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# An experimental analysis of activist message strategy effect on receiver variables

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An Experimental Analysis of Activist Message Strategy

Effect on Receiver Variables

by

Andrea Schuch

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
School of Mass Communications  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

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activism, public relations process model

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## Dedication

As unconventional as it may be, I dedicate this work to my dog, Luci. Her absence was the motivating factor in my timely completion of this manuscript. The greatest reward I can have for this achievement is her unconditional loyalty, energy, companionship, and positive attitude back in my life again. I also want to dedicate this to my mom, who not only cared for the beast so I could focus on this project, but offered me unwavering support, for which I am immensely grateful.

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# An Experimental Analysis of Activist Message Strategy

## Effect on Receiver Variables

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### ABSTRACT

Utilizing communication and activist organization perspectives, this empirical study examined activist message strategies and how they influence variables related to the receiver of activist communication. Specifically, J.E. Grunig's (1997) situational theory of publics and Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action were used to explain the communication effects of the seven activist message strategies developed from Hazleton and Long's (1988) public relations process model.

The findings of this study support the premise of situational theory of publics and contribute to the extension of the theory through the inclusion of goal compatibility as a predictor of information seeking behavior and the use of alternative items to operationalize information seeking behavior, such as visiting a Web site. Only partial support was found for the predictions of the theory of reasoned action. Attitude toward behavior was not found to have a significant influence on behavioral intent. However, the importance of subjective norm to the prediction of behavioral intent was reiterated. Also, the proposition that message strategies influence behavioral intent via their influence on attitude toward strategy was supported.

Finally, results of this study partially supported the hypothesis that receiver variables are influenced by activist message strategies. Problem recognition, goal compatibility, attitude toward strategy, and attitude toward behavior were found to be affected by activist message strategies. Problem recognition was influenced most by the persuasive strategy, goal compatibility was most influenced by the threat and punishment strategy, and attitude toward strategy and attitude toward behavior were both influenced most by the cooperative problem-solving strategy. Overall, the results of this research suggest that, of the seven activist message strategies, activist organizations will be most successful using persuasive and coercive strategies. This important finding offers a recommendation to activist organizations regarding the most effective strategy to use in message development.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Traditionally, the study of public relations has taken an organization-centered rather than a communication-centered approach. This means that public relations is viewed as a management function primarily influenced by factors related to the organization, and the organization is the unit of analysis (J. E. Grunig, 1989a, 1992, 2001; J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 1992; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J. E. Grunig & White, 1992). Research by L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, and Dozier (2002) suggests that, in order for an organization to have an excellent communication department, the public relations practitioner should be a member of the dominant coalition, be involved in the strategic management of the organization, and fulfill a managerial rather than a technical role. The organization should also maintain a participative culture, embrace diversity, and position the public relations function separate from other organizational functions such as marketing. These characteristics of excellence, though not exhaustive, demonstrate the disciplinary focus on organizational structure and culture.

On the other hand, in a communication-centered approach, the unit of analysis is the strategic communication between source and receiver, and public relations is positioned as “a dynamic process influenced by the situational interaction of source, message, and receiver variables” (Werder, 2005, p. 218). While the source variable has been examined at length within the organization-centered approach, there has been a

dearth of research on the message and receiver variables and a theoretical framework that links the two. The lack of public relations research on the relationship between the strategic communication of an organization (message variable) and its publics (receiver variable) has led to a “limited understanding of public relations strategy use in organizations and the effectiveness of strategies in achieving organizational goals” (Werder, 2005, p. 219).

Public relations research has not only been limited by the exclusion of a communication-centered perspective, but the development of the organization-centered approach has failed to include research related to activist organizations. Activist organizations are referred to by different names, such as special interest groups and grassroots organizations; however, their fundamental feature is that they are organized and thus “face some of the same challenges as do other organizations. They also strategically use communication” (Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 292). Scholarly interest in activist organizations has grown, “but it has not kept up with the increasing importance of activists on public policy and advocacy efforts” (Aldoory & Sha, 2007, p. 352). In addition, what research there is on activism is often limited to explaining, predicting, and responding to activist organizations’ behavior (Anderson, 1992; L. A. Grunig, 1992; Guiniven, 2002; Murphy & Dee, 1992; Smith & Ferguson, 2001; Taylor, Vasquez & Doorley, 2003; Werder, 2003, 2006).

### *Background*

An activist group is “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” (L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, &

Dozier, 2002, p. 446). While activist groups are strategic publics of organizations, Aldoory and Sha (2007) argue that “activists are not just publics of an organization” (p. 352). They are often organizations themselves, strategically utilizing public relations to communicate with their publics (Smith & Ferguson, 2001). Throughout public relations scholarship, however, activist organizations are not regarded as legitimate organizations. And, research on activism is most often performed in order to determine how organizations can best respond, when targeted by activists.

Research on activism and organizations, like a majority of public relations research, remains organization-centered. Werder (2006), however, used a communication-centered approach to analyze organizational response to activism. In her study, the relationship between message variables and receiver variables was explored. Specifically, she developed messages based on seven public relations strategies derived from Hazleton and Long’s (1988) public relations process model. She tested these messages’ influence on the attributes of publics of an organization responding to activism. Even though Werder utilized the traditionally overlooked communication-centered approach, her study—like a majority of the research on activism—was still conducted from the perspective of an organization responding to activism. There are significantly fewer studies exploring how activist groups’ use of public relations affects communication with their publics, which ultimately plays an important role in goal achievement.

### *Purpose*

This study seeks to fill a gap in the public relations literature by using a communication-centered approach to study public relations from the perspective of an

activist organization. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to further current theory-driven public relations research by examining activist message strategies and how they influence variables related to the receiver of activist communication. Specifically, J. E. Grunig's (1997) situational theory of publics and Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action are used to explain the communication effects of activist message strategies. The activist message strategies used in this study were developed from Hazleton and Long's (1988) public relations process model. The seven strategies tested in this study are informative, persuasive, facilitative, promise and reward, threat and punishment, cooperative problem-solving, and bargaining.

Werder (2006) examined the influence of these strategies on attributes of publics (problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and goal compatibility) when utilized by a corporation responding to activism. Werder (2003) also examined the influence of the public relations strategies on individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions toward a corporation responding to activism. This study will replicate and extend those experiments by testing the influence of the seven public relations strategies, reframed as activist message strategies, on receiver variables in regards to an activist organization utilizing the strategies. This will be done in an effort to discover the activist message strategies most effective in making publics more active, an important factor in an activist organization's goal achievement. The receiver variables examined in this research include problem recognition, constraint recognition, level of involvement, goal compatibility, beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions.

This study attempts to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding J. E. Grunig's (1997) situational theory of publics. Not only will this study test the premise of

the situational theory of publics, but it will further research on goal compatibility as a supplemental independent variable, as well as extend the operationalization of information seeking behavior.

Finally, this study seeks to expand on the use of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action as a useful framework for examining communication effects. In addition to testing the predictions of the theory of reasoned action, this study will explore activist message strategy effect on salient beliefs via the strategy's influence on attitude toward the message of the activist organization.

#### *Theoretical basis*

This research is based on three theoretical foundations. The first is Hazleton and Long's (1988) public relations process model, which provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of public relations message strategies. The public relations process model describes public relations as goal-driven communication strategies used by organizations to interact with target publics. Public relations can facilitate organizational goal achievement through communication (Hazleton, 1993). This is accomplished by translating goals into communication strategies that define appropriate and effective action for goal achievement (Werder, 2005).

Another important theoretical basis for this study is the situational theory of publics. This theory explains how and when people communicate with organizations and what effect this communication might have (J. E. Grunig, 1989b). According to J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984), the situational theory of publics posits that "communication behaviors of publics can be best understood by measuring how members of publics perceive situations in which they are affected by organizational consequences" (p. 148).



The three independent variables of the theory—problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition—constitute three attributes of publics that predict whether a public will engage in active or passive communication behavior. Research has also identified goal compatibility as a supplemental attribute of publics (Werder, 2005, 2006). Problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and goal compatibility are four receiver variables that are important in determining public relations strategy use and effectiveness in organizations (Werder, 2005, 2006).

The final theoretical foundation for this study also focuses on receiver variables. Activist message strategy effect on belief, attitude, and behavior will be examined using the framework of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action. According to the theory, the single best predictor of behavior is an individual's intention regarding that behavior (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996). Behavioral intention is determined by an individual's subjective norm regarding the behavior and attitude toward the behavior. Subjective norm refer to "the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior," and attitudes toward the behavior refer to "the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). An individual's attitude about a behavior is a function of his or her salient beliefs about performing the behavior, and it is these beliefs that are influenced by activist message strategies.

#### *Importance of the study*

This study is important due to the contribution it makes in three different underdeveloped areas of public relations research. First, this study will contribute to a communication-centered rather than an organization-centered approach to understanding

public relations by studying the effect activist message strategies have on publics receiving activist communication.

Second, this study contributes to the understanding of variables related to the receivers of organizational communication. Variables relating to publics, those who receive organizational messages, have received little attention in public relations research. With the exception of the situational theory of publics, there is no real framework for examining the impact of message strategies on publics (Hallahan, 2000a). The use of the theory of reasoned action as a measure of communication effects in this study adds an additional dimension to the research on receiver variables.

This study also seeks to further develop the situational theory of publics by extending the operationalization of the information seeking behavior variable. The original item for measuring information seeking behavior asked how willing an individual would be to send or call for a free informational brochure or booklet (J. E. Grunig, 1989b). Media outlets have changed substantially since the situational theory was introduced, especially with the advent of the Internet (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Chey-Nemeth, 2001). This study will extend the theory in light of these developments by exploring additional items that measure information seeking, such as visiting a Web site or responding to or sending an email.

The situational theory of publics is also enhanced by the addition of goal compatibility as a supplemental independent variable. Previous research indicates that goal compatibility is an attribute of publics that influences communication between an organization and its publics (Page, 2000b, 2000c; Page & Hazleton, 1999; Werder, 2003, 2005, 2006). This study seeks to replicate and extend previous research on goal

compatibility as a variable that impacts the information seeking behavior of publics.

Finally, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on activist organizations. There is a lack of public relations research from the perspective of the activist organization. Activist organizations are unique, both as organizations and as publics of other organizations, which the current nomothetic perspective does not encompass (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000). By studying public relations in diverse settings, such as in activist organizations, a more comprehensive understanding of the discipline can be gained.

#### *Outline of study*

Before the influence of activist message strategies can be tested, a more comprehensive examination of the theoretical basis of this study is necessary. Therefore, Chapter 2 provides an extensive overview of the public relations process model from which the activist message strategies used in this study were derived. In addition, literature related to the situational theory of publics and the theory of reasoned action is presented. Finally, research pertaining to activist organizations is discussed, and the hypotheses for this study are provided.

Chapter 3 outlines the methods and procedures used in this research. To test the proposed hypotheses, a controlled experiment was conducted. Participants were recruited from a population of undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory mass communication class at the University of South Florida and were randomly assigned one of nine different conditions resulting from a  $1 \times 9$  factorial. Prior to conducting hypotheses tests, a manipulation check was performed to assess the degree to which the

activist message treatments agree with the public relations strategy definitions presented in Hazleton's (1993) taxonomy.

Chapter 4 presents the results of this research, Chapter 5 discusses the results, and Chapter 6 provides conclusions, implications and limitations of this study, as well as areas for further research.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

In an organization-centered approach, the organization is most often viewed as the unit of analysis and the type of public relations behavior the organization exhibits is determined by its worldview (J. E. Grunig & White, 1992). Page and Hazleton (1999) suggest that this perspective “limits analysis of public relations behavior in organizations to communication source variables” (p. 2). By focusing on the source variable, other essential elements of the communication process, such as message and receiver variables, have been only minimally explored in research. This leads to an imbalanced and incomplete analysis of the public relations function. As a result, public relations scholars have argued that more theory-based research should be conducted from a communication-centered rather than organization-centered perspective (Botan & Hazleton, 1989; Botan & Soto, 1998; Hallahan, 2000b, Hazleton, 2006; Leitch & Neilson, 2001; Springston & Keyton, 2001).

Hazleton (2006) proposed a more communication-centered approach to the study of public relations with his theory of public relations competence. According to Hazleton, this theory is different from other theories of public relations in three significant and beneficial ways. “First, the theory considers the potential for a variety of outcomes from public relations activities. Second, the theory recognizes publics as active

participants in the public relations process. And finally, the theory recognizes context as a central feature of public relations” (p. 199).

