this issue, especially if those consequences were perceived as negative.

This unwillingness of PR firms to share internal processes led this study to be limited by time constraints. I would have preferred to have a multi-case study but went without any good case for months. I was fortunate to find the exceptional case I eventually studied.

My method had some limitations, as well. As a single researcher, I had no one to validate my coding process, either of interviews, organizational documents or Facebook comments. I limited transcription errors by using member checks but had no method to verify if the interviewees actually re-read their interview transcripts. Using social media also had its limitations. Individuals who comment on Facebook do so with a degree of anonymity that may influence the veracity of their comments, and recent events have shown that "bots" exist and can comment on Facebook pages (Shane, 2017), although it is doubtful they would comment on a candy company.

Finally, an underlying limitation of this study is my own bias. I am proud of my ability to see patterns in processes, and in the Air Force I practiced Quality Management to streamline and simplify organizational processes. I may have inadvertently imposed

patterns on the Facebook comment streams by my choice of codes and groupings. I have interviewed hundreds of individuals as part of my service, and I may have habits I learned in the Air Force that I do not recognize and may judge my interviewees and unconsciously guide the interview toward a predisposed result. To compensate for my biases I wrote in my journal, and was constantly questioning my assumptions in memos to myself and conversations with my colleagues and my spouse. I have also tried to write my results in a way that is applicable for practitioners, emphasizing understandings that may lead to an improvement in practice.

To further extend this study, I hope to use the results here to persuade other organizations to let me study other campaigns with unanticipated consequences. In any case, more research needs to be conducted to determine the true value of online communication in social media campaigns. Through this exploration, both public relations professionals and scholars can learn how social media can advance an organization's objectives and relationships.

Final thoughts

I see the #Cupfusion campaign as a precursor to other successful social media campaigns. Future public relations practitioners, if they want to be successful on social media, will have to have a clear vision of their brand, their voice, and their community, so they can react in an authentic way when the unexpected happens. I have been trying to find a metaphor for an individual in today's digital environment, and the best I have come up with is that we are droplets in a raging river. But like any river, along the banks one can find eddy's where the current is not so fast and like-minded folks can gather. Having this particular eddy happen around a chocolate peanut butter cup is fine. If something as

mundane as a candy bar can evoke the passion of a Star Wars sequel, that's okay. At the end of the day the campaign wasn't as much about selling chocolate but cultivating an environment where fans of the brand could get together be part of a mystery.

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

(italicized text below not to be said out loud to participants)

Opening Statement

Hello! My name is Timothy Penn, and I am a PhD candidate, researching my dissertation in public relations at the University of Maryland, College Park. My principle advisor is Dr. Elizabeth Toth, also from UMD. For my dissertation, I am performing case studies about organizations whose deliberate communication as part of a public relations campaign had unanticipated consequences. I am trying to determine if there are factors that can be generalized across other organizations. With that knowledge I hope to help improve practice by possibly avoiding future occurrences. So, I am specifically interested in how your organization's case may fit into the larger picture. Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed today about this important subject.

[Read]

This study has been approved by the UMD institutional ethics review board, which asks that you review and sign a consent form, if you haven't done so already. This study should take no longer than 45-60 minutes to complete. If you could please give your consent to be interviewed and recorded for the interview, I will be happy to answer any questions. (*see IRB Consent Form and read portions of it*)

Script:

Let's begin with some of the questions. The first few questions ask about you, your organization, and your current function in the organization.

- What is your position and job title?
- How long have you been in this position?
- How long have you been practicing public relations-related communication?
- Do you have any formal training or education regarding the practice of public relations? If so, please tell me about it.

Now that we have the demographics out of the way, let's move on to your experiences.

Organization/process:

1. Could you describe the origins and intentions of the campaign? (RQ1)
 - a. How did it come about?
 - b. Whose idea was it?
 - c. What were your goals?
2. How did you develop your strategies? (*probing questions*) (RQ1)
 - a. What was your process? How did the project flow from conception to execution?
 - b. Were you given specific direction from high level management?
 - c. Were you free to develop your own ideas?
 - d. Did you farm out some of the work?
 - e. Did you form groups around specific projects?
 - f. How did you choose your target publics?
 - g. How did you choose your platforms?

3. Could you describe in more detail the process you used to release the communication? (RQ1)
 - a. Was it based on any particular recurring event, such as a holiday or anniversary?
 - b. Did you perform any last checks before final release?
 - c. If you have a checklist, did you develop your own, or are you using one from another source?

