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Revisiting the relationship between public relations and marketing: Encroachment and social media



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ABSTRACT

Although public relations and marketing trade presses regularly discuss the conflict between the functions (e.g., Ecker, 2013; Havartin, 2013), academic researchers focused on the issue primarily in the 1980s and 1990s. The drop in public relations and marketing encroachment research does not parallel a drop in encroachment in practice, especially in light of today's social media environment. In fact, historic tension between public relations and marketing intensified with the incorporation of social media into communication efforts. This paper updates the study of encroachment by reviewing the historical views of the topic, proposes ways that social media use has intensified issues related to role encroachment between public relations and marketing professionals, and outlines questions to guide future study of these topics.

1. Introduction

In practice, public relations often conflicts with other communication functions, especially marketing. Similarities in work domain and the perception that communication functions within organizations are interchangeable contribute to this conflict (Lauzen, 1991). As a result, people from outside public relations routinely are put in charge of public relations functions or assume some public relations duties, a phenomenon referred to as *encroachment* (Dozier, 1988; Lauzen, 1991). Power issues and the overlap of goals between marketing and public relations functions can lead to encroachment (Lauzen, 1991).

The overlapping goals of the functions are illustrated in how they are defined by scholars. For example, public relations textbook authors Broom, Sha, and Seshadrinathan, (2013) define public relations as a management function that creates and maintains mutually beneficial relationships with many stakeholders while marketing focuses on transactions that benefits the company or organization. However, marketing textbook authors Kotler and Armstrong (2017) define marketing as a function that builds value for customers through managing positive relationships with them. Because the stakeholder group of customers encompasses potential and existing customers, managing relationships with these groups often happens simultaneously through public relations and marketing.

Although researchers studied encroachment in late 80s and early 90s, the topic seems to have fallen out of favor within public relations research. The most recent Handbook of Public Relations (Heath, 2010) exemplifies this drop off in study. The book only features one index entry for encroachment. Research about the boundaries between public relations and marketing has not built on the encroachment concept, but instead has explored boundaries and role enactment from other vantage points such as distributed public relations (Kelleher, 2009). While these newer lines of research add to the understanding of how public relations activities are being shared with other organizational functions, they do not fully address the boundaries between these roles. There continue to be

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separate college majors for public relations and marketing, separate faculty who teach them, separate literatures, separate consulting firms, and separate departments in companies. The boundaries between public relations and marketing still exist, and an examination of how these boundaries are breached, upheld and negotiated is important to our understanding of the practice of public relations. This article proposes a way to understand these boundaries as they continue to shift but not disappear.

The drop in encroachment research does not parallel a drop in encroachment in practice, especially in light of today's social media environment. A search of the major websites for the American Marketing Association and Public Relations Society of America yields hundreds of recent articles discussing content marketing, an activity both functions claim as their responsibility. In addition, major public relations and marketing industry surveys indicate that marketing and public relations are increasingly overlapping in activities and tasks, to the point where professionals say the term *public relations* will no longer accurately describe their work within a few years (Nanji, 2017; USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, 2017). In addition, more marketing firms are adding public relations as a subdivision of their agencies to augment the marketing mix (USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, 2017). The convergence of public relations and marketing communication via online channels increasingly blurs the lines between the marketing and public relations functions, which leads to challenges in practice, where public relations has historically been perceived as having less power or adding less value than marketing (Neill & Jiang, 2017).

Lines between traditional marketing and public relations have become even more blurry due to concepts like *content marketing* and *brand journalism* (Ecker, 2013; Royce, 2012). These new communication activities blend the tactics of marketing and public relations using social media and other online channels. Therefore, revisiting the encroachment concept is warranted, especially because public relations and marketing functions have changed drastically since the early days of encroachment research. For example, regulations on the use of personal data via social media in the European Union is changing the landscape of how marketers and public relations professionals reach their audiences (Griggs, 2018). The new regulations, called the General Data Protection Regulation, or GDPR, provide safeguards on the use of personal data, the type that were often used in direct marketing. Marketers see the GDPR as limiting their ability to reach their potential and current customers (Griggs, 2018). In the U.K., for example, the Public Relations and Communications Association indicated that public relations are particularly suited to take over some of the consumer relationship building once done through marketing, due to public relations' focus on building trust and mutually beneficial relationships (Griggs, 2018).

Another example of the new roles of marketing and public relations overlapping is in the practice of partnering with social media influencers. Historically, public relations and marketing often relied on celebrity spokespeople to provide credibility and exposure for products and services. In today's environment with YouTubers and Instagram celebrities, the role of celebrity spokesperson has evolved into the practice of talent-led or influencer marketing (Kirkpatrick, 2018; Kuhn, 2018). Public relations and marketing trade publications discuss the influencer as a key element of the promotional mix (Kirkpatrick, 2018; Kuhn, 2018). What happens when that influencer, who often is a self-made and self-managed celebrity, takes actions that tarnish the associated brand? Such was the case of one of YouTube's biggest stars, Logan Paul, who posted a video to his YouTube account that showed a corpse hanging in Japan's infamous suicide forest. Brands like Walmart and Dunkin' Donuts had sponsored Paul, and needed to react to the ensuing crisis from Paul's behavior (Sloan, 2018). Influencer marketing gone wrong leads to both marketing and public relations issues, leading to questions of who is responsible to manage the crisis and where does one function end and one begin.