The model of interpersonal competence, from which the theory of public relations competence originated, is grounded in seven, communication-focused assumptions that require interpretation from both sender and receiver. One assumption of the model, for example, is that competence is a matter of degree. In other words, the degree of competence will vary for both individuals and organizations. Another assumption is that competence is contextual. Communication strategies are designed to accomplish specific objectives relevant to specific situations; therefore, situational variables influence the selection of communication strategies. Another example of an assumption from the model is that competence is an interdependent process. “Communication is a process of reciprocal message exchange between a source and a receiver. Goals of the source, messages, and expectations of receivers are all relevant to judgments of competence” (Hazleton, 2006, p. 202). These assumptions demonstrate the importance of both sender and receiver variables in communication, which offers support for a more communication-focused research perspective.

Botan and Soto (1998) observe that surprisingly little has been written about strategic communication and what it means for publics, the receivers of organizational communication. They attribute this to the dominant organization-centered perspective that is central in public relations research, stating, “because of the organization-centered perspective dominant in public relations and organizational communication scholarship the whole field of communication has produced little research on publics or their internal functioning” (p. 25). Karlberg (1996) argues that in order for real balance and inclusion

in public relations to be achieved, the communication needs and constraints of the previously excluded segments of the population must be addressed in research.

Moffitt (1992) recognized that “one of the central, but often neglected, issues to everything public relations is about—theory, research, practice, pedagogy—is the concept and definition of a public” (p. 18). The purpose of Moffitt’s study was to offer another perspective toward the conceptualization and definition of a public and to “recognize and privilege the publics’ participation in the public relations process” (p. 18). Because of its focus on how individuals receive meaning, she recommends using critical theory to offer more insights into the notion of a public. Moffitt contends that “the study of public relations can be enriched and complemented with a closer look at meaning consumption and ‘audience,’ in other words, with a view toward the ways publics receive and consume meaning from messages” (p. 21). She also argues for more audience-centered research for a greater understanding of how public relations campaigns affect those they reach. She explains that this demonstrates a more ethical responsibility to the recipients of public relations communications.

Hallahan (2000b) describes the notion of publics as one of the most conceptually troublesome constructs in contemporary public relations. Other than the “limited-purpose situational theory, the public relations literature contains no systematic model that addresses how to segment publics or how different patterns of information processing by publics might impact message strategy” (Hallahan, 2000a, p. 464).

Hallahan (2000b) offers an extension to the situational theory of publics that suggests differentiating groups into five segments instead of the four—nonpublics, active, aware, latent—described by J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984). The model proposed by Hallahan

differentiates between inactive and aroused publics, which J. E. Grunig combines as latent publics. Therefore the typology of publics, according to Hallahan, includes active, aware, aroused, inactive, and nonpublic. Based on this segmentation, he offers the following definition of a public: “a group of people who relate to an organization, who demonstrate varying degrees of activity-passivity, and who might (or might not) interact with others concerning their relationship with the organization” (p. 502). He argues that a wide range of alternative response strategies is appropriate depending on whether a public is active, aware, aroused, or inactive and that communicating with inactive publics is an important problem that has often been overlooked in theorizing about communicating with publics (Hallahan, 2000b).

It is important that organizations understand how communication with publics will affect the achievement of organizational goals, especially with the increasing involvement of multiple publics in organizational activity (Werder, 2006). Werder states that “because strategic messages communicated by organizations to key publics are a functional result of the public relations process, an understanding of the effects of message strategies is critical to understanding public relations effectiveness” (p. 336).

A central function of public relations is creating effective messages to reach strategically important audiences. However, “a theoretically grounded methodology for assessing and analyzing messages sent to multiple publics has not been offered” (Springston & Keyton, 2001, p. 117). Hallahan (2000a) agrees that the message variable in public relations, especially strategies for communicating with inactive publics, has been minimally researched. To construct an effective message, he recommends that message content match the audience’s level of processing and that the message cues



encourage deeper message processing. Hazleton (2006) also suggests that the message production function of public relations include more than just strategic analysis and planning.

### *Public Relations Strategies*

Hazleton and Long (1988) defined public relations as “a communication function of management through which organizations adapt to, alter or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organizational goals” (p. 81). Inherent in this definition are the concepts and assumptions of communication, management, organization, adaptation/alteration/maintenance, environment, and goals. This definition is more communication-focused and symmetrical than the traditional public relations definition, “the management of communication between an organization and its publics,” proposed by J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 6), which only incorporates management, communication, and publics. Communication is the core of Hazleton and Long’s definition, while management is the focus in J. E. Grunig and Hunt’s definition. Hazleton and Long’s definition is more balanced, and it recognizes that public relations should “foster open, two-way communication and mutual understanding with the idea that an organization also changes its attitudes and behaviors in the process—not just the target audience” (Wilcox, Ault, Agee, & Cameron, 2000, p. 4).

Hazleton and Long (1988) suggest that general systems theory offers promise for organizing public relations phenomena. “As is the case with public relations practice, general systems theory is multi-disciplinary, i.e., not context specific, and assumes multiple, simultaneous cause-effect relationships among variables” (p. 80). General systems approaches are concerned with input-transformation-output cycles between the

system of study and its environment. With this in mind, public relations can then be described as a series of events containing:

(1) input from the environment (exogenous input) to the system, (2) transformation of inputs into communication goals, objectives, and campaigns, and (3) output, in the form of messages, to target audiences located in internal and external environments. Target audience reactions to public relations messages provide stimuli or further input for organizational maintenance or adaptation, refinement of the public relations process, and alteration of the environment in which the organization exists. (Hazleton & Long, 1988, p. 80)

Models, though abstractions of reality, facilitate the organization of seemingly unrelated events while directing the movement of theory toward practice. The public relations process model (see Figure 1) conceptualizes public relations as an open system where, at the macroscopic level, the environment is the system and public relations input, transformation, and output processes are its three subsystems. These three subsystems are, specifically, the organization (input), communication (transformation), and target audience (output). Considered microscopically, each of these subsystems possesses its own input–transformation–output cycles (Hazleton & Long, 1988).

The organization subsystem receives input from the environment and the target audience subsystem. These influence the development of organizational goals, structure, acquisition of resources, and management philosophy (Hazleton & Long, 1988, p. 83). Transformation occurs during the public relations decision process, which is directed and constrained by organizational goals. The final phase of transformation is solution identification. In this phase there is implementation of a solution that requires

communication—a public relations activity. The public relations activity is the output from the organizational subsystem. This provides inputs into the communication subsystem in the form of public relations goals, practical modes of action, and targeted strategies (Hazleton & Long, 1988, p. 84).

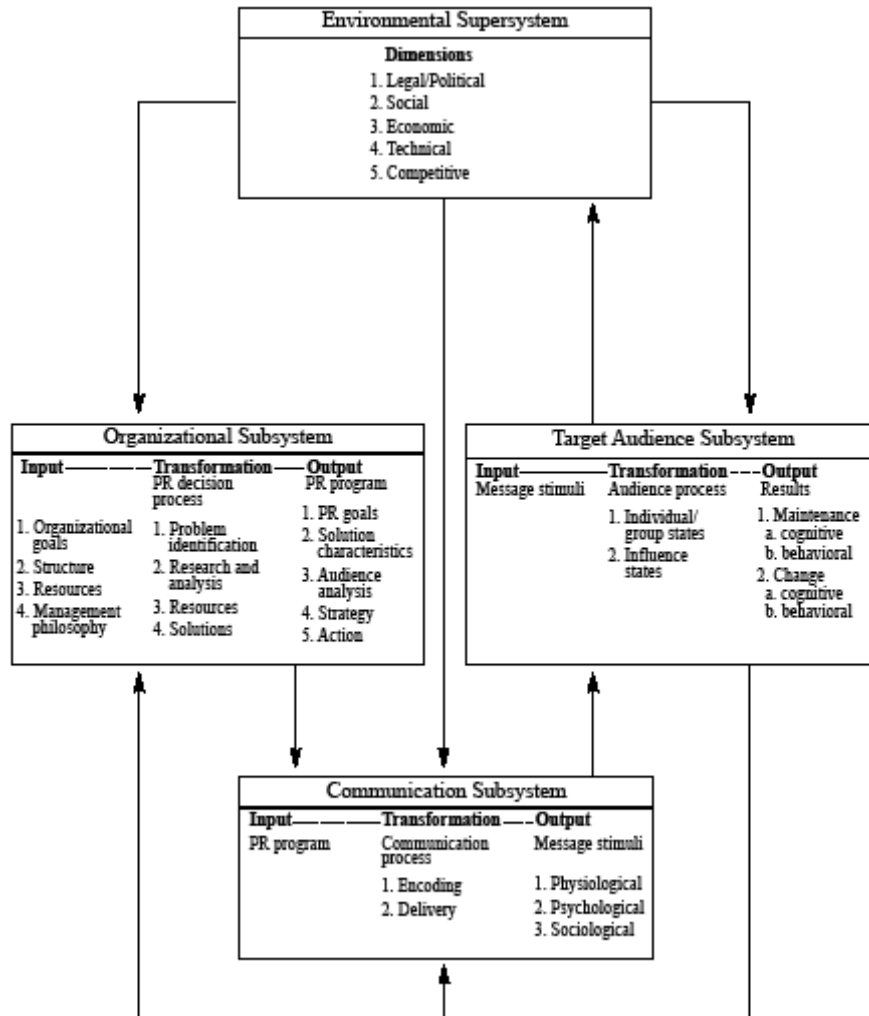


Figure 1. The public relations process model (Werder, 2005; adapted from Hazleton & Long, 1988)

The communication subsystem acts as a boundary-spanning function across the environment, organization, and target audience subsystems. These three areas also provide input for the communication subsystem. Transformation in the communication

subsystem involves the encoding and delivery of messages. The messages to which target audiences are exposed are the outputs of this subsystem. Not only must the messages take a tangible form before they can be communicated, but they also contain physical, psychological, and sociological properties. “Physically, messages are tangible stimuli that can be perceived. Psychologically, meanings attributed to messages by receivers can be specified. Socially, significant others influence individual message evaluation processes” (Hazleton & Long, 1988, p. 85).

The target audience subsystem receives input from the environment as well as from the communication subsystem. During transformation, the audience experiences a series of evaluation states in response to the message stimuli. “Individual and group evaluation of messages is often examined with respect to physiological, psychological, demographic, and behavioral profiles” (Hazleton & Long, 1988, p. 85). While these profiles assist in explaining target audience influence states, they may be interdependent and may change over time. It is important, then, to properly analyze target audiences, otherwise errors in output from the organizational and communication subsystems can occur. Output from the target audience subsystem feeds back into the environment and the organizational subsystem, which leads to maintenance, adaptation, or alteration, and influences subsequent public relations activities.

The public relations process is continuous and dynamic as specified by the public relations process model (Hazleton & Long, 1988). The model also describes public relations as goal-driven communication strategies used by organizations to interact with target publics existing in their environment (Werder, 2005). Organizational goals determine public relations goals, which in turn provide the means, through

communication, for organizational goal achievement (Hazleton & Long, 1988). The public relations function translates goals into communication strategies designed to be appropriate and effective actions for goal achievement. In order for this to occur, communication strategy characteristics must be examined to identify constraints on strategy selection, and the characteristics of audiences must be studied to select strategies most appropriate to specific audience segments (Hazleton, 1992).

Before communication strategies can be communicated, their messages must take a tangible form, which is accomplished through the use of symbols (Hazleton & Long, 1988). Hazleton (1993) stated that symbols are observable, tangible parts of the communication process and that public relations communication consists of one or more symbols encoded as a message by one party, most often an organization, and decoded by another party, most often a public. Symbols are socially constructed objects that take physical form and may have predictable effects. However, they are arbitrary; so for communication to be effective, symbols must be shared, or at least understood, by both source and receiver.

As explained above, messages must take a tangible, symbolic form before they can be communicated, but they also contain physical, psychological, and sociological properties (Hazleton & Long, 1988). Using these concepts, Hazleton (1993) developed a matrix for the analysis of public relations messages as symbolic communication (see Figure 2). Since symbols are developed and used for purposes of communicating with others, his matrix adopts a public (receiver) orientation.

Three levels of abstractions of the audience in terms of message effects and message processing—physical, psychological, and sociological—top the matrix. The

physical level refers to the tangible, consumable form of messages. This is required for communication to occur. Hazleton (1993) describes the message as “the single directly observable artifact of public relations” (p. 91). The psychological level is most frequently considered in the public relations planning process and is concerned with how individuals respond to and understand communication (p. 93). The sociological level considers the content of messages and how they mediate and influence publics’ understanding and responses to symbols (p. 95).

