Public Relations in Advocacy:
Stem Cell Research Organizations' Use of the Internet in Resource Mobilization

Maureen Taylor, Ph.D., and Shuktara Sen Das

The public relations efforts of advocacy organizations and social movements are emerging as an important topic in the public relations literature. The Internet is one tool for these groups as they communicate their messages to the public and legislative representatives. This article is a case study of how the Internet is used by the advocacy organizations participating in the stem cell research debate. Activist organizations such as those campaigning on embryonic stem cell research (ESCR) policy promote their cause through information subsidies and resource mobilization via their Web sites. This research examines 54 ESCR Web sites as advocacy tools in respect to their information subsidies to the media and resource mobilization for members. The findings suggest that the Internet has untapped potential to provide both tangible and intangible resources to organizations that advocate for social issues. Based on these findings, the article provides recommendations for public relations practitioners who work in advocacy on ways to use their Web sites for resource mobilization and information subsidies.

The Internet is a unique space for organization-public interaction. For public relations practitioners, the Internet is one more tool to reach the media and publics. For public relations scholars, its potential to enable personal and organizational communication makes it a valuable area for understanding relationships. One area of current interest to both public relations practitioners and scholars is the effective use of the Internet for advocacy. Advocacy involves a variety of public relations practices: media relations, issues management, strategic communication, coalition building, and organization-public interactions that build relationships.

The purpose of this article is to continue the study of Internet advocacy. It presents a case study of how stem cell advocacy organizations use their Web sites to participate in issues management. This research will help those public relations practitioners who work in advocacy organizations better understand how to use their Web sites as resource mobilization tools. The first section of the paper reviews the public relations literature about advocacy, the Internet, and issues management. The second part details the methodology of a case study (Stake, 1995) that examined a collective of stem cell research organizations as they competed for public attention, media coverage, and the opportunity to influence public policy formation. The third section reports the results of an analysis of 54 advocacy Web sites representing three perspectives of the stem cell research issue. The final section provides specific recommendations for public relations practitioners as they integrate the Internet into their advocacy efforts.

1

Evolving Perspectives about Activism and Public Relations

A lot has changed in the last 20 years in the ways in which the field of public relations views activism. L. Grunig (1992) originally defined an activist public as "a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics or force" (p. 504). Grunig noted that "activist pressure is an extensive problem for organizations" (1992, p. 513). Grunig's perspective on activists has evolved and she has acknowledged that activists can push an organization toward Excellence. Today, activists are no longer considered as impediments to organizational public relations efforts. Indeed, Holtzhausen (2007) has noted that Excellence theory has improved specifically because it has evolved to become more relevant for activists groups.

 Dozier and Lauzen explored activism and advocacy organizations as practitioners of public relations in a special issue of Journal of Public Relations Research. They encouraged scholars to consider the uniqueness of activist groups and social movements as practitioners of public relations and for us to "discover and theorize about the differences" between activists and corporations (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000, p. 19). Additionally, a chapter of the Handbook of Public Relations was devoted to activism. Smith and Ferguson (2001) reviewed the major perspectives that explain how activist organizations form and develop. Smith and Ferguson (2001) and Dozier and Lauzen's (2000) articles have called upon researchers to consider the public relations needs of activist organizations. This paper answers that call and provides public relations practitioners working in advocacy organizations with research findings to refine how they integrate the Internet into their communication efforts.

Internet Activism and Social Movement Advocacy

In a democracy, ideas compete when individuals, corporations, activists, and social movements advocate for their positions in the public sphere. This competition is what Robert Heath has called a fully functioning society (2006). Yet, Dozier and Lauzen (2000) noted that activists groups do not necessarily use the same tactics, share the same values, or have the same resources as corporations when they seek to accomplish their advocacy goals. Activist organizations attempt to raise awareness, change attitudes, and encourage or discourage certain behaviors. Activist groups are often member organizations of a larger social movement in society. For instance, Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, and the Nature Conservatory are individual activist organizations. They act alone on some issues and they act together on other issues. With other organizations across the U.S. and the world, they comprise the environmentalist social movement. Social movements, according to Dozier and Lauzen (2000), "are not adequately accommodated by existing public relations theory" (p. 9).

What makes theorizing about social movements so different from theorizing about other organizations? Diani (1992) defined social movements as:
(a) networks of informal interaction;
(b) sharing beliefs and solidarity;
(c) engaging in collective action on conflictual issues; and
(d) acting outside of the institutional sphere and routine aspects of social life.

Social movements emerge as advocacy networks. They gather like-minded people and organizations together to advocate for a social goal. The major issues of advocacy organizations are communicated through the network and this helps social movements to achieve some of their goals. Networks operate at both a micro and macro level (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000).

Advocacy can help people and institutions achieve understanding and agreement (Heath, 2007). While advocacy movements rely on committed individuals, they also need to communicate their issues to wider publics. Social movements need a variety of resources to disseminate their message to encourage non-members, and eventually public policy makers, to act on behalf of their issue (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Today, the Internet is one such resource.

The Internet as an advocacy tool is not a new topic for public relations scholars. As early as 1998, Coombs (1998) and Heath (1998) argued for the Internet's use as a tool for activists. The Internet has most often been used as a one-way communication tool. In this model, organizations place information on their Web sites and hope that publics will read it or the media will include their information in a news story. The intended outcome is that people will be persuaded to agree with the organization's position on a topic. The Internet has the potential to transcend the dichotomous one-way formulation of most communication channels. It can also be a relationship builder where the organization engages the visitor in two-way communication. Internet features including listservs, Blogs, social media, and discussion groups enable communication between dispersed people with similar interests. The focus thus far in public relations research is that activists use the Web as a resource for relationship building and information subsidies to the media (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Reber & Kim, 2006, Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001).