With these examples illustrating the current media landscape, it is imperative that marketing and public relations research continue to focus on encroachment of functional boundaries and establishing roles and responsibilities in the social media environment. Some recent research has examined various effects of social media and the relationship between marketing and public relations. The findings of these studies indicate that social media acumen may provide public relations professionals with more power over marketing professionals who may not have the same skills (Smith & Place, 2013), including helping overcome any gender-based imbalances of power (Lee, Place, & Smith, 2018). In addition, the introduction of social media has the potential to increase the perceptions of public relations as a strategic communication function (Estanyol, 2012). These recent studies show that the examination of the boundaries between public relations and marketing is still relevant and valuable to understand the practice of public relations.

This article includes a literature review that examines the origins of encroachment research and proposes how the blurring of marketing and public relations boundaries is worth exploring through revisiting the ideas behind encroachment research and extending these ideas into today's context. First, the article traces the development of the encroachment concept in public relations research. Next, the article reviews how social media use has intensified role boundary overlap between public relations and marketing. Lastly, the article proposes ways to study public relations and marketing role encroachment in today's context. These suggested future directions for research include examining points of differentiation and convergence between marketing and public relations roles, consequences of blurred lines between the functions, status of social media turf wars, and the role of public relations in leading integration between public relations and marketing.

2. Origins of public relations, marketing and encroachment research

The encroachment concept in public relations research evolved from early work conducted by Broom and Smith (1979) on the roles enacted by public relations professionals. Broom and Smith conceptualized four role types based on the work conducted by individuals and their outlook on the scope and purpose of their positions. The first is expert prescriber, which exhibited authority on all matters dealing with publics and was seen as a trusted strategic partner. The second is communication technician, which performed writing and editing tasks rather than strategic counsel. The third is communication facilitator, which acted as a liaison between the publics and the organization. The fourth is problem-solving process facilitator, which collaborated with other people

inside the organization to determine and solve problems. Broom and Smith asserted that although their five types are distinct roles, a public relations consultant can practice all of the roles, at any time, depending on the situation. The implications of this study were that public relations activities cannot be thought of as monolithic. Instead, public relations professionals enact various roles while performing their duties.

Broom and Smith's early concepts of roles within public relations became the starting point for a body of research into roles played by public relations professionals. Their findings were expanded into sex role research in public relations due to increasing feminization of the field in the 1980s. For example, Broom (1982) surveyed members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) to explore how members see their own role within their organizations. Broom found that on average, public relations professionals saw themselves as communication technicians. Broom and Dozier (1986) updated the survey data from the 1979 study (Broom, 1982) by asking about how people progressed in organizations. Broom and Dozier (1986) found that women stagnated in the technician role, leading to decreased pay and exclusion from decision-making. In addition, Broom and Dozier (1986) found that public relations advancement was dependent on gender and role within their original typology. Again, roles were shown to play a significant part in how public relations professionals operate.

Theory about public relations roles was influenced by a managerial issue emerging in public relations practice. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, public relations leadership roles were being filled by people who did not have public relations experience or education (Lauren, 1992, p. 61). This observed phenomenon led to theorizing within public relations literature using the term "encroachment." Dozier (1988) first defined encroachment as the "practice of assigning the top management role in public relations to someone from outside public relations" (p. 9). Lauren (1991) expanded the encroachment concept to include the idea of *imperialism*, defined as "interaction between departments with domain similarities that occurs as a result of perceived power differences...turf wars develop with one department intruding on the activities traditionally in the domain of the other" (p. 245). According to Lauren (1991), "domain similarity is defined as the degree to which two different individuals or departments share the same goals, skills, or tasks" (p. 246). Lauren theorized that because of domain similarities, such as having similar responsibilities, tasks, or audiences, imperialism leads to encroachment.

Lauren (1991) found that domain similarities also led to the perception that certain functions within organizations are interchangeable in some ways. The departments identified in the early encroachment research as somewhat interchangeable with public relations were marketing, legal, and human resources (Lauren, 1991, 1992).

In sum, early research on role encroachment focused on how public relations seemingly became a target for turf wars with other similar organizational functions. This research attempted to define the phenomenon. Once it was named, other research identified factors that led to role encroachment.

3. Factors leading to encroachment in early research

Early theories related to encroachment specify three main causes of different departments taking over public relations activities. The first factor focused on power relations within organizations including issues related to gender stereotypes and enactment of the public relations roles (Broom & Smith, 1979). The second causal factor focused on domain similarities between public relations and other functions. The third causal factor dealt with the overlapping goals between public relations and other functions within organizations. The following sections outline the theorized antecedents, causes and outcomes of encroachment from a public relations and marketing perspective.