	Physical	Psychological	Sociological
<b>Content</b>	graphic-visual oral-aural tactile olfactory taste	A. <u>Reference</u> denotative connotative  B. <u>Style</u> logical interesting emotional assertive face-preserving concise ambiguous factual	rhetorical visions fantasy themes symbolic cues fantasy types sagas
<b>Structure</b>	intensity contrast spatial order chronological order	A. <u>Organic</u> spatial chronological types  B. <u>Psychological</u> cause/effect problem/solution climax anti-climax	A. <u>Distribution</u> network size network shape symmetry relationship  B. <u>Frequency</u> activity topic/symbol
<b>Function</b>	A. <u>Attributions to Symbols</u> repeat contradict substitute complement accent verify  B. <u>Attributions to Communicators</u> relationship status affect	facilitate inform coerce bargain solve problems persuade	A. <u>Task Performance</u> problem identification solution identification behavior regulation information exchange  B. <u>Group Maintenance</u> socialization consciousness raising conflict resolution leadership

Figure 2. Matrix for the analysis of public relations symbols (Werder, 2005; adapted from Hazleton, 1993)

The left side of the matrix consists of three general concepts that reflect assumptions about the characteristics of messages—content, structure, and function. Content references the visible, discernible characteristics of messages. Structure references the distribution and frequency of communication elements within a particular level of analysis. Function references the audience and reflects assumptions about message effects. “The classification of messages according to their functional characteristics must take into account characteristics of the audience for the message. Specifically, strategic choices reflect assumptions about motivational, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics of audiences” (Hazleton, 1993, p. 91).

At the psychological level, Hazleton (1993) identified six functions of messages that reflect common public relations strategies—facilitate, inform, persuade, coerce, bargain, and solve problems. These functions represent the goals of public relations in terms of the impact messages have on audiences and the meaning audiences ascribe to the messages.

The first four functions—facilitate, inform, persuade, and coerce—stem from social change literature and include concepts for planned change identified by Zaltman and Duncan (1977). Bargaining and problem-solving functions reflect J. E. Grunig’s ideas about the direction and purpose of communication. Reflected in these two functions are the characteristics of the two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models of public relations described in J. E. Grunig’s (1992) excellence theory.

From these six psychological functions of messages, Hazleton developed a taxonomy of seven public relations strategies that organizations use when communicating with publics. These strategies are informative, facilitative, persuasive, promise and

reward, threat and punishment, bargaining, and cooperative problem-solving (Page & Hazleton, 1999). Below is a brief description of the seven public relations strategies (from Hazleton, 1993; Page, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Page & Hazleton, 1999; Werder, 2003, 2005, 2006).

### *Informative Strategy*

An informative strategy is based on the presentation of unbiased facts. It assumes a rational, motivated audience and presumes that the public will infer appropriate conclusions from accurate data. Informative messages, then, do not draw conclusions. Instead they are characterized by objectivity, the use of neutral language, and natural patterns of organization to assist comprehension. A variety of alternative solutions to problems may be suggested.

Since time-on-task and frequency of exposure to messages are positively related to learning, informative strategies are most effective when behavioral change within a target public does not have to occur quickly. They are particularly useful at the awareness stage of the adoption process and may be used to build a foundation for future learning, create awareness of a problem, and establish that the problem can be resolved. They are also effective in immunizing people against appeals to resist change or to revert back to the previous situation or behavior. Informative strategies are essential when behavioral change involves a radical departure from past practices, but the stronger the degree of commitment a change requires to be effective, the less impact informational strategies will have when used alone. In addition, an informative strategy alone will not be effective when an organization does not possess the resources to sustain long-term involvement (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977, p. 132).



### *Facilitative Strategy*

A facilitative strategy makes resources available to a public that allow it to act in ways that it is already predisposed to act. Resources provided in a facilitative strategy make an act easier to accomplish. This may be through tangible artifacts, such as tools or money, or directions or information needed to accomplish specific tasks.

Zaltman and Duncan (1977) recommend the use of facilitative strategies when the public recognizes a problem, agrees remedial action is needed, is open to external assistance, and is willing to engage in self-help. These strategies may be used to compensate for low motivation or when target publics lack the resources needed to implement or maintain a change. They are most effective when paired with a program that creates awareness among the public of the availability of assistance. The larger the magnitude of intended change, the more important the use of facilitative strategies becomes. Facilitative strategies are not as effective when change must occur quickly, when openness to change does not exist, when resistance to change is great, and when change involves altering a firmly held attitude or entrenched behavior (p. 108-109).

### *Persuasive Strategy*

A persuasive strategy appeals to a public's values or emotions and presumes resistance or a lack of motivation from the public. This strategy may include a selective presentation of information. The persuasive strategy is characterized by the use of varying degrees of language intensity and may use language that is not neutral to reflect the importance of the issue and/or the involvement of the source in the situation. Persuasive messages are directive in that they contain a call for action, either directly or indirectly.

Persuasive strategies are effective when a problem is not recognized or considered important by a public, when involvement is low, or when a particular solution is not perceived to be effective. They are preferable when publics are not committed to change and when the magnitude of change is great and is perceived to be risky and socially disruptive. These strategies are useful when an organization does not have direct control over a public, when time constraints are great, or when the ability to use power is low. They are not effective, however, when an organization does not have the resources to sustain a long-term involvement (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977, p. 151).

### *Coercive Strategies*

The coercive function was separated into two strategies, one positive and one negative (Page & Hazleton, 1999). Both promise and reward and threat and punishment strategies are considered to be coercive functions because they involve the exercise of power to gain compliance and assume audience resistance to compliance. Power strategies, according to Zaltman and Duncan (1977), are useful when a public's perceived need for change is low or when a solution to a problem has to be implemented in a short period of time. Power strategies may be effective in getting a public to reallocate resources in order to initiate and sustain change, but they will not be effective if a public does not have the necessary resources required to accept change and the organization cannot provide them (p. 165).

*Promise and Reward Strategy.* The promise and reward strategy is a positive coercive function in that it implies that the source of the message controls an outcome that is desired or liked by the receiver of the message. It includes a request for action and

a related outcome that may be directly or indirectly linked to an individual's performance of the request.

*Threat and Punishment Strategy.* A threat and punishment strategy is a negative coercive function in that it implies that the source of the message controls an outcome that is feared or disliked by the receiver of the message. It also includes a request for action and a related outcome that may be directly or indirectly linked to an individual's performance of the request.

#### *Bargaining Strategy*

A bargaining strategy is characterized by an organized exchange of messages between communicators and the use of contrasting symbols to differentiate groups, i.e. 'we' and 'they.' These strategies require feedback in order to understand each party's acceptable range of alternatives.

This strategy reflects characteristics similar to J. E. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way asymmetrical model. In this situation, organizations and publics are likely to have incompatible goals. While communication flows both to and from publics, the effects are imbalanced in favor of the organization. The organization does not change as a result of its communication; it just attempts to change the attitudes and behaviors of the receivers of the messages. Information withholding is a common tactic, as is deception designed to mislead others concerning the acceptable range of alternatives and discovering the other party's acceptable range of alternatives.

#### *Cooperative Problem-Solving Strategy*

Cooperative problem-solving strategies are characterized by an open exchange of information. They reflect a willingness to jointly establish a shared definition of the

problem, common goals, and shared positions and responsibilities about the issue. These strategies use inclusive symbols, such as ‘we’ and ‘us.’

This strategy reflects characteristics similar to J. E. Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) two-way symmetrical model in that there is a sense of interdependence between the organization and its publics. In this situation, organizations and publics are likely to have compatible goals. Cooperative problem-solving strategies will be effective when the public and the organization recognize the need for each other’s participation in the identification of problems and the development of possible solutions, and when they agree on a common problem definition and common solution. Communication flows both to and from publics, and organizations and publics are equally likely to change. Therefore, openness and fairness characterize these strategies.

The public relations process model and its accompanying taxonomy of public relations strategies provide a communication-centered framework for understanding the public relations behavior of organizations that shows equal concern for variables related to the source, message and receiver in the communication process. Research suggests that this taxonomy is a valid conceptualization of public relations behavior in organizations (Page, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Page & Hazleton, 1999; Werder, 2003, 2005, 2006). For example, in a content analysis of randomly selected press releases, Page (2000a) found examples of all of the public relations strategies, though frequency of usage did vary.

An underlying assumption of the public relations process model is that it is situational. An organization’s perception of the audience with which it is communicating at a given time guides its strategy selection (Hazleton, 1992). Attributes of publics,

therefore, should be identified by an organization's public relations department so that the most appropriate and effective strategy for achieving organizational goals can be selected (Page & Hazleton, 1999). If public relations strategies are viewed as symbolic messages guided by attributes of publics, it is possible to predict the effectiveness of strategies in achieving organizational goals (Hazleton, 1993).

The seven public relations strategies identified in Hazleton and Long's (1988) public relations process model may be effective in achieving activist organizations' goals as well. Since the nature of activist organizations is different from that of the 'typical' organization studied in public relations research, it is possible that the most effective strategies for achieving goals could differ. This study seeks to examine the use of public relations strategies from the perspective of an activist organization. For the purpose of clarity, the operationalization of the strategies will remain the same; however, they will be referred to as public relations strategies when used by 'typical' organizations and activist message strategies when used by activist organizations.

#### *Situational Theory of Publics*

Attributes of publics that influence activist message strategy use and effectiveness are identified by J. E. Grunig's (1997) situational theory of publics. Based on Dewey's (1927) definition, J. E. Grunig (1978) defines a public as a group of people who "(1) face a similar indeterminant situation, (2) recognize what is indeterminant–problematic–in that situation, and (3) organize to do something about the problem" (p. 109). Using this definition, J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) identified four types of publics. The first is a nonpublic to which none of the three conditions described above apply. This group does not have an effect on the organization, and the organization does not have an effect on

this group. The second group is a latent public. A latent public is a group of people who face a similar problem created by organizational consequences, but do not recognize the problem. When the members of this public recognize the problem, they become an aware public. Finally, when a public organizes and moves to do something about the problem, it becomes an active public. Organizations are most affected by active publics.

Nurturing, supporting, and encouraging its active publics is one of the fundamental goals of an activist organization. It is also important for an activist organization to identify aware and latent publics so that it can encourage members of the public to organize and act on the problem identified by the activist organization (J. E. Grunig, 1989b; Hallahan, 2001). The more active the public, the more likely it is to have well-organized opinions and to use those opinions to guide its behavior (J. E. Grunig, 1997, p. 5)

The situational theory of publics explains why and when people are most likely to communicate. According to J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984), the theory posits that “communication behaviors of publics can be best understood by measuring how members of publics perceive situations in which they are affected by organizational consequences” (p. 148). Basically, it provides a means of identifying and segmenting a general population into relevant groups based on predicted communication behavior (J. E. Grunig, 1997). Problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement are the theory’s three independent variables that “describe the perceptions that people have of specific situations, especially situations that are problematic or that produce conflicts or issues” (pp. 9-10).

The independent variables of the theory represent three attributes of publics that predict whether a public will engage in active or passive communication behavior. Active communication behavior is a characteristic of the dependent variable information seeking. When engaging in information seeking behavior, people purposefully scan the environment for messages and endeavor to understand information on a certain topic. Passive communication behavior is a characteristic of the dependent variable information processing. When engaging in information processing behavior, people do not actively search out information on a topic, but they will process the messages if they are randomly exposed to them. The discovery of a message is unplanned (J. E. Grunig, 1997; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Organizations can communicate more easily with active publics because they seek out information rather than passively receiving it (J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992).

While problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement were originally conceptualized as external perceptions of the environment, J. E. Grunig (1997) later differentiated internal and external dimensions of the independent variables. If these variables are strictly cognitive (internal), the behavior produced by cognitions can be influenced directly through communication designed to change cognitions. If the variables are a perception of real world conditions (external), real changes must be made in the environment before behavior can be influenced.

Problem recognition identifies whether or not people detect a situation that needs to be improved and has consequences for them (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Problem recognition occurs when people detect that something should be done about a situation and stop to think about what to do (J. E. Grunig, 1989b, 1997). Problems may arise

externally from a situation, environment or social system, or they may arise internally from curiosity or lack of understanding (J. E. Grunig, 1989a, 1997; J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992).

The situational theory of publics states that publics with high problem recognition will engage in both active information seeking and passive information processing. They engage in information seeking because they recognize there is a problem and need to gather information and plan behaviors to address the problem. Also, they are more likely to process information they come across randomly since they recognize there is a problem. Those that do not recognize there is a problem are unlikely to process information about it (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Constraint recognition is the extent to which people identify obstacles that may affect their ability to do something about a situation or problem. Constraints may limit the freedom people have to plan their own behavior (J. E. Grunig, 1989b, 1997; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Therefore, high constraint recognition discourages communication behavior. People will not communicate about problems or issues they believe they can do little about (J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992). Constraints may arise externally from a physical inability, or they may arise internally from a belief about or understanding of the problem (J. E. Grunig, 1997).

