Contesting the future of e-commerce

WebCred and net generation consumers

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ABSTRACT
E-commerce carries traditional offline concerns and disciplinary struggles into cyberspace as well as offering new online challenges and opportunities for Internet consumers. Public relations, for example, has long had to defend its role as distinct from the marketing function and current manifestations of that ongoing demarcation dispute have spilled into cyberspace. As marketing has tended to dominate the integrated communications movement of the early 1990s, so contemporary marketers are colonising cyberspace promotion, and its associated Internet youth market, in similar fashion. In this paper, we argue that, just as public relations can enhance integrated communications in the offline domain, so too the field can expand the possibilities for online promotion. By opening out issues involved in contemporary e-commerce, we draw attention to limitations in recent cyberadvertising and marketing initiatives and suggest how ethical public relations perspectives can increase public credibility. While some of the offline tactics of public relations, particularly issues and crisis management, might translate into distinctive cyberspace initiatives, the paper argues that the field needs to forge its own strategic contribution to developing ethical online relations.

CYBERPROMOTION: THE NEXT GENERATION

In a much-quoted piece on resisting marketing colonisation in the offline domain, Ehling, White, and Grunig concluded that the 'public relations function of excellent organizations exists separately from the marketing function' (1992, p. 390). Marketers have, on the whole, disagreed. In fact, marketing agencies and theorists alike have continued to present integrated communications as a comprehensive service, with public relations allocated, at best, a minor role. Outside commentators tend to be even more dismissive with one thesis of that new economy bible, The Cluetrain Manifesto (Levine, Locke, Searis, & Weinberger, 2000), suggesting that 'Public Relations does not
relate to the public. Companies are deeply afraid of their markets' (p. xiv). In both practice and theory, public relations has resisted marketing's attempted colonization of offline communication (see McKie & Hunt, 1998), but the field has yet to mobilize to resist more recent bids by marketing to control online promotion with its associated capture of the dot-com generation.

Organizations marketing and/or relating to younger markets have long sought to find the language, values, and channels to communicate with those target audiences. In Europe, 'to keep up with the tastes and styles of 15- to 25-year-olds who are hip and trendy but also cynical and fickle', Wells, Burnett, and Moriarty observe that marketers are 'spending more on in-house research, turning to a new breed of youth research agencies, and diversifying their use of youth oriented media' (1998, p. 192). The targeted group, or groups—as conflicting age banding can occur across the overall market—have been designated by a variety of names, most famously, Baby Boomers and Generation X (see Wells, Burnett, & Moriarty, 1998, p. 160 & 192). Currently, in a partial acknowledgement of the increasing ubiquity of computer knowledge, or at least computer awareness, among younger age groups, they have been called generation dot-com and the net generation (see Tapscott, 1998). As part of an ongoing effort to reach such consumers, the vast majority of companies are on, or in the process of going on, the Internet. The urgency of the scramble for virtual territory is caught in one managing director's pithy summary: 'WWW might stand for more than "World Wide Web"; if you don't change to embrace it, you might be asking yourself "What Went Wrong"' (Yeoh, 2001, p. 161).

Due to the ease with which a site can be constructed and uploaded to the Internet, however, simply having a web site is only the beginning of securing a credible web presence. Moreover, because of the one-to-one relationships made possible by the technology, giant corporations have to compete with individual teenage sites on a more equal basis than in other media. In fact, this 'communications revolution', in the words of leading cyberconsultant Regis McKenna (1997), 'is tilting the balance of power from institutions to individuals' (p. 29). As a result, in promotional activities directed to younger audiences, online credibility has strong parallels with a term common outside of cyberrealms. Street credibility, often abbreviated to StreetCred, has entered common usage to describe ideas and commodities, such as the Sony Walkman, which have had a successful take up by younger consumers (Gray, 1998; Morais, 1997; Munk, 1999). In moving from the urban to the virtual, we want to adapt the notion of WebCred. Just as with credibility hard to gain and easy to lose, so too with the Internet.