3.1. Power and encroachment

The first power-related aspect of encroachment relates to feminization of the public relations field. Over time, public relations became a female-dominated profession. When encroachment theory was developed in the late 1980s, women made up 57% of the public relations work force, which was an increase of 16% from 10 years earlier (Dozier, 1988). Because women were stereotyped to be unfit for management roles (Dozier, 1988), they were not rising to top leadership positions within the public relations function. Instead, management candidates for public relations were being selected from outside the department where there were more leadership-appropriate men to choose. The tendency for organizations to pick other professionals to lead the public relations function was exacerbated by the idea that anyone can *do* public relations and the perception that no real formal training was needed to perform the function (Lauren, 1991, p. 247). The idea that anyone can perform public relations work persists today, as exemplified in ongoing trade publications discussions (Havartin, 2013).

Because of encroachment, the power balance within public relations functions then shifted toward the newly appointed leaders with little public relations background. The people selected to manage the public relations function became the experts, despite their lack of training in public relations. The power shift further negated any power the public relations professionals would exert within the organization (Lauren, 1991, p. 247). The result of encroachment is that public relations has historically not been seen as a key executive activity and is often without a proverbial "seat at the table" of decision making within the organization. This lack of executive presence has practical consequences for resource allocation and personal job growth for people within public relations.

Encroachment research links to the early theories about roles in public relations to show how enacting the different role types affects the power dynamics and exacerbates encroachment. Lauren (1991) surveyed public relations professionals to uncover perceptions of encroachment and imperialism. She found that when the top public relations leader acted in the managerial role, he or she was powerful and could create boundaries around the function impermeable to encroachment or imperialism. However, if the top public relations leader acted in the technician role, which was more focused on tactical work, he or she was not perceived as powerful

within the organization, and a power vacuum was formed (Lauzen, 1991). As Lauzen (1991) concluded, “individuals from other departments, which have domains similar to public relations and are more powerful than public relations, are able to take over activities traditionally performed by the less powerful department (imperialism)” (p. 246).

3.2. Domain similarity and encroachment

Domain similarity is the second factor identified as leading to encroachment. According to Lauzen (1991), “domain similarity is defined as the degree to which two different individuals or departments share the same goals, skills, or tasks” (p. 246). In Lauzen’s studies, the functions most associated with public relations are marketing, legal, and human resources. More recently, fundraising and community relations functions also have overlapped with public relations (Kelly, 1993). These functions share similar goals of communicating with people outside the organization and rely on communication channels of all kinds (print, online, third-party, etc.). Because of perceived domain similarity between public relations and these other departments, “one function is often considered to be substitutable for the other” (Lauzen, 1991, p. 246). The perception of substitutability often blurs boundaries between the functions, which can cause encroachment. Lauzen (1991) summed up the confusion by using marketing and advertising as examples. She wrote,

Public relations firms do ‘marketing communication’ and ‘marketing public relations.’ Advertising agencies and marketing departments offer ‘public relations’ services. The public relations function reports to marketing. Advertising agencies gobble up public relations firms. Little wonder that many CEOs in organizations large and small think the functions are simply different techniques for achieving the same end (p. 246).

Although domain overlap is seen with many different functions (Neill & Jiang, 2017), the marketing department has been largely the focus of encroachment research related to public relations. The relationship between marketing and public relations is particularly contentious because audiences or stakeholder groups are often the same, especially when organizational efforts or projects may need both marketing and public relations. In addition, because of its history of linkage to sales, marketing has demonstrated its worth through metrics and measurement, while public relations has struggled to measure its impact. Because of this solid history in demonstrating return on investment, marketing is not seen as easily substituted for other functions, and it is perceived as crucial to the organization because of its historical partnership with sales (Lauzen, 1991).

For example, consider a firm that manufactures a business-to-business product. The marketing department for that organization may participate in a trade show that attracts a number of visitors, who can be thought of as sales leads. These leads can be measured again when they turn into actual sales, thus neatly measuring marketing’s return on investment for the trade show. Now, imagine the public relations department for the same organization holds a press conference at the same trade show, and shares information with the trade press about a new product. The trade journalists then write favorable stories about the new product. What public relations departments have had a hard time doing is measuring the return on investment of that trade show press conference and subsequent media coverage, thereby struggling to prove their worth to the organization.

In addition, marketing relies on owned or paid media, meaning that marketing pays to publish information about an organization or owns the media used to communicate (Stephen & Galak, 2012); however, public relations relies on earned media, such as placements in news outlets, blogs, etc. These differences in media use have dictated different ways to approach audiences through various tactics and messages. Because social media have blurred the lines between earned, paid, and owned media (Stephen & Galak, 2012), the relationship between marketing and public relations activities is even more contentious.