The situational theory of publics states that publics with high constraint recognition will not actively seek information nor will they pay attention to process information they come across randomly. J. E. Grunig and Ipes (1983) found that, of the three independent variables, constraint recognition was least affected by a drunk-driving campaign. They concluded that, “for a campaign to move people to develop organized



cognitions and perhaps to change their behavior, it must show people how they can remove constraint to their personally doing anything about the problem” (p. 51).

Aldoory and Sha (2007) posit that level of involvement is the most important independent variable of the theory. This variable helps determine whether an individual’s communication behavior will be active or passive, and it can be used to separate populations into active and passive segments (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992). Level of involvement ascertains the extent to which people feel that the situation affects them personally—the extent to which they connect themselves to the situation (J. E. Grunig, 1989b, 1997; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Involvement may arise externally from actual involvement in a situation, or it may arise internally from ego involvement (J. E. Grunig, 1997).

High level of involvement often leads to problem recognition because “it is difficult to be affected by an organizational consequence without seeing that consequence as a problem” (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 152). High level of involvement also often decreases constraint recognition because “involved people generally try to remove constraints that otherwise would discourage them from communicating and doing something about the problem” (p. 152). Level of involvement increases information seeking behavior, but it has little effect on information processing. If an individual personally connects to an issue or message, he or she is more likely to seek out, attend to, and comprehend it. People seldom seek information about situations and problems that do not directly involve or affect them. However, they will still randomly process information from low involvement situations, especially if they recognize the situation as problematic (J. E. Grunig, 1989b).

J. E. Grunig & Hunt (1984) offer a brief summary of the influence the three independent variables of the situational theory of publics has on information seeking and processing behaviors by stating that:

High problem recognition, low constraint recognition, and high level of involvement increase information seeking. High problem recognition and low constraint recognition also increase information processing. Level of involvement, however, has a limited effect on information processing. (p. 153)

Information seeking, and the independent variables that precede it, produce communication effects more often than information processing because there is more active participation involved with information seeking than information processing (J. E. Grunig, 1997).

Through the use of these variables, J. E. Grunig identified four generally enduring types of publics. *All-issue* publics are active on all the issues. These publics can truly be called activist publics since they challenge organizations on many different issues. *Apathetic* publics are inattentive to all of the issues. These are nonpublics and organizations do not need to pay much attention to them. *Single-issue* publics are active on one issue or a small subset of issues that usually concern only a small part of the population. These publics campaign and pursue solutions for one issue while ignoring other issues. *Hot-issue* publics are active on a single issue that involves nearly everyone in the population and that has usually received extensive media coverage (J. E. Grunig, 1989b, 1997; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992).

According to J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984), the situational theory explains how members of publics perceive situations involving an organization. This knowledge helps

organizations understand how different publics may be affected by and how they may respond to these situations. It also enables organizations to target specific publics and more appropriately distribute resources (J. E. Grunig, 1997). Addressing appropriate publics, determined via the situational theory, is an important factor in any successful public relations campaign (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

The situational theory of publics has been thoroughly studied and applied in public relations research, and results have generally been consistent and supportive. For a review of some of the abundant research using the situational theory, see J. E. Grunig and Repper (1992) and J. E. Grunig (1997). One of these studies, J. E. Grunig (1989b), is particularly pertinent to this study. In his study, J. E. Grunig attempted to add to the situational theory's predictive function by determining if the theory could explain membership and participation in activist groups. His findings confirmed the basic hypothesis of the situational theory:

Publics with high problem recognition and level of involvement and weak constraint recognition are most likely to communicate actively about situational issues, to construct organized conditions about those issues, and to engage in individual behaviors related to those issues. (pp. 21-22)

He also found that “an activist group such as the Sierra Club does appear to truly represent its membership; those members do not join for selective or solidary incentives” (p. 22). This finding supports the addition of a fourth independent variable to the situational theory of publics: goal compatibility.

### *Goal Compatibility*

An important limitation of the situational theory is its organization-centered approach. The theory uses a “structural-functional, business management perspective to define the organization-public relationship as opposed to a communication-based perspective” (Vasquez, 1993, p. 209), and so falls short of providing a full account of variables that influence communication between organizations and publics. Specifically, the theory does not include the strategic content of messages, the critical link between source and receiver variables in the communication process (Vasquez, 1993).

This limitation of the situational theory may be overcome by viewing public relations as goal-driven strategic communication that is influenced by the situational interaction of source, message, and receiver variables. According to Heath and Nelson (1986), organizational goals are central to all other activities in an organization, and Page argues that “a balanced account of the public relations process must also consider the goals of publics, the interaction between the goals of publics and organizational goals, and the impact of this interaction on public relations outcomes” (Page, 2002, p. 46).

Page and Hazleton (1999) define goal compatibility as “the extent to which the goals or objectives of an individual are similar to and coincide with the goals and objectives of another individual” (p. 9). Page (2000b, 2000c) conceptualizes goal compatibility as an attribute of publics that represents the degree to which members of a public perceive their goals and objectives to be similar to, and coincide with, the goals and objectives of an organization. Werder (2005, 2006) recommends that organizations determine the perceived goal compatibility of publics during the research phase of the public relations process and use this information to strategically communicate with those

publics. Public relations strategies become the functional link between organizations and publics when organizational goals are aligned with attributes of publics (Page, 2000c).

The concept of goal compatibility as an attribute of publics is relatively new. However, the findings of several studies indicate that public relations strategy selection is most effective when goal compatibility between an organization and its publics is considered (Hazleton, 1992, 2006; Page & Hazleton, 1999; Page, 2000b, 2000c; Werder, 2005, 2006). Hazleton (2006) summarizes the relationship between goal compatibility and public relations strategy selection by stating that:

The degree of compatibility of goals between organizations and publics has impact on determining the public relations strategy that will be most appropriate and effective in achieving organizational goals. If members of a public perceive that an organization's goals are similar to their own, they will likely be more receptive to messages from the organization. Similarly, a public may resist messages if its goals are not aligned with those of the organization. Furthermore, if a high degree of goal incompatibility exists, it may indicate the need for a bargaining strategy, which is defined by goal incompatibility. (p. 205)

Problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and goal compatibility provide a useful set of receiver variables appropriate for examining the influence of activist message strategies. However, as Hallahan (2000a) stated, with the exception of the situational theory of publics, there is no real framework for examining the impact of message strategies on exposed publics. The use of the theory of reasoned action as a measure of communication effects adds an additional dimension to the research on receiver variables.

### *Theory of Reasoned Action*

Based in social psychology, the theory of reasoned action was developed as a model for measuring people's beliefs, attitudes, and intentions toward a behavior in order to predict their actual behavior (see Figure 3). Prior to the development of the theory, most attitude research measured an individual's feeling toward an object, person, group or event, and then predicted his or her behavior related to the measured object. As a result, weak relationships were found between beliefs, attitude, and behavior. The theory of reasoned action, on the other hand, is based on an individual's beliefs and attitude toward a specific act or behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

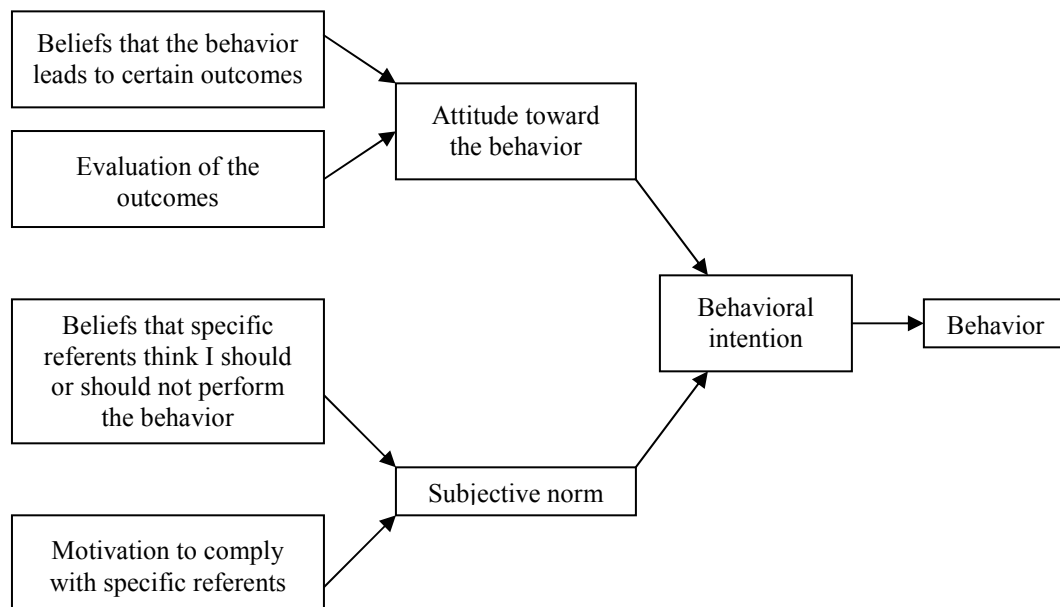


Figure 3: The theory of reasoned action (adapted from Perloff, 2003; Petty & Cacioppo, 1996)

According to the theory, behavior is best predicted by a stated intention to behave in a specified way at some subsequent point in time. Behavioral intention has two antecedents. Attitude towards behavior, the first antecedent, is simply a person's positive or negative evaluation of performing the behavior. Ajzen (1991) defines it as "the degree

to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question” (p. 188). An individual’s attitude toward a behavior is determined by his or her beliefs about the behavioral outcomes and his or her evaluation of those outcomes (Oliver & Bearden, 1985).

Beliefs represent the information a person has about an object. Specifically, beliefs link an object to some attribute. For example, the belief “Russia is a totalitarian state” links the object “Russia” to the attribute “totalitarian state” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 12). Public relations strategies affect the information a person has about an object and thus influence his or her beliefs (Werder, 2003). The object of a belief may be a person, group, institution, behavior, event, etc., and the associated attribute may be any object, trait, property, quality, characteristic, outcome, or event. The object of a belief, for the purposes of the theory of reasoned action, is a behavior and the associated attribute is an outcome. With respect to any object-attribute association, people may differ in their belief strength—the perceived likelihood that the object is linked to the attribute in question. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) recommend that “belief strength,” or more simply, “belief,” be measured in a way that places the subject along a dimension of subjective probability involving an object and some related attribute (p. 12).

Subjective norm regarding the behavior, the second antecedent of behavioral intent, is “the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior,” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). It is an internalized perception that referents—people who are important to the decision maker—prefer that he/she engage or not engage in the behavior. Subjective norm is based both on the perceived preferences of individual referents and on the individual’s motivation to comply with those preferences (Oliver & Bearden, 1985,

p. 324). According to Petty and Cacioppo (1996), people will generally perform behaviors they believe are favorable and popular with others and will refrain from behaviors they believe are unfavorable and unpopular with others.

The behavioral intention formation model reveals complex interdependencies among attitudinal and normative variables (Ryan, 1982). Burnkrant and Page (1982) also found strong support “for the validity of a two-component (i.e., attitudinal and normative) conceptualization of the determinants of behavioral intention” (p. 560). Behavioral intention refers to a person’s intent to perform various behaviors. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) categorize intentions as a special case of beliefs where the object is always the person (self) and the attribute is always a behavior. The strength of an intention, as with a belief, is indicated by the person’s subjective probability that he or she will perform the behavior in question. Fishbein and Ajzen then recommend that “the strength of an intention, or more simply, ‘intention,’ be measured by a procedure which places the subject along a subjective-probability dimension involving a relation between himself and some action” (p. 12). In summary:

The concept ‘attitude’ should be used only when there is strong evidence that the measure employed places an individual on a bipolar affective dimension. When the measure places the individual on a dimension of subjective probability relating an object to an attribute, the label ‘belief’ should be applied. When the probability dimension links the person to a behavior, the concept ‘behavioral intention’ should be used. (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 13)

Studies on theory of reasoned action offer strong overall evidence in support of the effectiveness of the model. Ryan (1982) demonstrated the usefulness of considering



intentions formed from mutually dependent yet separate attitudinal and normative variables as a strength of the theory. The results of Oliver and Bearden's (1985) study suggest that the theory of reasoned action is more complex and richer in content than is often presumed. Sheppard, Hartwick, and Warshaw (1988) conducted two meta-analyses and found strong evidence for the predictive utility of the model. They hypothesized that the model would fare poorly when used in situations for which it was not originally intended. However, they were surprised to find that even when used to investigate situations and activities that do not fall into the boundary conditions originally specified for the model, it still has strong predictive ability.