CREDIBILITY IN CONTEXTS E-COMMERCE

After Nixon's presidency, reliability of information became a major issue. They believed that the truth was really happening in Vietnam, not as depicted in the media. As the film Good Morning, Vietnam made clear, the internet was a place where people could express their opinions without fear of censorship. The Internet was used as a tool to express dissent in the United States. This led to a new form of political activism, where people could organize and mobilize online, even though they were not physically together. The Internet was also used to promote business and commerce, which led to the development of e-commerce. The credibility of online businesses was crucial to their success, as consumers had to be able to trust the information they were receiving. This led to the development of online reputation management, where businesses worked to build and maintain a positive online presence. As the Internet became more widely used, the need for credibility became even more important. The credibility of a website or business was now more important than ever, as it was a tool for people to interact and make decisions. This led to the development of online communities, where people could come together to discuss topics of interest and share information. The credibility of these communities was crucial to their success, as people had to be able to trust the information they were receiving. This led to the development of online reputation management, where communities worked to build and maintain a positive online presence.
want to adapt the notion of StreetCred to one of web credibility, or WebCred. Just as with credibility in any other context, web credibility is hard to gain and easy to lose.

CREDIBILITY IN CONTEXTS: PRE-WEB VIETNAM, POST-WEB VIETNAM, AND E-COMMERCE

After Nixon's presidency of the United States and the US war in Vietnam, reliability of information was much talked about. Many people felt deceived. They believed they were not told the entire truth about what was really happening in Vietnam. In fact, the authors of one text, Louvre and Walsh, consciously chose the book title: *Tell Me Lies About Vietnam*, to draw attention, singly and collectively; to the extent to which dominant depictions of the war serve as evasions, alibis, disavowals, distortion, and lies* (1998, p. xii). How different might things have been if the Internet had been generally available during the conflict?

As the film *Good Morning, Vietnam* (Levinson, 1987) suggested in relation to radio, a daily updated homepage maintained by US military officials would not have added much. It is possible, however, to speculate on other possibilities: grunts with notebooks feeding back to friends at home, family web pages publishing letters from relatives in the war zone, and chat rooms with dialogues between soldiers and peace groups. The Internet was not available to the general public during the Vietnam War, but, if the web had existed, would the information conveyed via cyberspace have been any more credible? Certainly in the Kosovo conflict, the technology and infrastructure did open new possibilities. During the period that the Kosovo Albanians were forced out, 'more than 4,000 websites were established around the world in only four weeks to financially support hundreds of thousands of refugees' (Lindstrom & Anderson, 1999, p. 5). And many web sites did indeed offer informed opinion and stories, and even uploaded video diaries from people in the region that differed from the official NATO line (Another Kosovo victim, 1999). Clearly, even in post-web times, the spectre of credibility continues to haunt the new technology.

Important though the topic of cybercoverage and war remains, we raise it as a prelude to consideration of allied WebCred challenges in business communication and e-commerce. Using the Internet in this commercial realm, too, has to involve trust and distrust (Goldberg, 1998). One term for it, WebTrust, is already at least three years old (see McKeown, 1998; Slyph, 1998). At the e-commerce level, a small number of users are happy to email credit card details to web traders and
purchase goods, but the majority of the public are not. Predicted expansions of e-commerce futures will depend upon how successfully the distrust is overcome (Borkowski, 1998; Handy, 1999).

**DEVELOPING WEBCRED (1): PREMATURE QUANTIFICATION AND CYBERTRUST**

One distinctive new online feature foregrounding trust as an issue has been the rise of a highly visible countermovement of cyberactivist sites offering online attacks on the credibility of market leaders as diverse as McDonald's and Microsoft. Indeed, as Intel and Nike found to their cost, online loss of credibility can swiftly be transferred offline to sharp declines in share values (see Klein, 2001). Rather than being simple marketing issues, such struggles fall within the traditional sphere of influence of public relations practitioners in corporate and not-for-profit organisations. Despite these signs, certain marketers view the development of online trust as simply dependent on the transfer of offline trust: 'The only way we're going to develop trust in the Internet is through the brands that we know' (Negroponte, 1996, cited in Lindstrom & Anderson, 1999, p. 9). Such faith ignores the non-separation of business and political power on the web, which provides easy access to posting adversarial material and contains massive potential for damaging commercial and political reputations.