Organizational Resources of Advocacy Groups

McCarthy and Zald (1977) noted that social movements need to accomplish certain internal organizational goals before they can accomplish external advocacy goals. In other words, the movement needs to have certain resources in place before it can begin and then sustain an advocacy effort. Tesh (2002) extended this conclusion and showed that social movements flourish under certain conditions. One of the most important conditions is the availability of resources. The Internet is a valuable resource because it provides information to a variety of publics and also links different groups together. Coombs (1998) described the Internet as a low cost and controllable channel for all types activists. Furthermore, the Internet allows direct communication between

organizations and publics. Activists can control the quantity and quality of information and organize their information in many different formats. The key benefit is that activists can get their messages across as they want it. The Internet helps to increase an activist group's network density by increasing communication and relationships with other stakeholders (Tesh, 2002).

This relationship-building function is what Kent and Taylor (1998) put forward as a set of principles for striking a dialogic relationship with the Internet audience. They argued that Web site design can facilitate relationship building. Web sites need to be more than merely information repositories or online brochures. Activist Web sites are influential only when stakeholders, including the media and policy makers, are persuaded by the content (Coombs, 1998). Yet, activists must also continue to work to make their issue salient in the broader print and electronic media. Jacobs and Glass (2002) noted that publicity is important for non-profit organizations to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the public and to gain the attention of policy makers. For a social movement, the Internet also offers the opportunity to "transform sets of geographically dispersed aggrieved individuals into a densely connected aggrieved population, thus solving one key problem of mobilization" (Diani, 2000, p. 388).

Challenges for advocacy organizations include mobilizing people and resources. Freeman (1979) proposed that activist organizations need a variety of tangible and intangible mobilizing resources to accomplish their goals. Tangible resources are things that bring monetary resources into the organizations. Intangible resources bring awareness of the organization, its issue and help the organization to reach new members. Jenkins (1983) extended the discussion of mobilizing resources to include human assets that are the core power of activist groups.

As per Freeman (1979) and Jenkins' (1983) classification, the Internet can also be considered as a mobilizing resource. The question is how the Internet can be used by organizations to mobilize both tangible and intangible resources. Taylor et al. (2001) and Kent et al. (2003) identified 16 Web site features that may serve this need. Tangible resources include opportunities to make donations, participate in fundraising, or shop at online stores. Intangible Web site resources include news releases, volunteering opportunities, action alerts, chat rooms, and the opportunity to contact institutions etc. Reber and Kim (2006) studied the pressrooms of 72 activist organizations. They found that the environmental activists organizations rarely incorporate these features.

Advocacy organizations want people who are interested in their topic to visit their Web site. Public relations practitioners who represent these organizations also want to extend their reach beyond individual visitors to reach multiple publics through media coverage. Activists need to influence the public discussion of the issue. They need to manage the issue.

Issues Management through Information Subsidies

Issues management involves both corporate and activist advocacy. It is strategic participation in public policy matters (e.g., Ansoff, 1980; Bartha, 1984; Chase, 1977, 1984; Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Hainsworth, 1990; Heath, 2006; Heath & Cousino, 1990; Heath & Nelson, 1986; Marx, 1986; O'Connor, 2006; Veil & Kent, 2009; Wartick & Rude, 1986). Advocacy organizations seek a role in the public policy process and they can participate in the public sphere by managing their issue. They need journalists and media representatives to visit their Web sites. When the media use an advocacy organization's information in their news coverage of the issue, that particular organization's interpretation of the issue becomes part of the public debate. Web sites have become a valuable tool for journalists—they can provide what Gandy (1982) termed the information subsidy.

The information subsidy occurs when organizations, usually businesses or governments, provide information to the media. This information lowers the cost of newsgathering. Gandy warned that it could corrupt the entire news process because groups with resources have more opportunities to provide this subsidy than groups or organizations without resources. Thus, well-established groups such as businesses, government agencies, or experts can be more influential in issues management.

Callison (2003), Hachigian and Hallahan (2003), Ryan (2003), and Reber and Kim (2006) have reported how organizational Web sites provide journalists this information subsidy. Providing the information subsidy, however, is not only for profit seeking businesses. Gandy was critical of corporations, government agencies, and large industry groups wielding this power. However, advocacy organizations can also participate in this process. Advocacy groups can conduct research in support of their position on issues. They can also identify experts who can speak on behalf of the organization's position to the media. Becoming an organizational authority on the issue is an important outcome of media relations. Issues management tells us that the organizations that get to define the issue also get the opportunity to define the desired resolution of the issue. Activist organizations should strive for being the source that media regularly consult when writing about an issue.

Ross (2005) found that third party sources such as non-government organizations (such as activist groups) are some of the most preferred sources for journalists. Activist organizations use their Web sites to provide the information subsidy. However, little is known about the success of these organizations as they attempt to influence the public policy agenda.

Based on the literature review, a few key points emerge about activist organizations' use of the Internet. Advocacy organizations need their cause to be heard and need to build relationships with other stakeholders. The Internet can be a low cost, multi-faceted, and controllable resource that can help build relationships and provide information to the media. However, success depends on how best an organization can avoid having their Web site merely serve as an online brochure. The next section

provides a case study to illustrate the opportunities and challenges of advocacy organizations' Web sites as resource mobilization tools.