In a book edited by Terry, Gallois, and McCamish (1993), the theory of reasoned action is extensively applied to AIDS-preventative behavior. Topics such as health care behavior, condom use, safe sex practices, and sexual risk-taking were studied in a variety of populations, including undergraduates, adolescents, ethnic groups, and gay men. While the theory of reasoned action is not perfect (Kippax & Crawford, 1993), it was found to be a sound predictor of AIDS-preventative behavioral intent.

Other studies that have tested the theory of reasoned action have provided support for its ability to account for intentions and behavior in diverse areas. Some of these areas include voting (Ajzen, Timko, & White, 1982), donating blood (Burnkrant & Page, 1982), coupon usage (Shimp & Kavas, 1984), birth control (Crawford & Boyer, 1985), use of natural resources (Fishbein & Manfredo, 1992; Fulton, Manfredo, & Lipscomb, 1996), and television viewing and violence in society (Nabi & Sullivan, 2001). For even more areas in which the theory of reasoned action has been tested, see the list of studies used in Sheppard, Hartwick, and Warshaw's (1988) two meta-analyses.

Ajzen (1988, 1991) extended the theory of reasoned action to the theory of planned behavior by adding the variable of perceived behavioral control. This variable was added to overcome the theory of reasoned action's limitation in dealing with behaviors in which people do not have complete volitional control—the ability to decide at will whether or not to perform the behavior. The intent to act in this study is completely voluntary, so the use of the theory of reasoned action is justified and provides a comprehensive and well-tested framework for examining activist message strategy influence on the beliefs, attitudes and behavioral intentions of individuals.

Fundamental to the premise of the theory of reasoned action is the use of persuasion to understand and affect behavioral change. Perloff (2003) defines persuasion as “a symbolic process in which communicators try to convince other people to change their attitudes or behavior regarding an issue through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice” (p. 8). Petty and Cacioppo (1996) note that “the theory of reasoned action makes it clear that any influence attempt—whether the goal is to change an attitude, norm, intention, or behavior—must always be directed at one of more of the individual's beliefs” (p. 200). Beliefs are cognitions about the world that include subjective probabilities regarding an object's attribute or an action's outcome (Perloff, 2003). In order to change a belief held by an individual, a message must be constructed that “provides information either to change the person's subjective probability that the attitude object has certain attributes or to influence the evaluations of those attributes” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996, p. 201).

Perloff (2003) recommends dividing the message into structure, content, and language appeals. With regard to structure, one-sided messages are less persuasive than

two-sided messages, and it is typically better for conclusions to be explicitly rather than implicitly stated. Evidence, fear, and framing comprise the content domain. And, finally, language appeals consist of speech rate, powerful speech, and language intensity.

Wilcox, Ault, and Agee (1997) describe nine factors involved in persuasive communication. The first is *audience characteristics* such as beliefs, attitudes, concerns, and life-styles. Knowledge of audience characteristics helps the communicator create messages that are salient, provide for a perceived need, and offer a logical course of action. A second factor is *source credibility*. A message is more believable if the source has credibility. The third factor is *appeal to self-interest*. People are more likely to become involved in issues or pay attention to messages that appeal to their psychic or economic needs. A fourth factor is *clarity of message*. “The most persuasive messages are direct, are simply expressed, and contain only one primary idea” (p. 221). The fifth factor includes *timing and context*. If environmental factors support the message (timing) or if the message is received within other messages and situations with which the individual is familiar (context), the more persuasive a message will be. A sixth factor is *audience participation*. Asking people to do something activates a form of self-persuasion and commitment. This component is often used by activist groups to encourage people to actualize their beliefs. *Suggestions for action* is the seventh factor in persuasive communication. People are more likely to endorse an idea if the communicator provides a proposed action. The eighth factor is the *content and structure of the messages*. Emphasizing or downplaying certain information will make the message more persuasive. Finally, *persuasive speaking* will also influence communication effects.

Behavioral intent is influenced by subjective norm as well as attitude. Therefore, persuasion is easier if the message is compatible with a person's general disposition toward a subject and if it reinforces favorable opinions (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1997). Also, communicators can utilize salient referents to affect an individual's subjective norm and, therefore, behavioral intent (Perloff, 2003).

The situational theory of publics and the theory of reasoned action provide a useful set of receiver variables appropriate for examining the influence of activist message strategies. In order to better understand the content and development of activist message strategies, a review of literature related to activism is warranted.

### *Activism*

An activist group is a collection of individuals who organize around a common goal to exert pressure on a public or organization in order to influence public policy, organizational action, or social norms and values (Berry, 1984; L. A. Grunig, 1992; Smith & Ferguson, 2001). They are often referred to as special interest groups, pressure groups, grassroots organizations or operations, social movements, or issue groups (L. A. Grunig, 1992). No matter what they are called, organized activists are strategic publics of organizations "because they constrain an organization's ability to accomplish its goals and mission" (Anderson, 1992, p. 151). Frequently, however, they are also organizations themselves that utilize public relations and strategic communications in order to achieve goals (Smith & Ferguson, 2001).

### *Activists as Publics*

Throughout public relations research, activist organizations are viewed as a 'problem' for other organizations. They are 'troublesome,' need to be 'dealt with,' and

developing and maintaining relationships with them is ‘tenuous’ (L. A. Grunig, 1992, Murphy & Dee, 1992; Smith & Ferguson, 2001). L. A. Grunig was one of the first researchers to study how organizations use public relations to deal with activist publics. In 1986, she compiled a series of 34 in-depth case studies about public relations behavior during conflict with activist groups and found that most organizations take a closed rather than an open stance toward activist groups (as cited in Holtzhausen, 2007).

Research on activism is most often performed in order to determine how organizations can best respond (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Karlberg, 1996, Werder, 2006). This perspective, which many scholars studying activism share, is captured by L. A. Grunig’s (1992) title to her chapter in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*: “Activism: How it limits the effectiveness of organizations and how excellent public relations departments respond” (p. 503). The findings reported in that chapter suggest that organizations need to practice two-way symmetrical communication with activist groups and maintain continuous communication efforts. This assertion is supported by Werder’s (2003) finding that cooperative problem-solving message strategies produced the most favorable attitudes and behavioral intentions toward an organization responding to activism.

Examples of other studies’ suggestions for organizational response to activism include: L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, and Dozier’s (2002) recommendation for organizations to practice environmental scanning of activist groups and to rely on their public relations department to deal with them; Taylor, Vasquez, and Doorley’s (2003) proposal to use engagement; Murphy and Dee’s (1992) idea of “Tit for Tat” games from game theory; and Oliver’s (1991) outline of five strategic responses to outside pressure,

including acquiesce, compromise, avoidance, defy, and manipulate. Hallahan (2001) developed a comprehensive issues process model to underscore “the need for public relations theorists and practitioners to develop a more comprehensive view of how issues evolve and how organizations respond” (p. 48).

More recently, activism has been viewed as an opportunity for organizations. L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, and Dozier (2002) argue that the pressure of activist groups can actually act as a catalyst in the development of an excellent public relations department within the organization exposed to activism. And Smith and Ferguson (2001) suggest that it is in the presence of activism that public relations practitioners are able to gain legitimacy and increase their value to an organization.

One key component of the excellence theory is excellent public relations practice, which is aided by practitioners’ knowledge of public relations. In regards to activism, knowledgeable practitioners will be more successful in dealing with activists than those without the necessary knowledge. Also, top management is more likely to value public relations if the practitioner has the ability to scan the environment, perform a boundary-spanning function, and practice two-way communication with activist publics (Holtzhausen, 2007). Another suggestion from the excellence theory in regards to dealing with activists is that identifying activist issues early, and communicating openly and honestly with activists, provides an organization its best opportunity for success (L. A. Grunig, 1992).

Holtzhausen (2007) notes that “when the Excellence Theory was conceptualized it was informed by the work of organizational theorists of the time, who viewed activists as real threats to organization” and that the theory privileged institutional perspectives over

the interests of activists (p. 364). This critique has been addressed and efforts have been made to make the excellence theory relevant to activist organizations.

Some believe that the principles of symmetrical communication, relationship building, and ethical behavior popular with excellent organizations will also benefit activist groups (J. E. Grunig, 2000, 2001), while others believe that activists' needs, organizational structures, financial structures, and access to management and public relations expertise are vastly different from those organizations (Holtzhausen, 2007). It is evident, then, why public relations scholars are increasingly encouraging a move towards research that examines the efficacy of activist groups (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000; Karlberg, 1996; Reber & Berger, 2005).

#### *Activists as Organizations*

Holtzhausen (2000, 2005, 2007) identifies activist organizations as the true voices of democracy through their advocating of different causes and guiding of organizations to adhere to the values systems of their environment. Dozier and Lauzen (2000) argue that activist organizations do not fit into the existing nomothetic model. The authors describe them as a “paradox that cannot be resolved at the organizational level of analysis” (p. 3) and utilize critical theory to illustrate a shift in the corporate-activist relationship perspective:

Instead of investigating the activist from the corporate perspective (see Figure 4) in the traditional manner, the critical public relations scholar looks at the corporate-activist relationship from behind the activist (see Figure 5), seeing the corporation from the activist perspective and interpreting behavior in that framework. (p. 19)

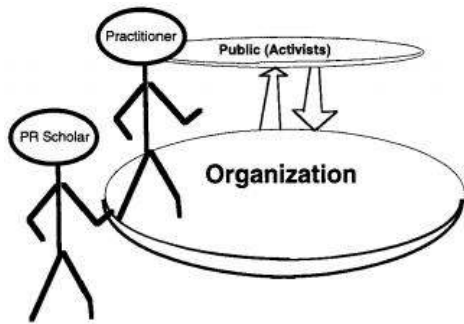


Figure 4: Organization–public relationship from the PR scholar’s perspective. (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000)

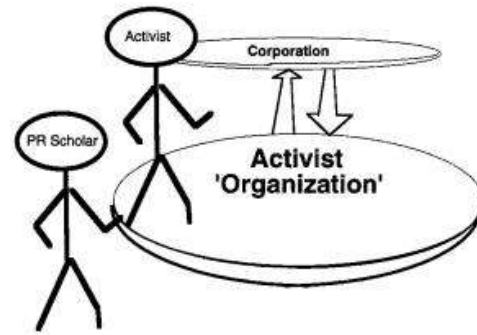


Figure 5: Organization–activist public relationship from the critical PR scholar’s perspective. (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000)

Smith and Ferguson (2001) identified two primary goals of activists. The first goal is to rectify the conditions identified by the activist organization. To accomplish this goal, activists must draw attention to the problem, position themselves as legitimate advocates, and successfully argue for their recommended resolutions to the problem (p. 294). The second goal is to maintain the organization established to pursue their purpose. In order to do this, they must maintain membership, thrive in a competitive marketplace of ideas and issues, and adjust to changes in their environment (p. 295).

Utilizing the activist perspective, Derville (2005) theorized about the communication strategies used by radical activist organizations. She found three differences among activist organizations based on their different approaches and goals. The first distinction among activist organizations involves the degree of change sought. This determines whether an activist organization is more radical or more mainstream on the classification spectrum. Another variation she found was that radical organizations differ from mainstream ones in their use of organizational strategies. Radicals pressure their targets through acts such as humiliation, terrorism, and boycotts, while moderates focus more on using communication strategies that are reasonable and adhere to the norms of society. The third distinction addresses the difference between self-and other-



directed movements. Members of self-directed activist organizations engage in activism for themselves based on their identities, i.e. race or sex, while members of other-directed activist organizations engage in activism to help others. Derville concludes that, though some radical tactics may alienate people, they often fulfill highly strategic purposes such as to help the activist organization redefine or enhance its members' identities, to recruit sympathizers and discourage opponent's supporters, to provide momentum to moderate activist organizations to act on an issue, and to facilitate favorable decision-making by policy makers by making the moderate activist organizations' requests seem reasonable by comparison (p. 532).

Aldoory and Sha (2007) observe that activists “are frequently organizations unto themselves who often know sophisticated PR strategies and theory” (p. 352). Reber and Berger (2005) recognized this as well, and in an effort to understand the value of message framing in activist communication with members and the general public, they analyzed collective action and issue frames utilized by the Sierra Club. They found that the Sierra Club could benefit from further strategic assessment of the number of issue frames it presents with particular audiences or within particular communication contexts. Having too many frames may dilute the potential power of any single frame to influence media coverage or capture public opinion.

A report by Dao (2005, as cited in Holtzhausen, 2007) on the Old Mining Battlefield case revealed that activist organizations must have formalization of activities, especially in the area of public relations, in order to be successful. In order to save the Old Mining Battlefield in West Virginia, activists formed an alliance, and their structured

and determined approach enabled them to take on individual coal mining companies and the coal workers' union and win.