Indeed, associated with the distrust of Internet transactions, and often accelerated by cyberactivism, company web sites can function less as locations for the uploading of brand loyalty than as a point of focus for corporate reputation challenges (see Esrock & Leighty, 1998). A good example of what might be called judicious politics on an equalising Internet is the case of Monsanto. From even a cursory look it is obvious that Monsanto has invested heavily in its web pages. Headed 'Monsanto Food/Health/Hope', these pages present—with aesthetically pleasing visuals of people from all over the planet—the image of a corporation concerned to address world hunger: 'There's a family that lives here... a family of six billion, each with the possibility of living longer and healthier through the discovery we, the people of Monsanto, have just begun' (Monsanto, 2001). The weight of all that investment has been effectively turned against the corporation by the relatively inexpensive site, 'Monsanto: A Legacy of Fraud' (Monsanto: A Legacy of Fraud, 2001), which appears alongside the Monsanto web site on nearly all the main search engines. Contradicting Monsanto's concern for consumers, the Legacy of Fraud site offers a quote from Phil Angeli, Monsanto's director of Corporate Communications, claiming that 'Monsanto should not have to vouchsafe the safety of biotech food' since their 'interest is in selling as much of it as Food and Drugs Admins 2001).

In this example, typically presented, and easy standard on the corporate is thrown into question by there are others, see, e.g. Monsanto's actions, more increase public trust, com for providing reliable information (the numbers) the people who ing information is quickly be drawn from such mail log on to, specific sites, counted and offer co cance to these hits has b Idiots 'Track Success' (Pair

WebCred depends on consulting an organisational sources and messages can the communicator is discerning, and expertise, as tence' (Cultrup, Center, & B of the Strategic Forecasting worthiness during the KI international web following media, and signific spondents from within learned by NATO public business contexts. On the trustworthiness of the sformation, and to the perceiver. The term reliability with consistency of the measu 'ability to provide consist several times' (Broom & Internet and its informal whether or not an Inte
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in selling as much of it as possible. Assuring its safety is the FDA's [US
Food and Drugs Administration] job' (Monsanto: A Legacy of Fraud,
2001).

In this example, typical user concerns for information that is attrac-
tively presented, and easily and quickly accessible, are met to a high
standard on the corporate site, but the credibility of their key messages
is thrown into question by the cyberadjacent Legacy of Fraud site (and
there are others, see, e.g., Monsanto Vigil, 2001, which also questions
Monsanto's actions, morals, and motives on a regular basis). In order to
increase public trust, companies will need to take responsibility, not only
for providing reliable information, but also for demonstrating the credi-
bility of the information provided; for respecting (as more than
numbers) the people who use the sites, and for recognising that conflict-
ing information is quickly available. This downgrades the conclusions to
be drawn from such marketing measurements as the tally of those who
log on to specific sites. While numbers of such users can easily be
counted and can offer comforting data, the attribution of more signifi-
cance to these hits has been memorably tagged 'an acronym for How

WebCred depends on much more than sheer number of people
consulting an organisational web site. Online, as well as offline, both
sources and messages can have perceived credibility: 'The credibility of
the communicator is determined by a person's intentions, trustworthi-
ness, and expertise, as these qualities are perceived by the target audi-
ence' (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1985, p. 263). As a result of perceptions
of the Strategic Forecasting website's (http://www.stratfor.com) trust-
worthiness during the Kosovo conflict, for example, it gained a large
international web following, a highly visible public profile in conven-
tional media, and significant feedback and interaction, involving corre-
spondents from within the Balkans and beyond. The lessons to be
learned by NATO publicists from this experience can also be applied to
business contexts. On the Internet, credibility refers to the perceived
trustworthiness of the source, the person or company posting the infor-
mation, and to the perceived trustworthiness of the information itself.
The term reliability within the field of public relations 'refers to the
consistency of the measure' (Pavlík, 1987, p. 34), or the measurement's
'ability to provide consistent results when measuring the same attribute
several times' (Broom & Dozier, 1990, p. 167). In the context of the
Internet and its information, reliability has the additional meaning of
whether or not an Internet address (URL) will always lead to the same
web site. It thus, does not refer to the content of this web site. Thus, as
opposed to reliability, credibility does refer to the content of a web site. Thus, according to Brandt (1996), well-versed Internet users ‘look closely at the reliability, credibility, perspective, and purpose of information’ (p. 44).

Even on company web sites, the actual sources of information often remain unknown. A name may be mentioned as the responsible contact person, but there is no guarantee the person exists or actually is who they claim to be. Lanning (1995) warns that ‘anyone can take information out, anyone can put information in, but no one needs to be accountable’ (p. 13). Though he is right in theory, in practice, a company is likely to be held accountable for the information provided on its web site. In fact, there are already problems, even if the company is not the original source of information. Rogue sites that copy the layout of a corporate web site but provide counter arguments take advantage of this process of attribution. Companies such as McDonald’s and Ford Motor Company have had to handle large public relations crises because of web counter-activity and rogue sites (see Coombs, 1998). Others, such as K-mart, Intel, Snapple, Prudential Life Insurance, Nike, Wells Fargo Bank, and Walt Disney are under constant crisis threat through opposing rogue sites.