Public relations researchers are not alone in focusing on domain similarities between marketing and public relations. Marketing researchers Kotler and Mindak (1978) identified issues of domain similarity between marketing and public relations. They asserted that blurry boundaries and inconsistent emphasis on the two functions have created tension between professionals doing these jobs. Kotler and Mindak (1978) asked questions like, “Should PR and Marketing be partners or rivals? Where does marketing end and public relations begin?” (p. 13). Their writing on the relationship between public relations and marketing did not present answers to these questions; however, they did describe different public relations and marketing organizational designs that existed at the time. Their descriptions included a look at how public relations could be a stand-alone department or part of a marketing or advertising department. For each of the designs, they identified issues that could create conflict between the functions. They concluded that marketers should “incorporate sound public relations in their thinking” to “obviate the need for an expanded corporate public relations department” (p. 19) and defend marketing’s turf.

3.3. Relationship-building goals and encroachment

Related to domain similarity is the shared goal of seeking to build and maintain relationships with external stakeholders. Drawing parallels between public relations’ and marketing’s efforts to building relationships illustrates how functional borders are often breached.

Within public relations research, theorizing on building relationships began with a call by Ferguson (1984) to change the focus of public relations theory and practice from processes and direct effects to a focus on building and maintaining meaningful relationships with stakeholders. Since then, a relational theory for public relations emerged as a central theory of the public relations field (Ki & Hon, 2007). The relational theory of public relations focuses on building and maintaining of relationships between organizations and their publics. One way relationship building has been conceptualized is through organizational public relationships, or OPR (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Ki & Hon, 2007; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Drawing on other disciplines such as interpersonal

communication and psychology, the concept of OPR describes the way in which public relations does not simply communicate on behalf of an organization, but instead develops a relationship with its publics. The OPR literature has suggested that OPRs can be measured along five dimensions, which are trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment (Ki & Hon, 2007). These dimensions can be measured from the organization's point of view as well as the public's point of view.

OPR is not the only relationship-building theory in public relations. From a philosophical and rhetorical perspective, Kent and Taylor (1998) proposed dialogic relationships through which organizations engage in ethical communication with their stakeholders. They perceived active dialogue as a way to more fully understand each other's point of view to reach "mutually satisfying positions" (p. 30), instead of relying on persuasion. In this way, public relations should commit to engaging in dialogic communications with their stakeholders to build mutually satisfying relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Within marketing theory, Webster (1992) advocated a shift to relationship building through development of strategic partnerships instead of the customary top-down management of marketing to consumers. These partnerships would result in the consumer relationship becoming the "key strategic resource of the business" (p. 1). This shift to partnerships advanced the idea of marketing as not simply an extension of the sales force but rather as a creator and manager of customer relationships. The relational theory of marketing focuses on the ongoing interaction with brands and products. The importance of relationship building has been further explicated through research that explains how consumers develop relationships with a small subset of brands and that marketing can help manage these relationships (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). As relationship theory of marketing evolved, researchers looked for ways to categorize and measure these relationships to bring more efficiency to the marketing function (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Fournier, 1998), thereby enforcing the concept of marketing as relationship-building.

4. Current views of encroachment

There are contemporary lines of research that explore the relationship between public relations and other functions such as marketing that do not use the term encroachment, but instead explore the topic of encroachment from specific angles. These lines of research do not focus on day-to-day role enactment, but instead focus on how activities of the two functions can merge. Two notable areas that discuss these issues are research into Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and dialogic approaches to managing public relations.

4.1. IMC research

Because of encroachment, there is tension between professionals who work in marketing, public relations, and related functions (Hutton, 2010). In addition, there continues to be confusion by top organizational leadership regarding who is responsible for what type of communications and who ultimately owns the relationships with external stakeholders (Hutton, 2010). Another major consequence of encroachment is that the top management of organizations seeks ways to minimize this tension. One solution developed within public relations and marketing practice and theory is a structural change to establish IMC.

Some organizations developed IMC in the late 1980s as a way to merge advertising, marketing and public relations functions into one department to coordinate communications effectively (Kitchen, Brignell, & Jones, 2004). Kitchen et al. (2004) wrote that IMC is the "attempt to combine, integrate, and synergize elements of the communications mix, as the strengths of one are used to offset the weaknesses of others" (p. 20). Extensive work by Cornelissen and Lock (2000); Cornelissen, Lock, & Gardner (2001); Cornelissen and Harris (2004), explored the idea of IMC from various vantage points. Cornelissen et al. (2001) reviewed literature from across disciplines to develop a testable framework for the integration of marketing communication. This framework illustrated how environmental and contextual issues brought about certain external communications needs. These needs influenced the structure of the external communication functions within an organization, including public relations and marketing. They asserted that this framework goes beyond where to place different people on an organizational chart. Instead, they

discard the whole idea of a 'fixed solution' towards the organisation of external communications, and provide a more complex and balanced view which emphasises the range of decisions and types of situations in which one form or another may arise and become significant (p. 84).