Okay, now if we could press on to how this particular case was different.

4. Could you describe what happened in this particular case? (RQ1)
 - a. What was particularly surprising?
 - i. Timing
 - ii. Velocity
 - iii. Scope
 - iv. Publics
 - v. Other
5. What do you think were the reasons you had these unanticipated consequences in this particular case? (RQ2)
 - a. Was there something different about the way you developed or released the communication?
 - b. Were you trying a new platform, or communication to a new target public?
 - c. Was there an outside event that influenced your communication?
 - d. Any other reasons?

6. Is there any one person, office or process you think was the **main** cause of the event? (RQ2)
 - a. Why?
7. In retrospect, is there anything you think you could have done to avoid this event? (RQ2)
 - a. Did you have doubts before the release?
 - b. Did you have the ability to have stopped the release?
8. Have you made any changes in your processes in the wake of this event? (RQ1,2)
 - a. If so, what changed have you made?
9. What lessons do you think you and your organization have learned from this event? (RQ2)
10. Is there any advice you would give other organizations? (RQ2)
11. Are there any written materials you could share with me that describe your guiding principles or processes? Any websites I should visit? (RQ1)
12. Are there any other officers or individuals you recommend I interview for this project?

Closing

Thank you again for all your time, and your thoughtful answers. I deeply appreciate this opportunity to speak with you, and we will send you a transcript of our conversation so you may ensure it is accurate. Thanks again.

Appendix B – IRB Application

1. Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to contribute to public relations research by exploring how the process organizations used to develop and release communication as part of a public relations campaign that resulted in unanticipated consequences. I will interview approximately 20 participants who work in public relations or perform public relations functions at these organizations. I will seek their views and experiences of building, executing and evaluating communication that resulted in unanticipated consequences. Each interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. I will approach each potential participant individually by e-mail or telephone, and will request his/her voluntary participation.

In order to protect privacy, the identities of participants will remain confidential unless the participant gives his or her consent to disclose such information. Only the Principal and Student Investigator will have access to the names of participants. Data will be securely stored on the student investigator's computer and separate hard drive. Hard copies of data will remain in the student investigator's home office in a locked file cabinet. All data will be destroyed (i.e., shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before a minimum of ten years after data collection.

2. Subject Selection:

a. Interview participants will be employees of selected organizations who develop and release communication as part of a public relations campaign. Each participant will be contacted individually by e-mail or phone and will be offered to participate in the study. Names of potential participants will be obtained from the organizational websites and through snowballing sampling method. Only organizations that seek to communicate with the public will be included in the study.

b. The only requirements are that the participants are 21 years of age or older and have been engaged in communication work for at least 6 months.

c. The purpose of my investigation is to explore the process in which the interviewees and their organization develop, disseminate and evaluate communication that had unanticipated consequences. The participants will need to share their experiences in cases where unanticipated consequences occurred. Therefore, the main criterion for participation in the study is to have experience in developing, disseminating and evaluating communication that had unanticipated consequences.

- d. I will recruit approximately 20 subjects, who work at the organizations I have identified as having experienced a public relations campaign which involved unanticipated consequences. I will contact them by e-mail and phone, and through personal contacts.

3. Procedures:

The potential interviewees will be approached by the student investigator by email or phone, inviting them to participate in the study. Consent will be obtained in writing by reply to the initial invitation and confirmed in writing prior to any interview. If the participants agree to participate, I will set up a time and a meeting place where participants feel comfortable speaking, either in their office, or in a neutral place. If the interview is taking place in their place of work, I will offer to grant the organization anonymity, unless they grant permission for their name to be used. If an in-person interview is not possible, interviews by Skype or telephone may be granted. The interviews will take place in June 2016 – May 2018.

Participation consists of responding to interview questions, which will take approximately 45-60 minutes. Interview questions will focus on communication practices. Examples of questions include: Could you describe your process for developing communication as part of your public relations campaigns? Do you have any theories why this communication had an unanticipated consequence? Participants will be informed of the researcher's wish to audiotape the interview for purposes of accuracy; however, participants will have the right to decline being audio recorded. All participation will be voluntary, and participants may withdraw from participation at any time. Participants will be asked to agree to participate in the study. Interview questions and the e-mail telephone script to be used to solicit participation are attached.