THE EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH DEBATE

Background on the Issue

According to the National Institutes of Health, stem cells are undifferentiated cells that have the potential to turn into many different types of tissues. They can repair damaged parts of the human body. Stem cells are found in some parts of the adult body such as bone marrow, liver, fat tissue, fetal tissue, umbilical cord blood, and in embryonic tissue. They can divide and form specialized cells. Stem cells have been the basis of bone marrow transplant therapy for leukemia since the 1960s. Stem cell research involves isolating and studying these stem cells to understand cell biology. It seeks to unlock the mysteries of several genetic and degenerative diseases such as Parkinson's, Paralysis, ALS, Alzheimer's, and Diabetes.

What is controversial is not stem cell research per se but rather, embryonic stem cell research (ESCR). This is because it involves isolating cells from the blastocyst – a cell mass that is four to five days old post fertilization. Indeed, many worry that even if embryonic stem cell research may be promising, it might lead the way to "a slippery slope of dehumanizing practices" (Sandel, 2004, p. 207).

Lobbying by pro and anti ESCR advocates began in 1994 when the National institutes of Health and the Department of Health and Human Services devised guidelines and regulations. Initial media attention (as well as public interest in the issue) was limited (Nesbitt, 2003). The issue became "current" (Crable & Vibbert, 1987) in 2001 when President George W. Bush declared that he would allow federal funding of ESCR based on the date of derivation, (i.e., the embryos would have had to have been derived before August 9, 2001).

Defining and Linking the ESCR Issue

Jones and Chase (1977) and Crable and Vibbert (1987) first explicated the nature of issues. Advocacy efforts need to take into account the reality that for issues related to reproductive genetics, there is no social consensus on potential harms and benefits. ESCR is not just an isolated issue. It is associated with other issues that are controversial by themselves. These are cloning (therapeutic / reproductive), assisted reproductive technology, and abortion. Cloning involves transferring stem cells from an embryo to a denucleated cell to help that tissue divide and grow (somatic cell nuclear transfer - SCNT). Because both ESCR and SCNT are linked so it is difficult to think of one without the other. Tauer's (2004) arguments about how this complicates legislation have demonstrated the difficulty that an advocacy organization may have in targeting audiences. The proximity of the ESCR debate to the abortion debate is that opponents argue about the moral equivalency of embryonic and human life. The arguments surrounding abortion deal with the ability of an embryo / fetus to survive without the

mother's body and on the moral equivalency of the mother and the embryo/fetus. However, as Davis (2002) pointed out, the abortion and ESCR debates are not parallel all of the time. Davis argued that the moral arguments for abortion and ESCR can be different (2002). For instance, a pro-choice individual may be opposed to ESCR because it involves destruction of extracorporeal embryos while a pro-life person can be in favor of it because of its promise in finding cures for diseases.

The Legal and Regulatory Process

Advocacy organizations on both sides of this issue have tried to influence legislation. Therefore, it can be expected that the Web sites would mention issues related to legislation. Nisbet (2004) and Brodsky (2002) summarized the current state of stem cell research legislation in the U.S. There is only one federal stem cell policy. It applies to research using cell lines derived before August 2001. Regulation of reproductive technologies is left for individual states to decide.

By early 2006, a total of 24 pro ESCR bills had been introduced to Congress. Some bills seek to allow embryonic stem cell research regardless of date of derivation. Other proposals seek to ensure that embryos used for research are in excess of in-vitro fertilization needs, that guidelines be prepared for research, and racial and minority diversity is ensured when deriving stem cells for research. On the other side of the issue, there are bills opposing stem cell research that link stem cell research to cloning. These bills propose that both therapeutic and reproductive cloning be banned and that civil and criminal penalties be imposed on those who violate these bans. Embryonic stem cell research is an issue that requires different advocacy organizations to mobilize resources and provide information subsidies to the media.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed case study methodology (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994) to identify, describe and analyze the data. A review of the ESCR advocacy groups showed that in late 2005 (4 years after President Bush's decision), there were 128 organizations that had Web sites addressing the issue of stem cell research. The Internet is a valuable resource for these organizations as they attempt to mobilize resources, provide information subsidies, and manage the issue. In order to understand how these organizations have used the Internet as a resource, the following research questions were asked:

RQ1: How are stem cell advocacy groups using their Web sites to mobilize tangible and intangible resources?

RQ2: What kinds of information subsidies are provided to the media and policy makers on these Web sites?

RQ3: Which stem cell organizations are emerging as media authorities on the issue?

SAMPLE

Our descriptive case study (Yin, 1994) is bounded by the Bush Administration's 2001 decision and the pending legislation considered before the 2006 presidential election. A population of 128 Web sites was identified through the Google search engine. Twenty Web sites that were under construction or were one-page shells with little content were eliminated from the sample (N =108). Using a table of random numbers, the researchers selected 54 Web sites for analysis (50% of all of the ESCR sites that met the parameters of the study). Pro stem cell research organizations (n = 32) constituted about 59 % of the sample. For the purposes of the rest of this study, these organizations will be identified as PRO. Anti stem cell research organizations (n = 11) constituted approximately 20% of the sample. These organizations are identified as ANTI.