Because organizations communicate with key stakeholders primarily through marketing and public relations, times of crisis can intensify relationship-building and communication efforts of the functions. Using the global financial crises of 2008 as a case study, Christensen, Firat, and Cornelissen (2009) built on Cornelissen and Lock (2000); Cornelissen et al. (2001); Cornelissen and Harris (2004) earlier work related to IMC and identified new pressures to integrate marketing and public relations due to stakeholders' increasing calls for transparency and the need for increased focus on credibility after 2008.

Discussion continues regarding integration of marketing and public relations functions. Within public relations research, there is an assertion that public relations is losing the battle and there is a "need for public relations to define its intellectual and practical domain especially vis-à-vis marketing, to regain control of its own destiny" (Hutton, 2010, p. 509). From the marketing side, the contention is that some encroachment research ignores logical reasons why organizations should find ways to integrate and maximize the overall communications function's contribution to organizations (Cornelissen et al., 2001). Marketing and public relations departments exist today in organizations and universities, which suggests that IMC perhaps was not the solution it was promised to be. This failure of IMC's widespread acceptance could be due to lack of implementation or because it was implemented in such a way to privilege one group over another (as indicated by the name Integrated Marketing Communications). Additionally, organizations did not embrace IMC because it was inconsistently defined and designed (Hutton, 2010).

Some of the recent research on IMC propose both positive and negative consequences of integrating public relations, marketing and advertising. These recent extensions to the IMC research stream are exploring various aspects related to IMC, power and decision-making. [Mckie and Willis \(2012\)](#) propose that integrating provides a way for both marketing and public relations to adapt to each other as well as new marketplace realities in order to best serve their organizations. In this case, the integration can provide positive outcomes for the functions of public relations and marketing as well as organizational effectiveness. These findings indicate further exploration is needed as to how the integration can be mutually beneficial, especially given that public relations and marketing industry press focus on integrated efforts like content marketing.

4.2. Distributed public relations management

There is no doubt that formal integration of public relations and marketing activities has resulted in some convergence of public relations and marketing duties. A contemporary line of research takes this convergence for granted as to how practice should evolve into a coordinated and shared activity through distributed public relations ([Kelleher, 2009](#)).

Distributed public relations is the model of communication activities in which “key outcomes of public relations are fostered by a wide range of people communicating interactively while representing an organization” ([Kelleher, 2009, p. 185](#)). This model proposes that the best outcomes for an organization's public relations efforts will occur when people who are organizational members use conversational voice and dialogic communication principles ([Kent & Taylor, 1998](#)). This approach promotes an integration of communication activities throughout the organization beyond the public relations department. However, this model still places a public relations department or leader in the center of decision-making. Therefore, the ingredients are still present for role boundary encroachment if and when people who are not in a position as decision-maker alter the message or deviate from the agreed-upon public relations plan.

In sum, research about IMC and distributed public relations assumes that the daily life of a public relations or marketing professional looks at this convergence as a logical extension of their work. While illuminating about how stakeholder communication often happens simultaneously between marketing and public relations, this research does not examine how someone who works in public relations may define the boundary of his or her work versus her colleagues who are reaching out to the same audiences. The guiding ideas behind the encroachment concept include basic questions of who makes decisions about programs and campaigns, which are not the focus of current research. However, it is not clear yet that public relations has gained credibility and has a seat at the table when it comes to integrated communication. Instead, research suggests that internal relationship issues continue to be a barrier to carrying out public relations leadership roles ([Cardwell, Williams, & Pyle, 2017](#)). This is where a return to encroachment as a guiding concept can help professionals and academics understand how these collaborations are playing out within organizations, given that most organizations still have separate public relations and marketing functions that report to different areas of the business.

Research into the relationship between public relations and similar functions such as marketing has recently focused on discussing output of the functions related to integration or distributed activities. However, the day-to-day role enactment of professionals in these positions still takes place in separate departments with separate reporting relationships within organizations, and it is unclear with current research how this relationship is evolving. Therefore, a return to encroachment concepts in research is warranted. In addition, the context for the practice of public relations and marketing has changed drastically since early encroachment research. The following sections outline how social media use intensifies role encroachment issues.

5. Social media use and encroachment

The practices of public relations and marketing have been affected by the introduction of social media. The following section reviews the literature on social media and highlights features of social media that may be affecting perceptions of encroachment between public relations and marketing professionals.

Researchers have studied social media extensively, beginning with early web-based chat rooms and then on to specific social sites like MySpace ([Kent, 2010](#)). Definitions abound, but [boyd and Ellison \(2008\)](#) definition of social network sites is often cited. They write that social network sites are:

“web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (p. 211)

Social media also can be thought of as user generated media (UGM), defined as “new media whose content is made publicly available over the Internet, reflects a certain amount of creative effort, and is created outside of professional routines and practices” ([Shao, 2009, p. 8](#)). According to [Pew Research Center \(2018\)](#), seven in 10 American adults use some kind of social networking site. Because people are spending so much time with social media, public relations and marketing professionals are trying to maximize their efforts with these media. Beyond marketing and public relations, other departments within organizations are incorporating social media into their activities. Social media increasingly are the interface between the company and the consumers, so organizations allow customer service departments to include social media interfaces and tools ([Geierhos, 2011](#)). Therefore, the arena for encroachment goes beyond public relations and marketing due to social media use by other functions.