4. Risks:

This study presents limited risks to participants. Interviews will be audio-taped, which may threaten the anonymity of participants; however, in all interviews, the identities of participants will remain confidential and audio files will be stored in a secure location. Additionally, participants will be asked to talk about events that may have had a negative outcome for the organization or the individual and participants may feel uncomfortable discussing these events. Participants will be told that their participation is voluntary and that they can decline to answer specific questions or to end their participation at any time without penalty.

5. Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to participants, but some possible benefits include a greater understanding of how organizations might better understand the processes that led to unanticipated consequences. Outcomes of the project may include providing recommendations to the organizations on how to improve their practices. The potential risks and benefits will be explained to all potential interview participants before their participation begins.

6. Confidentiality:

With prior permission of interviewees, interviews will be recorded electronically on password-protected personal computers with the latest anti-virus software and software updates. Hard copy data such as consent forms and the key linking participants to their identifiable information will be kept in a locked drawer in Timothy Penn's locked office. To ensure anonymity, the student investigator will assign pseudonyms. The affiliations of participants will remain confidential unless participants indicate otherwise. In addition, the identities of participants will not be known to other participants. Participants will be told that their participation is voluntary and that they can decline to answer specific questions or to end their participation at any time without penalty. Interview participants will not be asked questions that would compromise their positions with their employers. The project will be conducted from June 2016 to May 2018 and two people will have access to the data: the principle investigator (Dr. Elizabeth Toth) and the student investigator (Timothy Penn).

7. Consent Process:

Participants will sign informed consent forms prior to any interviews (attached as a supporting document).

All participants will receive a copy of the consent form for their records.

Privacy will be protected by secluding the participant in a private area away from others during the interview.

No deception is involved.

8. Conflict of Interest:

No conflict of interest

9. HIPAA Compliance:

Not applicable

10. Research Outside of the United States:

Not applicable

11. Research Involving Prisoners:

Not applicable

Appendix C: Recruitment Email

To: Potential Participant

From: Timothy S Penn

Subject: Have you ever experienced Unintended Consequences in a PR Campaign?

Dear XXX

My name is Timothy Penn, and I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to participate in my dissertation research on the unintended consequences of communication in public relations campaigns. I want to try to understand why things don't always go as planned, both good and bad.

Have you been involved in a campaign where you had unanticipated consequences, good or bad? If this has happened to you, would you be willing to talk to me about your experience? Do you know any other people who would be willing to talk to me about your experience?

If you would like to know more, please reply to tspenn22@umd.edu

Best,

Timothy

Timothy S. Penn, M.S.J.
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Appendix D: Facebook Data

Post	Link	Reach	Impressions	Post		
				Engagements	Comments	Post Likes
A cup can dream... #Cupfusion	https://www.facebook.com/reeses/photos/a.300033290411.190736.92982475411/10153968115135412/?type=3	1,732,863	1,850,211	10,420	225	4,964
Feeling Cupfused? Check back at 3:00 p.m. EST today. You don't want to miss this. #Cupfusion	https://www.facebook.com/reeses/photos/a.300033290411.190736.92982475411/10153982138715412/?type=3	2,090,119	2,104,294	3,605	46	679
Guess we've got some explaining to do... It's time to address the #Cupfusion. Bring your questions and check back here tomorrow at 3 p.m. ET.	https://www.facebook.com/reeses/videos/10153980970260412/	367,361	376,997	56,702	81	628
Now this is our kind of piñata. #CincoDeMayo #Cupfusion	https://www.facebook.com/reeses/photos/a.300033290411.190736.92982475411/10153967980915412/?type=3	1,572,600	1,613,364	12,718	417	5,385
This weekend, celebrate the ones who love you to <i>Pieces</i> . #HappyMothersDay #Cupfusion	https://www.facebook.com/reeses/videos/10153972170890412/	3,699,711	4,712,410	648,188	350	15,170
Where did all the <i>Pieces</i> go? #Cupfusion	https://www.facebook.com/reeses/photos/a.300033290411.190736.92982475411/10153978567430412/?type=3	4,929,107	5,311,822	11,526	173	3,353
The #Cupfusion is REAL.	https://www.facebook.com/reeses/videos/10153982547015412/	6,965,242	7,057,871	582,328	2,594	10,755
Total			23,026,969	1,324,947	3,886	40,934

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