The researchers expected two roughly equivalent groups (PRO and ANTI). However, as in many case studies, upon closer inspection of the Web sites selected in the random sample, we realized that a third group emerged that was distinct from the other two groups. This third group encompassed stem cell focused research organizations. Given the important role of these groups in adding a research-based perspective to the ESCR policy debate, the researchers created a third category to examine their use of resource mobilization features. The third group, stem cell focused informational organizations (n = 11), constituted the remaining 20 % of the sample. These organizations will be identified as RES in the study. The distinction between PRO stem cell research organizations and RES stem cell research organizations was made in terms of the key cause each group pursued. The PRO organizations were concerned about stem cell research in relation to how it affects their cause. For instance, groups dedicated to diabetes research or Alzheimer's research have specific positions about stem cell research and advocate for passage of legislation. They have the ability to reach a broader audience since people visit their sites for disease specific information. While on the Web site, visitors can learn about stem cell research through the lens of that disease. The organizations labeled RES were singularly devoted to stem cell research. RES organizations include hospitals, universities, or research centers. They seek to increase funds for the research and call for legislation that will increase the available number of stem cells lines for research.

The 54 Web sites were examined by two coders for evidence of resource mobilization and information subsidies. Intercoder reliability was calculated and the percentage of agreement met accepted standards of 70% and higher for all categories. It is important to note that the breakdown of the sample into three groups created categories too small (n = 11) to provide the statistical power necessary to make meaningful claims of difference. Thus, the researchers did not test hypothesizes of difference. Instead, the researchers will report percentages of features to each group to describe the prevalence of resource mobilization features on these advocacy Web sites. Thus, the descriptive nature of the findings will assist public relations practitioners to revise their Web sites and follows research by Reber and Kim (2006) that reported frequencies of

Web site design features as a first step to theory development in Internet-facilitated public relations.

Variables of Interest

Resource mobilization. RQ1 inquired how stem cell research advocacy groups use their Web sites to mobilize resources. Freeman (1979) identified tangible resources such as money and facilities. Tangible Web site resources asked visitors to make a donation, participate in fundraising, become a corporate sponsor, or shop at the on-line store. These Web site feature brought financial resources into the organization. Intangible Web site features focus on human skills and building levels of support for the organization. Intangible resources considered data in this study included Web site options that asked visitors to: become a member, sign up email updates, sign up to receive a newsletter, join message boards/ chat rooms, volunteer, tell a friend, fill out an action alert, contact Congress, contact the media, login, apply for an internship/job opportunity, and look at the past voting records of political leaders. To answer RQ 1, the researchers assessed each Web site for the presence or absence of the tangible and intangible mobilizing features. The perfect score would be 100% if all organizations in that group incorporated that particular resource-mobilizing feature into their Web site.

Information subsidies. RQ2 asked what types of information subsidies are provided on the Web sites to inform visitors, the media, and policy makers. The researchers studied information subsidies in two ways. First, we counted as data the actual information subsidy tactics featured on each organization's Web site. We looked for information that would be useful for anyone visiting the page. Features that were counted included news releases, background information about the organization, philosophy/mission statements, strategic plans, newsletters, news conference or media event information, speeches and policy papers, fact sheets and statistics, downloadable graphics, audio and video clips, links to other relevant sources, sample letters, and organizational histories. Second, we looked at the target publics of each of the three categories of organizations' (PRO, RES, ANTI) to see if they specifically provided information to researchers, policy makers, medical professionals, patients, media, voters, and sponsors. These information subsidy tactics were coded for their presence or absence on a Web site.

Media coverage. RQ3 inquired which stem cell organizations are emerging as media authorities on the issue. To answer this RQ, we examined news coverage of the ESCR issue in two different ways to see which organizations are actually appearing in the stories about stem cell research. First, we sought evidence of which organizations were being cited as experts in news stories about the stem cell research debate. Through a LexisNexis key word search of the term, "Stem Cell Research", the researchers checked which organizational names were being mentioned within a nine-month period before the 2004 Presidential election. The search yielded 66 articles in total, dated within a nine-month period (Feb. 8, 2004 to Nov. 1, 2004). Out of these, 20 articles were eliminated from the sample because they were either transcripts of federal hearings or radio interviews. Articles from international press sources were also eliminated from the

sample as we wanted to focus on press articles that the American public would have be able to access. In addition, we conducted a name search of each organization in the sample. The names of the 54 ESCR organizations were used as a keyword in LexisNexis to ascertain how many times each of these organizations was included in news coverage of the stem cell research issue. Together, the online data collected from Web sites and the mention of ESCR organizations in the media provide the data for this case study. The results of the case study provide a descriptive analysis of the patterns of ESCR Internet resource mobilization and media coverage.

RESULTS

Resource Mobilization

RQ 1 sought evidence if and how the Internet is being used for tangible and intangible resource mobilization. The ESCR organizations had low scores on both types of resource mobilization. Table 1 shows that the Web sites incorporate very few of the tangible and intangible features. In terms of tangible resources, the groups use their sites to appeal for donations (range 42% to 50%). The ANTI stem cell research organizations appear to be better at selling products (such as anti abortion tee shirts and bumper stickers). The PRO organizations have a higher rate of asking for corporate sponsorship and this is actually common for health related not-for-profit organizations. Corporations, especially health or consumer product organizations, regularly sponsor campaigns to raise awareness and money for health related causes. The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, a PRO stem cell research group, has partnered with Accu-Check, Abbott Diabetes Care, and Ford Motor Company. It might be more difficult for ANTI groups, especially those that frame the ESCR issue around cloning and abortion, to attract corporate sponsorship.