Some key features of social media are affecting encroachment. The three main aspects of social media affecting encroachment are as follows: the collapse of channels to reach stakeholders; the allowance of real-time, constant dialogue between stakeholders and

organizations; and time pressures on responses. Because much of the encroachment literature focused on marketing and public relations, the following examination of the effects of social media will focus on these two groups. This approach does not assume that social media is affecting the encroachment between only marketing and public relations. However, based on the review of literature, not enough is known about public relations and other departments like customer service or human resources to include these other departments in the discussion.

5.1. Social media and collapsing communication channels

Because public relations and marketing share goals, as discussed above, the use of social media by both groups could be affecting encroachment. In the past, marketing had its own communication channels (brochures, point-of-sale displays, etc.) while public relations used its own tools (third-party communications through press releases sent over the news wire, press conference events, etc.). With social media, these previously offline activities are now online. Social media have become the point-of-sale via sponsored Facebook posts. News comes from news organizations' websites as well as a friend's Twitter feed. Beyond having all these activities on one type of media, people are "permanently online" (Vorderer & Kohring, 2013, p. 188). According to Vorderer and Kohring (2013), "The Internet allows people to communicate seemingly independent from time and place—that is, potentially always and everywhere. People are no longer subject to individual messages; rather, they seem to communicate and interact almost permanently" (p. 188). Therefore, any organization that wants to communicate with stakeholders also has to conduct its relationship-management business *permanently online* to meet people where they are spending their time and attention.

Social media, then, "collapse multiple audiences into single contexts" so that content producers must navigate "imagined audiences" who are on the other end of the social media (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 114). This "imagined audience" is not bound by ideas of space and place, and is seemingly boundless. "This, the imagined audience, might be entirely different from the actual readers of a profile, blog post, or tweet" (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 115). Marketing and public relations functions traditionally know their target audiences and know the best way to reach these audiences. With an imagined audience, it is much more difficult to strategically target messages for optimum effectiveness.

In addition, social media such as Twitter "cut across and connect diverse networks, actors, and locations in an action space" (Segeberg & Bennett, 2011, p. 202). Therefore, marketing and public relations professionals who rely on social media to reach their goals are facing the challenge of trying to pinpoint their audience. Marketing and public relations professionals also must navigate the difficulties in controlling messages because social media transcend the audience segmentations available in traditional communication activities.

The collapse of channels can be attributed to the fact that social media are diverse enough to play multiple parts in a person's life. For example, people may use social media to satisfy information, entertainment, social connectivity, self-expression, and actualization needs (Shao, 2009, p. 9). In addition, social media use is tied to personal image expression (Toubia & Stephen, 2013). Because some social network sites have different utilities, people use the same sites for different reasons (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011) such as information gathering or social connections.

In sum, because social media are now one of the main ways organizations communicate with external stakeholders, marketing and public relations professionals are treading on the same ground even more than before the introduction of these media. The merging of channels used by these groups could be creating more encroachment issues as they compete to strategize, manage, and control social media efforts on behalf of their organizations.

5.2. Social media and stakeholder dialogue

Another key characteristic that may be affecting encroachment is the way in which social media open up real-time, constant dialogue with stakeholders, often many stakeholders at once. Looking back to traditional ways of communicating through marketing and public relations, there were fewer opportunities for dialogue, let alone real-time dialogue. For example, the placing of a press release in a newspaper may have resulted in a call or letter after someone read the newspaper. However, this dialogue would have occurred one-on-one, and not immediately after the press release was distributed. On the marketing side, a customer who picked up a product brochure at point-of-sale would have to contact the company directly through a phone call, which again would be one-on-one interaction occurring after the brochure was printed and distributed. This lag time allowed for strategic planning in relation to responses to potential issues.

With social media, public relations can Tweet out a link to company news, or marketing can post a consumer contest to Facebook, and within seconds the stakeholders can reply to and forward the information. This instantaneous feedback has the potential to make or break the goals of a public relations or marketing campaign. On one hand, the direct reach to stakeholders is creating new opportunities for relationship building. However, the instant feedback and potential viral nature of social media is putting increased pressure on public relations and marketing professionals to manage the dialogue.

The management of this dialogue can intersect between marketing and public relations due to the often-overlapping and elusive online audiences. Both public relations and marketing theorists have established the importance of managing dialogue with stakeholders, which is a shared goal of the functions.