Kovacs (2001) noted that few attempts have been made to understand the strategic use of public relations by activist organizations. She also observed that the role of relationships and relationship building in public relations has become a focal point for scholars. Therefore, she decided to study the relationship-building strategies of six British activist groups concerned with broadcasting issues. The results of her study provide several lessons about how activists should practice public relations. First, activist organizations need to engage in environmental scanning in order to recognize and deal with variables that may have a significant impact on their goals. Second, there needs to be diversity both within the activist organization and the publics it seeks to influence. Third, relationships influence effective motivation of publics and increase the possibility for long-term outcomes and non-adversarial communication. She concluded that it might be in the activist organizations' best interest to consider more conciliatory tactics or educational strategies.

While these studies have provided insight into the role of public relations in activist organizations, many unexplored areas in the public relations literature related to activism still remain. This study seeks to fill a gap in this literature by studying activist communication from the perspective of an activist organization. Specifically, this study examines activist message strategies and how they influence variables related to the receiver of activist communication.

## *Hypotheses*

Utilizing a communication and activist organization perspective, this study examines activist message strategy effect on receiver variables. Nine hypotheses, three propositions, and two research questions were developed based on the purpose of, and literature reviewed for, this study.

While the situational theory includes information processing as a dependent variable, it was not examined in this study. This is due to the nature of activist organizations. In order to survive and be successful, activist organizations must maintain membership and effectively argue for their cause. Therefore, they need their publics to be active. Information seeking is an active behavior, so it is more important for receivers of activist communication to engage in this behavior rather than the passive behavior of information processing. The first three hypotheses concern J. E. Grunig's (1997) situational theory of publics.

H1: Problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition predict information seeking behavior in publics.

Hypothesis 1 tests the premise of the situational theory of publics. It is a relational statement positing that the degree of information seeking behavior in publics is predicted by the independent variables of problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition.

H2: Perceived goal compatibility influences information seeking behavior in publics.

Previous research has demonstrated that goal compatibility affects the information seeking behavior of publics (Werder, 2005, 2006). Hypothesis 2 is a relational statement

that asserts that the degree of information seeking behavior in publics is predicted by the independent variable of goal compatibility.

H3: Activist message strategies influence problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and goal compatibility in publics.

P3.1: Facilitative and cooperative problem-solving strategies will have the greatest influence on problem recognition.

P3.2: The persuasive strategy will have the greatest influence on level of involvement.

Hypothesis 3 is a relational statement asserting that activist message strategies, derivatives of the public relations strategies developed from Hazleton and Long's (1988) public relations process model, are independent variables that influence the dependent variables of problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and goal compatibility. The two propositions related to Hypothesis 3 were developed based on the results of previous research (Werder, 2006).

The theory of reasoned action posits that salient beliefs predict attitude toward behavior and that attitude toward behavior and subjective norm regarding behavior predict behavioral intention. To examine the predictions of the theory of reasoned action, the following two hypotheses were tested:

H4: Salient beliefs predict attitude toward behavior.

H5: Attitude toward behavior and subjective norm regarding behavior predict behavioral intention.

Werder (2003) found that individuals form attitudes toward public relations strategies communicated from organizations. It is these attitudes that influence salient beliefs. Attitudes toward strategic messages influence salient beliefs toward behavior, which in turn influence attitude toward behavior. Attitude toward behavior, along with

subjective norm, then influences behavioral intention. Werder illustrated these relationships with the following model, which has been slightly modified to reflect the use of public relations strategies by activist organizations:



The following four hypotheses were tested in order to examine the above relationships in an attempt to replicate and extend Werder's findings:

H6: Activist message strategies influence attitude toward strategy.

H7: Attitude toward strategy predicts salient beliefs.

Werder (2003) found a significant, positive correlation between attitude toward strategy and attitude toward behavior and between attitude toward strategy and behavioral intention. Therefore, the following hypotheses were developed to test the relationship between these variables using more rigorous analysis:

H8: Attitude toward strategy influences attitude toward behavior.

H9: Attitude toward strategy influences behavioral intention.

It is a primary goal of this study to learn more about the effectiveness of activist message strategies in producing the desired outcomes of activist organizations. In order to be able to offer recommendations to activist organizations on the best strategies to use in message development, this study intends to identify which strategies have the greatest influence on behavioral intention toward the activist organization.

The next chapter provides the methodology used to test the hypotheses and propositions posited above. It provides the data collection, instrumentation, and data

analysis procedures used to form conclusions about the topic of study, as well as to offer recommendations for more effective activist messaging.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

A controlled experiment was conducted to test the nine hypotheses and two propositions proposed in this study. The purpose of this study is to further current theory-driven public relations research by examining activist message strategies and how they influence variables related to the receiver of activist communication. Specifically, the situational theory of publics and the theory of reasoned action were used to explain the communication effects of seven activist message strategies—informative, persuasive, facilitative, promise and reward, threat and punishment, cooperative problem-solving, and bargaining.

Werder (2003) used an experimental method to test the effect public relations strategies have on beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions, and Werder (2006) used the same method to test strategy influence on publics' problem recognition, constraint recognition, level of involvement, and goal compatibility. As this research seeks to replicate and extend these previous studies, it is logical that the same method is utilized.

However, there are two distinct differences between Werder's studies and this one. First, the context for analysis in the Werder studies was an actual case of activism between two real organizations, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and McDonald's. Unlike Werder's studies, this study is not based on real organizations or events. The activist organization used in this analysis, the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy

Group, is modeled after an actual organization, and the issue addressed by the group in this study is real, but the experimental context has been fabricated. This helps to eliminate confounding variables due to existing perceptions of participants.

Second, the messages Werder used to test strategy influence were designed to be responses from McDonald's related to PETA's activism. She was interested in studying participants' perceptions of McDonald's after their exposure to both PETA's activism and McDonald's responses. This study takes a different perspective by exploring participant perceptions of an activist organization in order to determine strategy effectiveness in making publics more active and sympathetic to the activists' cause. These factors are both important components in activist organization goal achievement.

The experimental method is not often used in public relations research, but it is a primary research method for establishing causation. And, as Stacks (2002) states, "most public relations research seeks to establish a relationship between a campaign and an outcome. What we want to be able to say is that our message strategies have truly caused a change in some public's perception or behavior" (p. 198). So it is reasonable that, in a study that seeks to establish a relationship between activist message strategies and receiver variables, experimental methodology is used.

#### *Design of Study*

The activist organization of interest in this study, the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group, was modeled after an actual gopher tortoise conservation group. This was done to keep the scenario as realistic as possible, but a contrived organization was used in the study to limit the effects of existing perceptions toward the organization. The problem addressed by the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group in this study is that of gopher tortoise



habitat destruction, specifically the entombing of tortoises during corporate development projects. This issue was chosen due to its geographic proximity to the participants, as well as the researcher's personal interest.

To examine the influence of activist message strategies, participants were shown a message based on the strategy definitions discussed in the literature review. The message was presented in the form of an article from the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group's quarterly magazine. After reading the article, participants rated their problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, goal compatibility, and intent to seek information toward the gopher tortoise situation described by the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group. To measure the independent variables of the situational theory of publics, items were used that replicated standard statements used to test the theory. Modifications were made, however, so that the statements fit the situation in which they were being tested. Participants also rated their beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions toward the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group and the gopher tortoise situation using measures specified by the theory of reasoned action.

#### *Data Collection*

Research participants were recruited from a population of undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory mass communication class at the University of South Florida. The sample totaled 329 participants. Of these, 136 (41%) were male, 180 (55%) were female, and 13 (4%) did not report their sex. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 53, with an average age of 19. The experiment took place in the students' classroom at the beginning of class, and each participant was randomly assigned to one of nine different treatment conditions resulting from a  $1 \times 9$  factorial. Variation in conditions was

achieved through the use of booklets containing a message from the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group developed from one of the activist message strategies and an instrument designed to measure the receiver variables of interest. At the beginning of each booklet, participants were provided with an informed consent statement, a brief explanation of the purpose of the experiment, and instructions. Participation in the experiment was voluntary.

### *Instrumentation*

To achieve a  $1 \times 9$  factorial, eight treatment conditions and one control condition were created. In the eight treatments, participants were exposed to one of eight different messages from the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group. Seven of the messages were manipulations of the activist message strategies identified in the literature review, and the eighth message was unrelated to the activist organization's campaign in order to control for strategy type. All of the messages were presented in the format of an article that would typically be found in a publication produced by an activist organization.

Each of the eight articles featured identical color images and the same layout. The seven articles derived from the public relations strategy taxonomy also shared the same text in the main body that was used to introduce background information on the issue (see Table 1). The main body of the seven message strategy treatment articles contained 285 words and 24 lines of text. The content of the main body of the control article was unrelated to that of the seven other articles; however, the format was the same, with a comparable 306 words and 25 lines of text (see Table 2).

Table 1. Shared Text for Message Strategy Treatments

<p>Title: The Gopher Tortoise: A Keystone Species of Florida</p> <p>The gopher tortoise is considered to be a keystone species in Florida. This means that other animals depend on the gopher tortoise for survival. Their burrows offer shelter to more than 300 other species, including the gopher frog and the eastern indigo snake, which is a federally protected species. Gopher tortoise burrows also provide protection to a variety of wildlife during fires.</p> <p>Wildlife experts estimate that gopher tortoises have existed for 60-million years. However, a 2006 study led by University of South Florida Professor Henry Mushinsky revealed that the population of gopher tortoises in Florida has declined by more than half in the past 60 years. This resulted in the reclassification of the gopher tortoise as “threatened,” which is one step below “endangered.” The main threat to the gopher tortoise is habitat loss.</p> <p>For 16 years, Florida’s Pay-to-Pave Program has permitted corporate developers to pave over gopher tortoise burrows. Because of their low metabolic rate, tortoises can take months to die. The Pay-to-Pave Program grants permits to developers in exchange for a monetary contribution used to buy land for tortoises elsewhere. As of May 2007, permits issued through the Pay-to-Pave Program have resulted in the death of more than 94,000 gopher tortoises.</p> <p>The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group was formed in 1978 by a group of biologists and others concerned about the range-wide decline of the gopher tortoise (<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>). The Advocacy Group offers professional advice for management, conservation, and protection of gopher tortoises; encourages the study of the life history, ecology, and management of gopher tortoises and other upland species; conducts active public information and conservation education programs, and seeks effective protection of the gopher tortoise and other upland species throughout the southeastern United States.</p>
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Table 2. Text for Message Strategy Type Control Treatment

<p>Title: Gopher Tracks: An Educational Book Project</p> <p>The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group has distributed <i>Gopher Tracks</i>, a book published by Florida State University, to every public elementary school within the range of the gopher tortoise, as well as to a number of schools located in adjoining counties. Written at the fourth grade level, <i>Gopher Tracks</i> introduces gopher tortoise ecology, upland habitats, the role of fire, and environmental stewardship through the adventures of two girls.</p> <p><i>Gopher Tracks</i> was out of print before the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group developed a plan to reprint the book and place two copies in every public elementary school library within the range of the gopher tortoise. The fundraising campaign began with a \$1,000 donation and, with the help of several individuals and conservation organizations, \$9,000 was raised for the re-printing of an additional 6,700 copies of the book in August 2007.</p> <p>This allowed us to distribute <i>Gopher Tracks</i> to 2,785 schools located in 70 counties, and we have received numerous calls, e-mails, and letters from teachers and librarians who greatly appreciated the book and are using it in their classrooms. Many people have contacted us requesting additional copies of the book. Unfortunately, we only printed enough copies for our project and do not have extras available. Perhaps if the demand continues, Susan Jane Ryan (the book's author) will have it reprinted again sometime in the future.</p> <p>Thanks again to everyone who donated money towards the reprinting. Contributors to the <i>Gopher Tracks</i> book project include: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Audubon Society of Southwest Florida, Coastal Wildlife Club, Lemon Bay Conservancy, Seminole Audubon Society, Southern Ecosystems Research, and The Tortoise Reserve, Inc.</p> <p>The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group was formed in 1978 by a group of biologists and others concerned about the range-wide decline of the gopher tortoise (<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>). The Advocacy Group offers professional advice for management, conservation, and protection of gopher tortoises; encourages the study of the life history, ecology, and management of gopher tortoises and other upland species; conducts active public information and conservation education programs, and seeks effective protection of the gopher tortoise and other upland species throughout the southeastern United States.</p>
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The messages used to test manipulations for strategy type, along with the operational definitions of the strategies, are provided in Table 3. The sidebar where the strategy message text was presented contained between 15 and 19 lines of text and 49 and 73 words. The sidebar of the control article contained 16 lines of text and 46 words. The ninth condition, the overall control condition, did not contain a message from the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group. To measure the variables of interest, all nine treatment conditions utilized the same instrument.