Table 1
Percentage of Resource Mobilization Features on Web Sites

Tangible Resources	RES (n =11)	PRO (n = 32)	ANTI (n = 11)
Make a Donation	45	50	42
Participate in Fundraising	27	13	17
Become a corporate sponsor	9	16	8
Shop at the on-line store	27	25	42
Intangible Resources			
Become a member	18	44	17
Sign up email updates	18	34	50
Sign up to receive a newsletter	0	50	33
Message boards or chat rooms	0	28	17
Volunteering opportunities	18	16	8
Tell a Friend (Help spread the word about us)	18	13	17
Action alerts (e.g., legislative alerts)	18	28	8
Contact congress/government/organization/media	27	38	8
Benefits to members	9	25	8
Member login	9	25	8
Internship/Job opportunity	18	13	42
Past voting records	0	3	8

Note. RES = Stem cell research focused; PRO = pro ESCR; ANTI = anti ESCR

ESCR organizations also fail to incorporate intangible resource mobilization features into their Web design. The options to become a member of the organization, sign up to receive newsletters, or e-mail updates were provided by approximately one quarter of the organizations. PRO stem cell advocacy groups scored higher on encouraging visitors to become a member, asking them to fill out action alerts, providing information to contact Congressional representatives, and asking visitors to sign up for the newsletter. The ANTI stem cell research organizations more frequently offered e-mail updates, internships, and job opportunities.

The low scores by all three groups suggest that the Internet is not being used as a tool to mobilize tangible or intangible resources. To answer RQ1, there appears to be only minimal evidence that ESCR organizations are using their Web sites for any type of resource mobilization.

Information Subsidies

RQ 2 inquired about the information subsidies of ESCR organizations. Web sites provide organizations with a controlled way to reach the public and the media. Table 2 provides a breakdown of percentages of the different public relations tactics integrated into the ESCR Web sites.

Table 2
Percentage of Information Subsidies

	RES (n =11)	PRO (n = 32)	ANTI (n = 11)
Press releases	27	47	42
Biographical information ("about us")	64	100	83
Philosophy/Mission statement	73	72	33
Strategic plan	0	31	8
Newsletters	9	59	58
Conference and/or media events	54	53	25
Speeches/Policy papers	27	44	50
Fact sheets/statistics	45	34	17
Downloadable graphics	27	19	17
Audio or video clips	36	28	50
Contact information	54	38	33
Out-link to other relevant information sources	63	56	25
Organizational history	0	25	58
Sample letters to policy makers	0	3	0

Note. RES = Stem cell research focused; PRO = pro ESCR; ANTI = anti ESCR

Organizations can post a variety of public relations tactics on their Web site to inform and persuade. Common tactics include news releases, newsletters, speeches, fact sheets, audio and video clips, and backgrounders. These tactics provide useful, reliable information to visitors and the media. The organizations appear to be doing a good job of telling Web site visitors about their organization and mission. The low percentage of Web sites that featured news releases, policy papers, and fact sheets suggests that the ESCR organizations are not maximizing their outreach to a variety of publics.

Kent and Taylor (1998) suggested that Web sites need to be useful to a variety of publics including government leaders. Jones and Chase (1979) showed us that public policies are decided in the halls of government. Thus, organizations that seek to influence public policy need to ensure that the information on their Web sites is valuable to policy makers. Policies are influenced by media coverage of a topic and voter interest in legislation (Jones & Chase, 1979).

Table 3 shows that ESCR organizations are not doing a very good job of providing useful information subsidies to those who have the most influence/power in stimulating the issue agenda and policymaking. The very low score for customized information for journalists (ranging from 8% to 18% of the Web sites) suggests that these organizations are not maximizing their site design to serve the information needs of the media.

Table 3
Percentage of Information Subsidies on Advocacy Web Sites

Influencing The Influencers	RES (n = 11)	PRO (n =32)	ANTI (n = 11)
Customized information for journalists	18	9	8
Customized information for policymakers	0	9	8
Customized information for voters	27	6	17
Influencing Stakeholders			
Customized information for sponsors	0	9	8
Customized information for researchers	64	63	0
Customized information for medical professionals	27	50	17
Customized information for members/patients	18	38	33

Note. RES = Stem cell research focused; PRO = pro ESCR; ANTI = anti ESCR

The very low scores on customized information for journalists, policymakers, and voters shows that all three ESCR types are missing key opportunities to inform those who influence legislative decisions.

 The frequency of information subsidies customized for more general stakeholders is higher. The data show that Web sites appear to focus their information for researchers, doctors and medical practitioners, and to a lesser extent, people interested in treatment options. When reviewing Table 3, it becomes clear that the ANTI group refuses to even acknowledge stem cell researchers. They have no information directly targeted to researchers. Table 3 also shows that the RES groups are not attempting to influence policy makers. This finding really begs the question about their role as experts to advocate for ESCR legislation and funding. These findings suggest missed opportunities by all three groups for issues management.

RQ3 inquired if specific organizations were emerging as authorities on the ESCR topic in media coverage. Because of the high interest in the ESCR issue in connection with the 2004 Presidential elections, many of the organizations selected in the sample were featured in media stories about the issue. Stem cell research was a major point of difference between the two 2006 presidential candidates (President Bush and Senator

Kerry). The researchers employed two different search strategies to identify organizations cited by the media in stories about ESCR.

General keyword search. The authors searched the term "Stem Cell Research" in LexisNexis. A total of 46 articles were identified through these terms. Forty three articles met the parameters of the study and contained the names of advocacy organizations in this study. Organizations that appeared in news coverage most frequently include the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (13 articles), California Stem Cell Research and Cures Initiative (10 articles), Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation (8 articles), and Advanced Cell Technology (4 articles). It is useful to note that the most frequently mentioned organizations in the general search are all PRO ESCR organizations.

