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Understanding Influence on Corporate Reputation: An Examination of Public Relations Efforts, Media Coverage, Public Opinion, and Financial Performance From an Agenda-Building and Agenda-Setting Perspective

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Abstract

Seeking to extend research on public relations evaluation, this study investigates the influence of public relations efforts and media coverage on corporate reputation and financial performance through the theoretical grounding of first- and second-level agenda-building and agenda-setting. A triangulation of research methods compared public relations content, news media coverage, public opinion, and corporate financial performance for 28 U.S. companies from the annual Harris Interactive (2005) Reputation Quotient. Evidence for agenda-building and agenda-setting propositions was

found, which work to inform strategies of public relations practitioners. The implications of the findings are discussed.

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Notes

[1]The Reputation Quotient has been measured by Harris Interactive and the Reputation Institute annually since 1998. This instrument evaluates stakeholder perceptions of the most visible corporations in the United States and Europe across six attributes or dimensions of corporate reputation and 20 subattributes. This article used data from the 2005 Reputation Quotient survey, which was conducted in two phases: a nomination phase (March–June 2005) and a rating phase (August 30–September 26, 2005). In the nomination phase, 6,977 randomly-selected U.S. adults completed telephone and online surveys, and each nominated two companies with the best reputation in their opinion and two companies with the worst reputation. Responses were tallied, generating a list of 60 of the “most visible” companies in the United States. In the rating phase, 19,564 randomly-selected respondents evaluated one or two companies from the list of 60 with which they were “very or somewhat familiar” on 6 attributes and 20 subattributes presented in Table 1. Finally, Reputation Quotient scores were calculated for each company. More information about the Harris Interactive study can be found at http:// www.harris interactive.com/services/rq.asp.

[2]The final list of companies analyzed in this study was (in descending order of reputation scores): Johnson & Johnson, Coca Cola, Google, UPS, 3M, Sony, General Mills, FedEx, Toyota, Home Depot, Procter & Gamble, Walt Disney, Dell, Honda, PepsiCo, Costco, IBM, General Electric, Southwest Airlines, Boeing, Starbucks, Nike, Target, DuPont, Apple, Unilever, Wal-Mart, and Best Buy.

# p < .10,

* p <. 05,

** p < .01,

*** p < .001

# p < .10,

* p <. 05,

** p < .01,

*** p < .001

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