Table 3. Operationalization of Activist Message Strategies

<i>Activist Message Strategy</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Message</i>
Informative	An informative strategy is based on the presentation of unbiased facts. Informative messages do not draw conclusions, but presume the public will infer appropriate conclusions from accurate data. They are characterized by objectivity and the use of neutral language.	More than 1.7-million acres of Florida land that was once gopher tortoise habitat has been developed into home sites, roads, shopping centers and parking lots. The gopher tortoise is losing its habitat and faces extinction. Relocation is an alternative to paving over gopher tortoise burrows during corporate development.
Facilitative	A facilitative strategy is accomplished by making resources available to a public that allow it to act in ways that it is already predisposed to act. Resources may be tangible items, such as tools or money, or they may be directions or information needed to accomplish specific tasks.	Relocation is an alternative to paving over gopher tortoise burrows during corporate development. If you want to save the gopher tortoise, you can help by visiting <a href="http://www.4gopher.com">www.4gopher.com</a> to sign a petition to Governor Crist demanding he end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws that require gopher tortoise relocation.
Persuasive	A persuasive strategy is characterized by appeals to a public's values or emotions. This strategy may include a selective presentation of information. It may use language that is not neutral and reflects the importance of the issue and/or the involvement of the source in the situation. Persuasive messages are directive in the sense that they provide a call for action either indirectly or directly.	Gopher tortoises that are victims of the Pay-to-Pave Program suffer a slow torture of starvation and immobility before they die. Help stop the inhumane treatment of gopher tortoises. Write to Governor Crist and demand he end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws that require corporate developers to relocate tortoises.

Table 3 (Continued)

<p>Promise and reward</p>	<p>A promise and reward strategy uses positive coercion and involves the exercise of power to gain compliance. It includes a request for action and a related outcome that may be directly or indirectly linked to an individual's performance of the request. This strategy implies that the source of the message controls an outcome desired by the receiver of the message.</p>	<p>The gopher tortoise needs your help. Relocation is an alternative to the inhumane burial of tortoises. Write Governor Crist and demand he end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws that require corporate developers to relocate gopher tortoises. You will be rewarded with the survival of these animals for future generations to enjoy.</p>
<p>Threat and punishment</p>	<p>A threat and punishment strategy uses negative coercion and involves the exercise of power and threat to gain compliance. It includes a request for action and a related outcome that may be directly or indirectly linked to an individual's performance of the request. This strategy implies that the source of the message controls an outcome feared or disliked by the receiver of the message.</p>	<p>If no action is taken to end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws requiring corporate developers to relocate gopher tortoises, the threat of extinction will become a reality within 20 years. Write Governor Crist and demand he end the Pay-to-Pave Program or risk watching the demise of the gopher tortoise and the many species who rely on its burrow for protection.</p>
<p>Bargaining</p>	<p>Bargaining strategies are characterized by an organized exchange of messages between communicators. Bargaining strategies use contrasting symbols, such as 'we' and 'they,' to differentiate groups. These strategies require feedback in order to understand each party's acceptable range of alternatives.</p>	<p>The State has not done enough to protect the invaluable gopher tortoise. Join us in our fight against developers who are burying tortoises alive and the State that gives them permission to do so. We feel your input is crucial to the satisfactory resolution of this problem. In an effort to better understand your needs and concerns, we would like your feedback. Contact the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group at 1-800-4GOPHER. Help us fight them.</p>
<p>Cooperative problem-solving</p>	<p>A cooperative problem-solving strategy reflects a willingness to jointly define problems and solutions to problems. These messages are characterized by an open exchange of information to establish a common definition of the problem, common goals, and to share positions and responsibilities about the issue. These strategies use inclusive symbols, such as 'we' and 'us.'</p>	<p>In cooperation with advocacy groups such as the Sierra Club, we are working closely with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws for gopher tortoise relocation. If you would like to join us in this cooperative effort, please visit our Web site at <a href="http://www.4gopher.com">www.4gopher.com</a>. Together, we can protect the gopher tortoise's habitat and save it from extinction.</p>

After viewing a message from the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire containing items that measure attributes of

publics. Specifically, items were created to measure problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and goal compatibility. Items were also created to test information seeking behavior. All responses to these items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

The instrument also contained items that measured participants' beliefs, attitudes, subjective norm, and behavioral intentions. Specifically, 7-point semantic differential scales were created to measure the following variables: 1) behavioral intention; 2) attitude toward behavior; 3) subjective norm regarding behavior; 4) salient beliefs; and 5) attitude toward message/strategy.

Problem recognition was measured by the following statements: 1) I do not believe corporate development is a threat to the gopher tortoise's habitat; 2) I believe there is a problem with the Pay-to-Pave Program; 3) I believe there is a problem with the current method of handling gopher tortoises during corporate development; and 4) I do not view issues related to the gopher tortoise as problematic.

To measure level of involvement the following statements were used: 1) I am personally affected by situations involving the gopher tortoise; 2) I am concerned about the gopher tortoise, but I am not personally affected by its habitat loss; 3) I do not feel I have any involvement with situations involving the gopher tortoise; and 4) The survival of the gopher tortoise affects me.

Constraint recognition was measured using the following items: 1) I do not think there is anything I can do to help improve the gopher tortoise's chances of survival; 2) My actions will improve the gopher tortoise's chances of survival; 3) I am able to make a

difference in the situations involving the gopher tortoise; and 4) My actions will be too inconsequential to impact gopher tortoise habitat loss.

Finally, goal compatibility was measured using the following items: 1) In regards to protecting the gopher tortoise, I take the same position as the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group; 2) The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group has goals that are similar to mine; 3) My goals are not compatible with the goals of the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group; and 4) The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group and I do not want the same thing.

Information seeking behavior was measured using the following items: 1) I plan to seek out additional information about ways that I can help the gopher tortoise; 2) I plan to visit a Web site for further information on situations involving the gopher tortoise; 3) I would send an email requesting further information on situations involving the gopher tortoise; 4) I would attend a meeting of the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group.

Attitude toward strategy was measured using the following items: 1) Messages from the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group are unbalanced/balanced; 2) Messages from the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group are not informative/informative; 3) Messages from the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group are not credible/credible; and 4) Messages from the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group are untrustworthy/trustworthy.

Salient beliefs were measured using the following items: 1) I believe that environmental protection is important; 2) I believe that animal rights advocacy is important; 3) I believe habitat loss is a problem for the gopher tortoise; and 4) I believe corporate development is important to economic success.

The following items were used to measure subjective norm: 1) If aware of situations involving the gopher tortoise, people who are important to me would think that

there is a problem; 2) People who are close to me would want me to sign a petition to protect the gopher tortoise; 3) If my friends and family knew about the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group, they would want me to support it; and 4) Writing a letter to a politician to encourage gopher tortoise relocation is something people like me do.

The following items were used to measure attitude toward strategy: 1) My attitude toward the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group is unfavorable/favorable; 2) My attitude toward the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group is negative/positive; 3) My attitude toward the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group is bad/good; 4) My attitude toward situations involving the gopher tortoise is unfavorable/favorable; 5) My attitude toward situations involving the gopher tortoise is negative/positive; and 5) My attitude toward situations involving the gopher tortoise is bad/good.

Finally, behavioral intent was measured using the four items that measured information seeking behavior along with the following statements: 1) I would sign a petition to change permitting laws to protect gopher tortoises; 2) I would forward an email about situations involving the gopher tortoise to my friends; 3) I would donate money to the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group for the protection of the gopher tortoise; 4) I would write a letter to the governor asking that permitting laws be changed to protect the gopher tortoise's habitat.

In addition to the items outlined above, subjects were asked to provide demographic information, including gender, age, ethnicity, geographical region of Florida they are from, academic major, and year of study.



### *Manipulation Check for Strategy Type*

Prior to conducting the hypotheses test, a manipulation check was performed to assess the degree to which the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group's activist message treatments agreed with the activist message strategy definitions presented in the literature review. An instrument was developed and administered to 88 students in another section of the introductory mass communications course. Participants randomly received one of the seven activist message strategy treatments and a list of the strategy definitions. They were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), how strongly the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group's message characterized each strategy.

Omnibus ANOVA indicated significant differences in means for only the informative,  $F(6, 81) = 2.208, p = .050$ , persuasive,  $F(6, 81) = 3.565, p = .003$ , and promise and reward strategies,  $F(6, 79) = 2.388, p = .036$ . An evaluation of mean scores for all treatments and definitions can be found in Table 4. With the exception of the facilitative treatment, the definition corresponding to each treatment produced one of the top two highest means.

A Levene's Test was significant for the informative,  $F(6, 81) = 2.462, p = .031$ , and persuasive strategies,  $F(6, 81) = 2.733, p = .018$ , indicating that the assumption of equality of error variances was violated. No significant differences were indicated between the treatments and definitions when the more rigorous Dunnett's C post hoc procedure was used to correct for unequal variances in ANOVA. A Levene's Test was not significant for the promise and reward strategy,  $F(6, 79) = 1.178, p = .326$ , indicating that the assumption of equality of error variances was not violated. Therefore, the least

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for Treatments Across Definitions

<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Informative	Informative	4.00	.816
	Bargaining	4.00	.739
	Facilitative	3.92	1.084
	Cooperative Problem-Solving	3.77	1.092
	Promise and Reward	3.50	1.225
	Threat and Punishment	3.27	1.191
	Persuasive	2.81	1.328
Facilitative	Cooperative Problem-Solving	3.62	.961
	Bargaining	3.50	.798
	Threat and Punishment	3.30	1.252
	Persuasive	3.25	1.000
	Facilitative	2.92	1.084
	Informative	2.90	.876
	Promise and Reward	2.71	2.71
Persuasive	Threat and Punishment	4.64	.674
	Persuasive	4.44	.892
	Promise and Reward	4.43	.646
	Bargaining	4.25	.866
	Informative	3.90	1.197
	Cooperative Problem-Solving	3.77	1.235
	Facilitative	3.00	1.537
Promise and Reward	Promise and Reward	3.86	1.027
	Cooperative Problem-Solving	3.08	1.115
	Bargaining	2.92	1.084
	Threat and Punishment	2.90	1.524
	Persuasive	2.87	.990
	Informative	2.60	.966
	Facilitative	2.33	1.073
Threat and Punishment	Threat and Punishment	2.60	1.647
	Informative	2.60	.843
	Promise and Reward	2.43	1.158
	Bargaining	2.25	1.288
	Cooperative Problem-Solving	2.23	1.235
	Facilitative	2.00	1.265
	Persuasive	1.87	1.302
Bargaining	Cooperative Problem-Solving	2.54	1.330
	Bargaining	2.50	1.446
	Promise and Reward	2.43	1.158
	Persuasive	2.13	.806
	Informative	2.10	.738
	Threat and Punishment	2.10	1.449
	Facilitative	2.09	1.375

Table 4 (Continued)

Cooperative Problem-Solving	Threat and Punishment	4.09	.701
	Cooperative Problem-Solving	3.92	.760
	Bargaining	3.75	1.357
	Promise and Reward	3.43	1.089
	Informative	3.40	1.713
	Persuasive	3.31	1.014
	Facilitative	3.17	1.467

significant difference (LSD) procedure was used for post hoc analysis to examine specific differences between means for the promise and reward treatment across definitions.

Results revealed that, except for cooperative problem-solving, the means for the promise and reward treatment were significantly different between definitions. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Post Hoc Comparisons for the Promise and Reward Treatment Across Definitions

<i>Definition</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Informative	1.257	.008
Facilitative	1.524	.001
Persuasive	.990	.019
Threat and Punishment	.957	.040
Bargaining	.940	.034
Cooperative Problem-Solving	.780	.072

Because the results of this manipulation check provided mixed support for the treatments' representations of the definitions, a second, more simplistic, check was performed. Twenty-nine participants from an advanced public relations course were asked to match each treatment message with its corresponding definition. The promise and reward strategy, again, performed the best. Of the 29 participants, 27 (93%) correctly matched the promise and reward message with its definition. The threat and punishment and informative strategy percentages were also very high. For both strategies, 26 of the

29 participants (90%) correctly matched the message with its definition. For the persuasive strategy, 23 of the 29 participants (79%) correctly matched the message with its definition. The cooperative problem-solving, facilitative, and bargaining strategies performed the worst. Nineteen of the 29 participants (66%) correctly matched the cooperative-problem-solving message with its definition. And for both the facilitative and bargaining strategies, only 16 of the 29 participants (55%) correctly matched the message with its definition. While the percentages for the cooperative problem-solving, facilitative, and bargaining strategies were lower than for the other strategies, overall accuracy for matching treatments with the correct definition was more than 50%, with over half of the participants successfully identifying the corresponding treatments and definitions.