Name search. The second strategy searched for the names of the 54 specific stem cell advocacy organizations. This search created a sample of 125 articles. One RES group in particular, Stem Cell Research Foundation, was mentioned in 59 different articles. The March of Dimes, Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research, Kaiser Foundation, ALS Association, Organ Transplant Association, and Alliance for Aging Research were also featured in multiple articles.

Certain ANTI organizations in the sample received significant press coverage: Concerned Women for America (60 articles), United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (75 articles), Family Health International (75 articles), Stand to Reason (69 articles), National Right to Life (82 articles), and Culture of Life Foundation (4 articles).

The results present a case study of how stem cell advocacy organizations use their Web sites to participate in issues management. The next section provides specific recommendations to the public relations practitioners who work in advocacy organizations on ways to better use their Web sites as resource mobilization tools.

Implications for Public Relations Practitioners

Previous public relations research about activists' use of the Web for relationship building and information subsidies to the media has suggested that activists have not been able to use their Web sites to increase their influence in social issues (Kent et al., 2003; Reber & Kim, 2006; Taylor et al., 2001). This current research study supports these earlier conclusions.

Social movements begin with a group of committed individuals and in order for them to get their definition of the issue and the resolution of the issue onto the public agenda, they need to communicate their issues to broader publics. Freeman (1979) and Jenkins' (1983) framework provided the groundwork to position the Internet as a logical tool in issues management. The findings of this study suggest two conclusions and three recommendations about activism, public relations, and the Internet for practitioners.

Missed Opportunities for Resource Mobilization

The data suggest that the Web sites of these organizations are not used adequately for resource mobilization. When tangible Web site resources are examined, it appears that less than half of the organizations seek donations or ask like-minded organizations to help them financially. Not one tangible resource feature achieved a frequency greater than 50%. Web site features that provided intangible resources were also not prevalent. There were many lost opportunities for these groups to leverage their Web sites' potential. For instance, very few (less the 32%) asked visitors to contact their elected officials and even fewer showed the political positions of elected leaders on the topic. The sites fail to follow through on the issues management mission of their organizations. They cannot hope to change government policy without additional supporters, additional resources, or additional news coverage.

Missed Opportunities for Information Subsidies and Issues Management

Web sites are controlled communication channels. With little or no effort, a public relations practitioner can place existing organizational documents such as news releases, memos, fact sheets, backgrounders, graphics or speeches onto the Web site. The media cannot use information that does not exist or is difficult to find. Web site content needs to anticipate and fulfill media needs (Reber & Kim, 2006).

The ESCR sites are not using their Web sites to provide information to policy makers, the media, or voters. The very low scores reported on Tables 2 and 3 suggest that the organizations are missing the key argument made by academics about the Web: organizations can use their sites to communicate controlled information. A closer look at Table 2 shows that more than half of all organizations failed to post one news release about their position on the ESCR issue. More than half of the organizations in this study failed to clearly state their policy in a document for the media and only one organization provided visitors with their strategic plan for resolving the ESCR issue.

There are exemplar Web sites and the data from RQ3 shows some support that excellent Web sites can generate increased media coverage of the organization's position. Excellent PRO Web sites provided a variety of mobilizing features and information subsidies. The California Stem Cell Research and Cures Initiative provided their perspective on the ESCR issue when their positions were covered in 10 news articles. The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation appeared in 13 different articles. The Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation was mentioned as a source in eight news articles. These organizations' Web sites incorporated many of the resource mobilization and information subsidy features and thus emerged as sources for media stories. These organizations have a greater chance of influencing the ESCR debate because of this news coverage.

Two of the ANTI Web sites: "Stand to Reason" and "National Right to Life" also appear as exemplars of Web site advocacy. The group, Stand to Reason "trains Christians to think more clearly about their faith and to make an even-handed, incisive, yet gracious defense for classical Christianity and classical Christian values in the public square." It does not call itself a political or advocacy group. Rather, it trains individuals to become

personal advocates on Christian issues in their own communities. It uses its Web site as a training tool. Stand to Reason's Web site embodies many tangible and intangible advocacy features. It was mentioned in 69 news articles about ESCR. From an issue management perspective, it had 69 opportunities to communicate its stand on the issue to the public and policy makers.

The National Right to Life Web site also included many of the tangible and intangible resource mobilizing features. A section entitled "Training" provided public relations tactics to visitors. Features such as ready-made presentations, sample letters to the editor, shells of speeches, and "personal tactics" could be downloaded and used immediately by anyone who wanted to become a foot soldier in the anti-ESCR movement. The National Right to Life organization and its position on the ESCR issue was mentioned in 82 national news articles. Its information subsidies appear to be effective in gaining media attention.

Public relations practitioners who work in any type of advocacy organization can benefit from the findings of this study. Three suggestions for advocacy organizations interested in maximizing their tangible, intangible, and information resources via the Internet emerged from this study.

Recommendations for Improving the Advocacy Potential of Web Sites

What can public relations practitioners do to maximize the use of the Web sites for issues management? The literature and the case study findings suggest advocacy organizations can start by ensuring that they include Web site design features that create opportunities for tangible and intangible resource mobilization. Organizations need to sit down and look carefully at their Web site. The public relations practitioner needs to recognize all of the potential ways that the Web site can be used to support and extend the organization's agenda. If an activist group wants a policy created or changed, then they need to tell the visitor how s/he can be a part of that change. By including action alerts, e-mail addresses of Congressional leaders, sample letters to the editor, and other mobilizing features, the organization can fulfill the public relations and issues management potential of the Web. There are three specific recommendations to improve the use of the Internet in public relations advocacy.