5.2.1. Public relations and stakeholder dialogue

Public relations theory has focused on the dialogic potential in web-based communication. Kent and Taylor (1998) first conceptualized web-based dialogic relationships as the ultimate goal of public relations activities online. By dialogic, Kent and Taylor

point to principles of dialogue in the tradition of rhetoric. To them, dialogic communication “refers to any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions. Dialogic denotes a communicative give and take” (p. 325). Dialogic communication has to be guided by the presumption that agreement is not always the desired or expected outcome, but instead the focus should be on “intersubjectivity” (p. 325), or the process of creating mutually acceptable meanings in the situation.

According to [Kent and Taylor \(1998\)](#), features of the Internet make it well suited to creating dialogic communication. Due to the timeframe of their theorizing, they are referring to websites. However, some of their recommendations would apply to newer online media. To maximize the web’s dialogic capabilities, [Kent and Taylor \(1998\)](#) proposed five principles for creating dialogic relationships (p. 326–331) that encourage mechanisms for feedback and user-friendly interfaces. These principles were proposed to maximize the features of the web to create and maintain relationships.

Research on dialogic possibilities of public relations using the web has expanded to look at different types of situations. Public relations research has examined activist groups’ use of social media and web-based communication in relation to the dialogic communication principles ([Reber & Kim, 2006](#); [Sommerfeldt, Kent, & Taylor, 2012](#); [Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001](#)). This research found that although the web holds the possibility for relationships built on dialogic communication, the five principles have not been applied consistently. This line of research has gone beyond analyzing webpages to focus on how social media might be enhancing the dialogic communication between activists and their stakeholders ([Reber & Kim, 2006](#)).

In crises, social media are also important due to their ability to allow dialogue and feedback. Organizations look to the public relations function for help managing the onslaught of communications during crises. Research on crises and public relations has found that interactive techniques via social media can help foster productive dialogue by speaking with stakeholders ([Coombs & Holladay, 2012](#)). By monitoring social media conversations, public relations professionals can better understand stakeholder sentiments and then provide more effective responses ([Schwarz, 2012](#)). In addition, because some generations of people use social media differently than others, effective engagement, dialogue, and relationship building with younger audiences are more effective when using social media ([Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011](#)). Social media are not limited to use during times of crisis. Fortune 500 companies are using websites ([Park & Reber, 2008](#)) and now social media ([Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010](#)) to engage and manage relationships with stakeholders and customers.

5.2.2. Marketing and consumer dialogue

Because the focus of marketing has shifted to building relationships, “social connectivity is becoming key to marketing” ([Geho & Dangelo, 2012, p. 61](#)). Reaching out to consumers through social media and monitoring consumers’ online activities have become main tasks within the marketing function ([Geho & Dangelo, 2012](#)). These activities have given rise to two major streams of research in marketing, which are brand management and electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

Brand management is defined as activities that enhance and uphold the image in a consumer’s mind related to a brand and its products ([Chung, Lee, & Heath, 2013](#)). Traditionally, this work had been done through marketing and advertising ([Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013](#)). However, social media have created a new environment for brand management ([Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013](#)). According to [Gensler et al. \(2013\)](#),

the social media environment has seen a shift from the firm to consumers as pivotal authors of brand stories in the branding process; a high level of interactivity manifested in social networks of consumers and brands; and a multitude of channels and brand stories that cannot be easily coordinated. (p. 253)

This new environment engages consumers in dialogue through the interactivity of social media.

In addition to proactive communication, marketing professionals are interested in the conversations consumers are having online. Due to the rapid rise of review sites, eWOM is also an important aspect in marketing practice and research. Online communications foster conversations among consumers about products and brands. Therefore, eWOM is a credible source for consumer information and can influence purchases and brand experience ([Canhoto & Clark, 2013](#); [Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009](#)). In addition, eWOM can be an important research tool for marketers to target their efforts ([Quinton & Harridge-March, 2010](#)). Many times eWOM evolves into larger brand communities and even translates to offline behaviors ([Quinton & Harridge-March, 2010](#)).

Overall, efforts to maximize the benefits and alleviate the costs of the dialogic possibilities of social media are now essential activities within the functions of public relations and marketing. Given the overlap between these functions, the question becomes: When does the dialogue go from a marketing issue to public relations issue, and vice versa? The answer to this question is often unclear and varies from case to case. The answer is also sometimes an equal collaboration between the functions, with role boundaries blurred and audiences shared. Because of this uncertainty related to who should manage the stakeholder online dialogue, encroachment issues are heightened between public relations and marketing.

5.3. Social media and reduced response time

Because relationships are fragile and need constant care, and because social media are “always on,” response time for issues has been reduced. Both marketing and public relations professionals are reaching out to their perceived audiences more quickly than in the traditional media environment. This communication with stakeholders via social media is also less coordinated, although sometimes an issue warrants a joint public relations and marketing response. Reduced response time may be leading to increased encroachment because there is less time to coordinate efforts, especially when issues are urgent.