Developing WebCred is a multi-layered process that relies on three general principles: feedback, return visits, and usability (Kent, 1998-99). Of these three, feedback is the one most likely to impact on WebCred. To establish and maintain WebCred involves providing possibilities for giving feedback on a web site, actually encouraging feedback, giving responses to received feedback, and encouraging both positive and negative feedback. As public relations practitioners know, but marketing departments often forget, neglecting negative feedback can be more disastrous to a company than neglecting proactive customer relations. The cyberspace dimension also raises the stakes because ‘if a company enters into public debate in cyberspace the chances are it will get even more visibility’ (Lanning, 1995, p. 14). We would, therefore, claim that to leave this area to marketing can be as dangerous as to leave offline crisis management to law. It is critical for sustaining organisational WebCred that crisis management develops cybersolutions for cybergenerated, and/or cyberamplified, crises.

**DEVELOPING WEBCRED (2): THE BEACH AND COVERT PUBLIC RELATIONS**

In cases of unintentional disinformation, violations of WebCred have a huge potential to turn into major public relations crises; in cases of intentional disinformation, the risks grow exponentially. In this section

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we lean heavily on Pleumarom's (2000) innovative research on 'Cybersmear, Cybersmother: Internet PR and The Beach Protests' in the online journal M/C (http://www.api-network.com/mc), emanating from the University of Queensland, which is itself an outstanding example of using the web imaginatively to disseminate and discuss these kinds of theoretical concerns in an attractive, free, and stimulating forum. Pleumarom's (2000) article discusses the reliability of the website http://thaistudents.com/thebeach, which is based around the film The Beach. Established in 1998, the site claims: 'we are not affiliated with or receive payments from any groups that have associations with people and organisations such as 20th Century Fox. Leonardo DiCaprio, Beach Productions and environmental groups' (cited in Pleumarom, 2000).

Despite the disclaimer, Pleumarom (2000) observes that the site was developed by Richard Barrow, an expatriate on the staff of the high-class private Sriwittayapaknam School in Samut Prakan, and that the same school has another website, 'sriwittayapaknam.ac.th', which states that Leonardo DiCaprio sent videos and calendars to the school 'worth thousands of US dollars'. Moreover, Pleumarom continues, 'during the filming, Richard Barrow and three students were invited by the film publicist, Sarah Clark, to visit Phuket and Phi Phi Leh Island and meet the film's cast and crew' and the site 'which is updated at least once a day, seven days a week' gives the

impression that this is not the effort of just Barrow, the diligent Webmaster, and Thai pupils alone, but of a whole team of public relations experts, who are carefully monitoring and analysing news worldwide, contacting individuals and agencies to make statements, producing articles and commentaries and moderating discussions on the various Website message boards. The internet identification numbers from the Webmaster's messages put on the Website also indicate that these messages are sent from overseas as well as from Thailand. (Pleumarom, 2000)

If the site is using covert public relations, it is not only dishonest, but exposes 20th Century Fox and superstar Leonardo, to a significant loss of credibility and to potential consumer backlash among the young audiences likely to be attracted to that movie and that star. If the film had been a success, then the stakes would have been even higher. It is not too difficult to imagine a Nixon-and-Watergate style environmental exposure being catalysed by the questions and answers posted on the Justice for Maya Bay International Alliance (2000) site:

COVERT PUBLIC RELATIONS violations of WebCred have relations crises; in cases of potenially. In this section

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Want to chop down a mountain in Yosemite? Not at any price. Want to destroy a beach in Maya Bay? That’ll be $100,000 dollars plus deposit, while the leading man pockets $20 million thank you very much.

In going online, it is important to remember how the lessons learned in issues management have made it possible to avoid unnecessary crisis management. One key lesson has been to aim for maximum inclusion and minimum exclusion. Numerous recent presentations at Australian, New Zealand, and US Public Relations Association conferences have extolled the virtues of bringing the activists—whether environmental or indigenous representatives—into the tent. Strategically, this leads to the question: how different is a virtual tent? Can a company website profitably include adversarial material? In the USA, Coombs (1999) has written of the effectiveness of the Flaming Ford site, which mobilised consumers against a life threatening design flaw in the company’s cars, and its negative impact on Ford’s corporate reputation. As illustrated by the Monsanto example, such sites raise the question of whether the company might have been better to meet its critics, satisfy their legitimate demands, and bring them into the official web site. Otherwise, ongoing answers to the question, ‘for how many net surfers are rogue sites their first online contact with a corporation?’, may not be a comforting one for businesses.