#1: Create a checklist of tangible and intangible features on your Web site. Practitioners interested in maximizing their resource mobilization need to review the specific features of their Web sites. Create a checklist based on Tables 1 and 2 and visit your Web site to see how easy it is to find the pages that ask people to donate, contact their Congressional representative, or download information about the issue. Visitors will not donate or sign up for more information if the organization does not ask them to do so. If your organization is missing some of the tangible and intangible features, the public relations practitioner should consider ways to add these features to the Web site. Adding social media tactics that provide both tangible and intangible resources will also help advocacy groups to accomplish their mission.

#2: Anticipate what the media will need when they visit your Web site. Practitioners interested in maximizing their media coverage need to review the information subsidies provided on their Web site. Jones and Chase (1979) suggested that the media play an important role in linking issues with policy solutions. Practitioners should look at their Web site as if they were a media representative gathering information for a news story about the ESCR issue. What they see (or do not see) might motivate them to rethink the content of their site. Advocacy organizations that seek to influence public policy need to provide the information media need in an easy to find format. The media need mission statements, statistics, names of experts, news releases, and audio/video clips as a foundation for their stories. These information subsidy features need to be regularly updated and available in a variety of formats. For instance, television reporters need video to enhance their stories while radio reporters seek audio clips. Print outlets appreciate high quality, downloadable graphics such as charts, tables, and photographs. Adding these tactics will increase your chances of media coverage of the issue.

#3: Advocacy means empowering individuals. Social movement organizations and activists groups need regular citizens to become the "foot soldiers" of the cause. Most Americans are not comfortable writing a letter to the editor or speaking at a public forum. Advocacy Web sites can provide grass roots activists with simple tools that allow them to maximize their individual efforts on behalf of the collective cause. If an organization wants to empower individuals to act, then it needs to provide the tools to support the activism. Practitioners should review their Web sites to see which empowering tools they are providing. The National Right to Life Web site provides a variety of personal advocacy tools that could be easily adapted for any type of advocacy organization. Their Web site, with 82 media hits in a short nine-month period, provides an exemplar of how to use the Internet for pushing an issue agenda. Even small organizations can activate their foot soldiers by providing model news releases, speeches, letters to the editor, Op Ed pieces, and training guides for local organizing.

CONCLUSION

This paper followed Dozier and Lauzen's (2000) call to study activist organizations as practitioners of public relations. The case study specifically explored advocacy, public relations, and the Internet. The Web sites of these stem cell advocacy organizations have the potential to serve two broad public relations goals: resource mobilization and information subsidies. Currently, most of the Web sites are missing these opportunities. The 1989 movie, Field of Dreams, made popular the expression, "if you build it, they will come." The same is true for activist Web sites. If an activist organization builds a Web site that incorporates both tangible and intangible mobilizing resources, then they can maximize their ability to provide useful information to the media, government policy makers, and visitors. This information can become the foundation of influencing the ESCR debate.

This case study is only the starting point for learning more and theorizing about advocacy and the Internet. The patterns that emerged suggest that public relations

theorizing indeed needs to include activist organizations because of their unique needs and constraints. Right now, public relations theory and public relations practice appear to be disconnected. Public relations and advocacy theories tell us that the organizations should be creating certain Web site design features to maximize their activism. However, the reality of the Web sites is much different. They lack features that would bring in both tangible and intangible resources.

Like all research, this research project has some limitations. The case study sample was chosen through a Google search as no composite list of stem cell research advocacy organizations was available. Therefore, it is entirely possible that some organizations that should have been included in the population were missed. The results therefore should be understood as demonstrating the general trends in Internet use for public relations by stem cell research advocacy organizations rather than an exact picture of stem cell research advocacy on the Internet. Given the exploratory nature of the research, this is appropriate goal (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

The breakdown of the sample did not allow for the application of inferential statistics. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings for theory building is limited. The case study provides descriptive information for public relations practitioners who work in advocacy organizations. The use of frequencies of resource mobilization feature does, however, provide a general framework for describing how advocacy groups are using their Web sites. The frequency (or lack of) does tell us that the ESCR advocacy groups are missing out on valuable mobilizing and information subsidies opportunities.

Future studies might look at current and potential visitors to advocacy Web sites. This would allow us to see what users expect from such Web sites and how the current ESCR sites are meeting these expectations. Another area for future Internet advocacy research could include an analysis of Blogs or other interactive social media features in how they help the organizations engage in dialogue (Kent &Taylor, 1998). Agenda setting theory would also provide a valuable framework for future studies.

The debate over stem cell research continues with the election of a pro stem cell research president in 2008. Yet, no matter who sits in the White House, the ESCR issue, like most issues, will come and go depending on media coverage and current events. The stem cell advocacy groups on all sides of the issue will use public relations to explain this complex issue to the public and to policy makers. The media will continue to need experts to help them understand this issue. The organization that provides the most useful Web site with the most mobilizing features will be in the best position to have their interpretation of the issue become the dominant interpretation of the issue. This organization will be in the best position to manage the ESCR issue and ultimately influence public policy.

REFERENCES

Ansoff, H. I. (1980). Strategic issue management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 1, 131-148.