Social media can reach many people instantaneously. In addition, interaction with organizations via social media “takes place on many and often changing platforms at once” ([Bucher, Fieseler, & Suphan, 2013, p. 1680](#)). A social media outlet may be relevant one

day and obsolete the next, as seen in the rise and fall of MySpace, and the decline in use of Facebook (Loader & Dutton, 2012). Within public relations research, response time has been evaluated as a key variable in the success of crisis communication efforts (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Within marketing, efforts used to be “one (organization) to many,” but now communication is happening in real time, across time and space, with the voice of the customers creating and shifting the conversations (Gensler et al., 2013; Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012).

With issues and crises often going viral quickly, pressures continue to rise for marketing and public relations professionals to be nimble in their responses to stakeholders. Often the speed of this response can mean the difference between success and failure. Therefore, because the goal of maintaining relationships is shared between marketing and public relations, shorter response time could be creating encroachment issues as professionals are trying to keep their fingers on the pulse of stakeholder conversations and potential issues. Adding social media as a variable to the encroachment research will also place encroachment in context of today’s media environment, which has changed the way public relations and marketing manage relationships with their key stakeholders.

6. Directions for future encroachment research

The focus on public relations and marketing encroachment in the 80s and 90s began to uncover role boundary tensions and factors leading to tension between functions. However, research into the current state of the relationship between these functions, although illuminating on some aspects such as shared tasks, does not thoroughly explore the topic of role encroachment. Through an analysis of current literature, it is clear that more work should be done to bring the study of encroachment up to date with the age of social media. By focusing on collapsing external channels and the changing nature of public relations and marketing duties and roles, researchers can further understand the factors that lead to confusion on the part of executives as to who is responsible for specific communication tasks. Future research should examine how social media use has caused process and cultural adaptations within organizations that include public relations and marketing functions. By identifying and addressing these factors, public relations and marketing professional can better serve their organizations and their audiences.

To explore these factors, the following questions are proposed and can be used as guides for future research directions and provide and extension of the research reviewed above.

What points of differentiation are logical for public relations and marketing related to social media use? What points of convergence are logical for public relations and marketing related to social media use? Because of the collapse of channels used to reach stakeholders (Ecker, 2013; Royce, 2012) and overlapping relationship building goals of the functions (Aaker et al., 2004; Broom & Sha, 2013; Kotler & Armstrong, 2017), future research should evaluate and identify the context in which integration is the best course of action and how each function adds unique value to organizations. As noted, contemporary issues like data privacy may force a more relationship-driven approach to communication based on public relations practices than sales-based tactics used in marketing. This line of research would help to further distinguish the two functions and provide a roadmap for how each can work better together.

What are the consequences of further blurring of lines between public relations and marketing for professionals in these functions as well as for organizational effectiveness? Future research in this area should focus on the consequences of increasingly similar activities such as influencer marketing (Kirkpatrick, 2018; Kuhn, 2018). Examining how each function defines their turf and how professionals deal with turf encroachment would help further understand intra-organizational dynamics. This line of research would help to identify how public relations and marketing professionals deal with the day-to-day issues arising from encroachment due to social media and how others within the organization see the two functions within the larger organizational system based on social media tactics.

Is public relations still on the defense when it comes to the marketing turf war and what is the role of social media use in this battle? Marketing research continues to look at public relations as an extension of the marketing mix (USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, 2017) while public relations research continues to look at how public relations can get a seat at the table, with the assumption that marketing always has one (Lee et al., 2018; McKie & Toledano, 2008; Smith & Place, 2013). Future research should establish how public relations professionals see the use of social media as a way to gain leverage within organizational power structures and establish a greater role. Research in this area has already identified social media acumen as an advantage public relations has over marketing in some cases (Lee et al., 2018; Neill & Moody, 2015). More research in this area would reveal if this phenomenon is widespread and what consequences it has for educating future practitioners on social media use.

Should public relations take a leadership role in integration efforts in order to shape the power dynamics in integration? As noted above, a solution to the tension between public relations and marketing has been a movement toward IMC (Cornelissen et al., 2001; Huton, 2010; Kitchen et al., 2004). Given that marketing is in the name of this movement, public relations is automatically subsumed. However, because public relations has a history of building mutually beneficial relationships versus the sales-related history of marketing, future research should examine whether public relations practitioners have a role to play in shaping the dynamics of the future of the function when and if there should be integration. If the future of stakeholder communication is storytelling and based on building relationships through generating compelling and valuable content (USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, 2017), this line of research should look for ways that public relations can lead the way in redefining its role in organizations, rather than letting marketing define it.

In sum, encroachment by marketing into public relations terrain, and vice versa, is more salient today than it was in the 1990s, given the entrée of social media into communication efforts. By focusing on the aspects of social media use that affect this encroachment, future research can help ensure favorable relationships between these historically at-odds functions as well as help organizations communicate more effectively with their stakeholders. By bringing encroachment back to the vocabulary of the public relations researcher, we can begin to reexamine the boundaries and role enactment issues that exist between these separate but related organizational functions to better understand how to navigate these roles.

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