**CONCLUSION: CYBERSIGNS, AGE GROUPINGS, AND ATTITUDES IN AN ATTENTION ECONOMY**

Honesty should be a prerequisite for a site, but it is not enough. According to Holtz (1999), one of the few public relations theorists to write a book on public relations on the net, the Internet world turns into an information economy (p. 15). However, Holtz does not go far enough. It is necessary to extend his insight into recent formulations that, rather than information, attention is the currency of the New Economy (see, e.g., Davenport & Beck, 2001) or at least recognise that the Internet is not a separate information economy but part of a larger attention economy whose major currency is time. Users want to spend as little time as possible for swift return of information and/or pleasure. Companies want users to spend a maximum of time on their web sites, or watching their entertainment programs, or consuming their advertisements. To satisfy the online user needs, web sites have to be focused around clearly identified central points, the efficient delivery of goods and/or information, and, frequently, the delivery of some form of entertainment. Although, as Levine (1999) accurately notes, the most effective and efficient pages, in these terms, of satisfying companies’ needs

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In their survey of 250 Griffith (1998) have estimat ories include multimedia (hyperlinks, internal links, tion, free software, prizes) loading software); and pr research conducted was n means, frequencies, Chi-s

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For how the lessons learned to avoid unnecessary crisis and for maximum inclusion are presented at Australian, ocation conferences have -whether environmental or -logically, this leads to the a company website prof- e Coombs (1998) has writ- ed, site, which mobilised law in the company’s cars, reputation. As illustrated by a question of whether the critics, satisfy their legiti- official web site. Otherwise, any net surfers are rogue exoration? (1)

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for what have been dubbed ‘sticky’ users (i.e., those who will stay on web sites longer), are sometimes not the most aesthetically appealing ones. At the extreme end of the pay-for-staying spectrum is iWon.com, which gives away $10,000 each day. $1 million each month and $10 million every April 15th (Crockett, 2000, May, p. EB 20).

In their survey of 250 Fortune 500 company web sites, Palmer and Griffith (1998) have established five categories of analysis. These categories include multimedia (audio, frames, video, text); site navigability (hyperlinks, internal links, Java); promotional activities (product evaluation, free software, prizes); sales and delivery (online purchasing, downloading software); and product support (Palmer & Griffith, 1998). The research conducted was mainly quantitative. Conclusions were based on means, frequencies, Chi-squares, and probabilities.

The authors’ goal was to describe what they see as an emerging model of web site design for marketing. Their main conclusions were that commercial web site design is influenced by the interaction between marketing functions and technological characteristics, the level of consumer involvement, information search costs, and innovation in technology (Palmer & Griffith, 1998). The interaction between marketing functions and consumer involvement seems most important in the public relations perspective. Public relations strives for a dialogue with the intended audience to convey key organisational messages in one direction and to attend to public concerns in the other. Thus, while marketing departments want consumer involvement to sell more products to more satisfied customers, public relations departments want information exchange to design more targeted messages and build relationships.

In resisting the conventional wisdom that Internet marketing is completely new (and that traditional marketing upgraded is an adequate way to handle it), we have argued for the transferability of some offline practices to diverse web presences. More questionable may be the global transferability of marketing’s attachment to segmentation. While not all Internet marketing is new, neither is all of it old, and we value its potential for innovative one-to-one communication in relation to age, or even for the virtual abolition of age as a target category. Holtz (1999) has given public relations a good lead by relating the simple example of how he saw a poster with nothing but a URL: ‘http://www.realbutter.com’ (p. 30). He was not attracted, but his wife, whom, he claims, is an outstanding cook, immediately wanted to check the site out.
Holtz (1999) concludes from this example that, though demographics still matter online, specific targeting of individual interests, regardless of age, has become more important (p. 34). In the butter example, instead of trying to analyse specific groups that might be interested in this product, the company behind the advertisement simply allowed each individual to decide whether they belong into the target group or not. Using this example, Holtz (1999) contends that ‘customization’ offers ‘the key to market share in the information economy’ (p. 19). This correlates with other anecdotal and personal evidence of grandparents and grandchildren sharing crossgenerational cyberpassions, which the intervening generations—perhaps too caught in the other demands of the attention economy—may lack. Business analysts of e-commerce possibilities similarly see people increasingly attracted to web commerce more by a pro-technology attitude that cuts across traditional segmentation groupings such as education, gender, and income (see Zellner, 2000, p. EB.116).