Bartha, P. F. (1984). Tuning in on issues management. *Canadian Business Review*, 11, 25-33.

Behuniak-Long, S. (1989). Roe v. Wade. The impact of an outdated decision on reproductive technologies. *Policy Studies Review*, 8 (2), 368-379.

Callison, C. (2003). Media relations and the internet: How Fortune 500 company web sites assist journalists in newsgathering. *Public Relations Review*, 29, 29-42.

Chase, W. H. (1977). Public issue management: The new science. *Public Relations Journal*, 33, 26.

Chase, W. H. (1984). Issue management: Origins of the future. Stamford, CT: Issue Action Publications.

Coombs, W.T. (1998). The Internet as potential equalizer: New leverage for confronting social irresponsibility. *Public Relations Review*, 24, 289-303.

Crable, R. E., & Vibbert, S. L. (1985). Managing issues and influencing public policy. *Public Relations Review*, 11, 3-16.

Davis, D. S. (2002). Stem cells, cloning and abortion: making careful distinctions. The *American Journal of Bioethics,* 2 (1), 47-49.

Diani, M. (2000). Social movement networks, virtual and real. Information, Communication and Society, 3, 386-401.

Diani, M. (1992). The concept of social movement. *The Sociological Review*, 38, 1-25.

Dozier, D. M., & Lauzen, M. M. (2000). Liberating the intellectual domain from the practice: Public relations, activism, and the role of the scholar. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12, 3–22.

Freeman, J. (1979). Resource mobilization and strategy. In M. N. Zald, & J. M. McCarthy (Eds.), The dynamics of social movements (pp. 167-189). Cambridge, MA: Winthrop.

Gandy, O. (1982). Beyond agenda setting: Information subsidies and public policy. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Grunig, L. A. (1992). Activism: How it limits the effectiveness of organizations and how excellent public relations departments respond. In J. Grunig (Ed.), Excellence and public relations and communications management (pp. 483-502). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hachigian, D., & Hallahan, K. (2003). Perceptions of public relations Web sites by computer industry journalists. Public Relations Review, 29, 42-62.

Hainsworth, B.E. (1990). The distribution of advantages and disadvantages. *Public Relations Review*, 16, 33-39.

Heath, R. L. (2007). Management through advocacy: Reflection rather than domination. In E. L. Toth (Ed.), The future of excellence in public relations and communication management (pp. 41-66). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Heath, R. L. (2006). A rhetorical theory approach to issues management. In C. H. Botan, & V. Hazelton, (Eds.), Public relations theory II (pp. 63-100). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Heath, R. L. (2006). Onward into more fog: Thoughts on public relations' research directions. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18, 93-114.

Heath, R. L. (1998). New communication technologies: An issues management point of view. *Public Relations Review*, 24, 273-288.

Heath, R. L., & Cousino, K. R. (1990). Issue management: End of first decade progress report. *Public Relations Review*, 16, 6-18.

Heath, R. L., & Nelson, R. A. (1986). Issue management: Corporate public policy making in an information society. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Holtzhausen, D. (2007). Activism. In E. L. Toth (Ed.), The future of excellence in public relations and communication management (pp. 357-380). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Jacobs, R. N., & Glass, D. J. (2002). Media publicity and the voluntary sector: The case of non-profit organizations in New York City. Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations, 13 (3), 235-252.

Jones, B. L., & Chase, H. W. (1979). Managing public policy issues. *Public Relations Review*, 5, 3-23.

Jenkins, J. C. (1983). Resource mobilization theory and the study of social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 9, 527-553.

Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (1998). Building dialogic relationships through the World Wide Web. *Public Relations Review*, 24, 321-334.

Kent, M. L., Taylor, M., & White, W. J. (2003). The relationship between Web site design and organizational responsiveness to stakeholders. *Public Relations Review*, 29, 63-77.

Marx, T. G. (1986). Integrating public affairs and strategic planning. *California Management Review*, 29, 141-147.

McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (1977). Resource mobilization and social movements. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82, 1212-1241.

Nisbet, M. (2004). The poll trends: Public opinion about stem cell research and human cloning. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 68, 131-154.

O'Connor, A. (2006). Merchant of mercy, merchant of death: How values advocacy messages influence jury deliberations. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34, 263-285.

Reber, B. H., & Kim, J. K. (2006). How activist groups use websites in media relations: Evaluating online pressrooms. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18, 313-334.
Ross, S. (2005). Eleventh annual RSCG Magnet and Columbia University survey of the Media. New York.

Ryan, M. (2003). Public relations and the web: Organizational problems, gender, and institutional type. *Public Relations Review*, 29, 335-349.

Sandel, M. (2004). Embryo ethics – The moral logic of stem cell research. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 351 (3), 207 – 214.

Smith, M. F., & Ferguson, D. P. (2001). Activism. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), Handbook of public relations (pp. 291–300). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stake, R. (1995). The art of case research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
Tauer, C. A. (2004). International policy failures: Cloning and stem cell research. Lancet, 364:9429, 209-215.

Taylor, M., Kent, M. L., & White, W. J. (2001). How activist organizations are using the Internet to build relationships. *Public Relations Review*, 27, 263–284.

Tesh, S. N. (2002). The Internet and grassroots. Organization and Environment, 15 (3), 336-339.

Wartick, S. L., & Rude, R.E. (1986). Issues management: Corporate fad or corporate function? *California Management Review*, 24, 124-140.

Yin, R. (1994). Case study research: Design and methods (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.