Nor is it, we think, coincidental that one of the sites circulating in an international public relations network is http://www.thehunger-site.com. At that site, a surfer can click a certain button and have some hungry person get a meal paid by the site’s corporate sponsors. This line of creative altruistic-oriented thinking is very much in line with certain futurist projections of the likely mindset of post-2000 generations (see McKenzie & Hunt, 1998; Popcorn, 1996; Turnbull, 1996) and the kinds of moves corporations will need to make to attract those mindsets. Bickerton, Bickerton, and Pardesi (1996) have obviously learned that the Internet is currently not a good selling place, but they cannot resist quantifying: ‘90 per cent of what you do on the Superhighway must add value and 10 per cent must sell—any other combination fails’ (p. 36).

For these authors to pretend that such percentages are any more than guesswork is absurd. That is not to say that it may not turn out to be accurate, just to say that it lacks any evidence. It also contradicts the already-existing history of e-commerce pioneers. Amazon.com, for example, have sold a huge number of books and have yet to make a profit, but retain significant stockmarket value—even after the stock market’s dot.crash in new economy stocks—because they have become a key portal, built strong relationships with their customers (even those who may never buy a book), and no one can be sure how e-commerce futures will develop. As Saunders (1999) puts it: ‘The Web allows entrepreneurs to do what wouldn’t work in the real world’ and ‘the opportunities would seem limited only by your imagination and business acumen’ (p. ix). It is too early to have marketing’s premature quantifications determine the shape of e-commerce and much of Amazon’s success is down to transferring their site, Jeff Bezos’s relations and, even before, called ‘cyberbuzz’ about rooms’ (Saunders, 1999, p. 34).

Although, on some level, we have done well out of we ecologically promote a change relations: ‘Don’t rely on p to 2% of a startup’s eq. therefore, we see a major- oping cyber solutions to tance around the crucial cre- tive side, despite the onl few signs of their being a paper, we found Holtz’s (two ways. Firstly, it stands form in relation to the m cybereconomics (see Zef Pardesi, 1996; Lindstrom relations book publishing Renton’s (1997) totally fi net. Usage for Organisations the exception of a section ning the Web: A Handboo ing with more strategic is tising and marketing box sections (if they have any) deeply with such web speci achieve previously unhear of communication chang is already significantly lan was not, we argue, they i hopefully, too altruistic at

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success is down to transferring public relations tactics online. In promoting their site, Jeff Bezos and Amazon.com excelled in the use of press relations and, even before their launch, the firm promoted what they called 'cyberbuzz' about itself 'via discussion groups and other chat rooms' (Saunders, 1999, p. 40).

Although, on some current estimates public relations practitioners have done well out of web firm developments, the estimators simultaneously promote a change with advice on reducing investment in public relations: 'Don't rely on public relations firms, which can command up to 2% of a startup's equity' (Rebello, 2000, p. EB 6). In conclusion, therefore, we see a major WebCred portal for public relations as developing cyber solutions to cyber crises that can only increase in importance around the crucial question of trust in e-commerce. On the negative side, despite the online possibilities for public relations, there are few signs of their being theorised. In researching publications for this paper, we found Holtz's (1999) Public Relations on the Net to be rare in two ways. Firstly, it stands out by existing in virtual isolation in book form in relation to the more numerous books on cyberadvertising and cybermarketing (see Zeff & Aronson, 1999; Bickerton, Bickerton, & Pardesi, 1996; Lindstrom & Anderson, 1999). Secondly, within public relations book publishing, it is unusual, in contrast to, for example, Renton's (1997) totally functional Public Relations Newsletters and Internet Usage for Organisations and Wittmer's (2000) similarly limited (with the exception of a section on the relevance of structuration theory) Spinning the Web: A Handbook for Public Relations on the Internet, in engaging with more strategic issues. As a result, unlike the majority of advertising and marketing books, which even in their brief public relations sections (if they have any), ignore cyberactivism, Holtz engages more deeply with such web specific phenomena as how 'Online protests can achieve previously unheard-of results' (1999, p. 13) in a broader context of communication change. At this point in history, generation dot-com is already significantly larger than people of a certain age and, even if it was not, we argue, they are too vital for public relations to neglect and, hopefully, too altruistic and individual for marketing to colonise.

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