Message strategies are complex, and the subtle differences between the strategy definitions and treatments may be indiscernible to a layperson. Therefore, despite the mixed findings for the manipulation check, the decision was made to continue the experiment in order to gain a greater understanding of activist message strategies for future research.

#### *Data Analysis*

Data was analyzed using SPSS 15.0 for Windows. An alpha level of .05 was required for significance in all statistical procedures. Before hypotheses were tested, analysis of the reliability of scales used to measure the variables of interest was performed using Cronbach's alpha. Statistical procedures to test the hypotheses included correlations analysis using Pearson's  $r$ , linear regression analysis, and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

## Chapter Four

### Results

Prior to hypothesis testing, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the multiple-item indexes for problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, goal compatibility, information seeking behavior, attitude toward strategy, salient beliefs, subjective norm, attitude toward behavior, and behavioral intent. Reversed items were transformed before performing the reliability analysis. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Final Cronbach's Alpha for Multiple-Item Indexes

<i>Variable</i>	<i><math>\alpha</math></i>	<i>Number of items</i>
Problem Recognition	.67	3
Level of Involvement	.55	3
Constraint Recognition	.71	4
Goal Compatibility	.68	4
Information Seeking Behavior	.87	4
Attitude Toward Strategy	.85	4
Salient Beliefs	.72	3
Subjective Norm	.83	4
Attitude Toward Behavior	.91	6
Behavioral Intent	.88	8

Four items were included to test problem recognition; however the alpha indicated scale reliability was higher by dropping the item "I do not believe corporate development is a threat to the gopher tortoise's habitat." The three remaining items produced a reliability coefficient of .67. Four items were included to test level of

involvement, and the alpha indicated scale reliability by dropping the item “I am concerned about the gopher tortoise, but I am not personally affected by its habitat loss.” The three remaining items produced a reliability coefficient of .55. The four items included to test constraint recognition produced a reliability coefficient of .71. The four items included to test goal compatibility produced a reliability coefficient of .68. The four items included to test information seeking behavior produced a reliability coefficient of .87. The four items included to test attitude toward strategy produced a reliability coefficient of .85. Four items were included to test salient beliefs, and the alpha indicated scale reliability by dropping the item “I believe corporate development is important to economic success.” The three remaining items produced a reliability coefficient of .72. The four items included to test subjective norm produced a reliability coefficient of .83. The six items included to test attitude toward behavior produced a reliability coefficient of .91. Finally, the eight items included to test behavioral intent produced a reliability coefficient of .88.

While alpha values between .80 and 1.00 indicate high reliability (Berman, 2002), it is generally agreed that the lower limit of .70 is still a useful measure of constructs (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Stacks, 2002). Nunnally (as cited by Major, 1993) even suggests that an alpha coefficient of .50 or greater is sufficient for scale reliability.

While the situational theory of publics is a strong theory, one of its greatest criticisms is the weak internal reliability of the items that measure its constructs. Aldoory and Sha (2007) reported the internal reliability of items measuring problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition for a variety of situations. While the alphas for problem recognition were all above .70, the alphas for level of involvement

fluctuated above and below .70, and the alphas for constraint recognition were all below .70. The authors pose two explanations. The first is the operational challenge of measuring such complex concepts. The second is the issue of questionnaire length and how it affects respondents' participation in studies testing the situational theory.

The weak internal reliability of construct items was also found in a recent study of consumer publics in Singapore by Sriramesh, Moghan, and Wei (2007). Using a survey instrument adapted from J. E. Grunig (1997), the internal reliability of the items that measured the constructs of the situational theory all produced Chronbach's alphas below .70 in their study. Problem recognition yielded an alpha of .66, level of involvement yielded an alpha of .66, and constraint recognition yielded an alpha of .63. The authors concluded that these values were sufficient in demonstrating internal consistency.

The theory of reasoned action is another strong theory, and the large number of studies testing it have shown that the constructs, and the items that measure them, have proven to be very reliable. This study also demonstrated high internal reliability between the multiple items measuring the constructs of the theory. The Cronbach's alphas for the single-item constructs ranged from .72 to .91, with most having coefficients greater than .80. It is evident, then, that the items measuring the theory of reasoned action constructs in this study demonstrate high internal reliability; therefore, the collapsed indexes were used for hypothesis testing.

#### *Hypotheses Related to the Situational Theory of Publics*

While the internal reliability of the items measuring the constructs of the situational theory in this study are not as strong as those measuring the theory of reasoned action, the previous literature on the topic indicates that the coefficient values found for

the situational theory variables are also acceptable. Therefore, the decision was made to use the construct indexes developed for problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and goal compatibility in the testing of the hypotheses for this study.

Before testing the hypotheses related to the situational theory of publics, a correlation analysis was conducted to examine the linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables of the theory, including goal compatibility. Results indicate that all variables were positively correlated with the exception of constraint recognition. Constraint recognition had a negative correlation with all other variables, which is explained by the premise of the theory. The greatest correlation was found between goal compatibility and problem recognition,  $r = .593, p = .000$ . All correlations were significant and are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Correlations Between the Independent and Dependent Variables of the Situational Theory of Publics, Including Goal Compatibility

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Problem Recognition</i>	<i>Level of Involvement</i>	<i>Constraint Recognition</i>	<i>Goal Compatibility</i>	<i>Information Seeking Behavior</i>
Problem Recognition		.319**	-.408**	.593**	.341**
Level of Involvement	.319**		-.556**	.404**	.492**
Constraint Recognition	-.408**	-.556**		-.316**	-.432**
Goal Compatibility	.593**	.404**	-.361**		.436**
Information Seeking Behavior	.341**	.492**	-.432**	.436**	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)



### *Hypothesis 1*

H1 was that problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition predict information seeking behavior in publics. To test this hypothesis, linear regression analysis was conducted. Information seeking behavior, the dependent variable, was regressed on the measures of problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition. Nearly 30% of the variance in information seeking behavior was due to problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition,  $R^2 = .30$ ,  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .29$ ,  $F(3, 306) = 43.357$ ,  $p = .000$ . The results indicate that level of involvement produced the strongest contribution to the prediction equation,  $\beta = .347$ ,  $t(308) = 5.963$ ,  $p = .000$ , followed by constraint recognition,  $\beta = -.170$ ,  $t(308) = -2.813$ ,  $p = .005$ , and problem recognition,  $\beta = .159$ ,  $t(308) = 3.007$ ,  $p = .003$ . These results are shown in Table 8 and indicate that the independent variables of problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition predict information seeking behavior; therefore, H1 is supported.

Table 8. Regression Model for Situational Theory Variables Predicting Information Seeking Behavior

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i><math>\beta</math></i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Level of Involvement	.394	.066	.347	.000
Constraint Recognition	-.201	.071	-.170	.005
Problem Recognition	.182	.060	.159	.003

### *Hypothesis 2*

H2 stated that perceived goal compatibility influences information seeking behavior. Linear regression analysis was conducted to test this hypothesis. The regression equation indicated that almost 20% of the variance in information seeking

behavior is explained by goal compatibility,  $R^2 = .19$ ,  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .19$ ,  $F(1, 315) = 73.913$ ,  $p = .000$ . Also, goal compatibility produced a significant contribution to the prediction equation,  $\beta = .567$ ,  $t(315) = 8.597$ ,  $p = .000$ . The results indicate that goal compatibility influences information seeking behavior, thus H2 is supported.

To examine the relationship of goal compatibility with the other situational theory variables, a linear regression analysis was conducted where information seeking behavior, the dependent variable, was regressed on the measures of problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and goal compatibility. The regression equation indicated that 32% of the variance in information seeking behavior is explained by the four independent variables,  $R^2 = .33$ ,  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .32$ ,  $F(4, 304) = 37.575$ ,  $p = .000$ . These results indicate that goal compatibility accounted for an additional 3% of explained variance in information seeking behavior.

With the addition of goal compatibility, however, problem recognition no longer made a unique contribution to the prediction equation. Only level of involvement, goal compatibility, and constraint recognition produced unique item variance. Level of involvement continued to produce the strongest contribution to the prediction equation,  $\beta = .299$ ,  $t(307) = 5.118$ ,  $p = .000$ , followed by goal compatibility,  $\beta = .236$ ,  $t(307) = 3.921$ ,  $p = .000$ , and constraint recognition,  $\beta = -.157$ ,  $t(307) = -2.638$ ,  $p = .009$ . These results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Regression Model for Situational Theory Variables and Goal Compatibility Predicting Information Seeking Behavior

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Level of Involvement	.339	.066	.299	.000
Goal Compatibility	.313	.080	.236	.000
Constraint Recognition	-.185	.070	-.157	.009
Problem Recognition	.044	.068	.038	.524

### *Hypothesis 3*

H3 stated that activist message strategies influence problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and goal compatibility in publics. To test this hypothesis, and its corresponding propositions, a series of one-way ANOVAs were conducted. The results indicate that activist message strategies only influenced problem recognition,  $F(8, 308) = 5.119, p = .000, \eta^2 = .117$ , and goal compatibility,  $F(8,310) = 2.292, p = .021, \eta^2 = .056$ . Therefore, H3 is partially supported.

An evaluation of mean scores indicates that the threat and punishment strategy produced the greatest influence on goal compatibility ( $M = 4.61, SD = 1.05$ ), followed by the persuasive ( $M = 4.46, SD = 1.23$ ) and promise and reward ( $M = 4.43, SD = 0.88$ ) strategies. The mean and standard deviation scores for goal compatibility across all treatments are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Means and Standard Deviations for Goal Compatibility Across Treatments

<i>Treatment Condition</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Threat and Punishment	4.61	1.05
Persuasive	4.46	1.23
Promise and Reward	4.43	0.88
Informative	4.38	1.14
Cooperative Problem-Solving	4.31	0.82
Facilitative	4.18	0.92
Control for Strategy Type	4.13	0.82
Bargaining	4.03	1.10

Overall Control	3.72	0.91
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A Levene's Test was not significant for goal compatibility,  $F(8, 310) = 1.474$ ,  $p = .166$ , indicating that the assumption of equality of error variances was not violated.

The Bonferroni correction was then used for post hoc analysis to examine specific differences in means for goal compatibility across treatments. This is a highly rigorous test that is used when the equality of error variance has been met and when multiple comparisons are being made (Colman, 2001). Results revealed that the mean for the threat and punishment strategy treatment was significantly higher than the overall control treatment,  $M \text{ diff.} = .8839$ ,  $p = .020$ . This was the only significant difference in multiple comparisons between means for goal compatibility across treatments.

Problem recognition was also significantly affected by activist message strategies. An evaluation of the mean scores indicated that the persuasive strategy produced the greatest influence on problem recognition ( $M = 5.31$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ), followed by the cooperative problem-solving ( $M = 5.24$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) and facilitative ( $M = 5.21$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) strategies. The means for problem recognition across all treatments are shown in Table 11. Proposition 3.1 posited that facilitative and cooperative problem-solving strategies have the greatest influence on problem recognition. While the cooperative problem-solving and facilitative strategies did have a strong influence, the persuasive strategy had the greatest influence on problem recognition; therefore, P3.1 is not supported.

A Levene's Test was significant for the problem recognition variable,  $F(8,308) = 4.084$ ,  $p = .000$ , indicating that the assumption of equality of error variances was violated. Therefore, Dunnett's C was used for post hoc analysis to examine specific differences in means for problem recognition across treatments. Dunnett's C is a conservative post hoc

Table 11. Means and Standard Deviations for Problem Recognition Across Treatments

<i>Treatment Condition</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Persuasive	5.31	1.06
Cooperative Problem-Solving	5.24	1.21
Facilitative	5.21	1.01
Informative	5.20	1.38
Threat and Punishment	5.11	1.04
Promise and Reward	5.07	1.21
Bargaining	4.66	1.21
Control for Strategy Type	4.34	0.47
Overall Control	4.10	1.04

test that is used to correct for unequal variances in ANOVA (Green, Salkind, & Akey, 2000). Results of the procedure revealed that all of the strategies, except for bargaining, had significantly higher means for problem recognition than the control for strategy type and overall control. These mean differences are shown in Table 12. No significant differences were found between strategies.

Table 12. Post Hoc Comparisons for Problem Recognition Across Treatments

<i>Treatment Condition</i>	<i>Treatment Condition</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>
Informative	Control for Strategy Type	.853*
	Overall Control	1.10*
Facilitative	Control for Strategy Type	.864*
	Overall Control	1.11*
Persuasive	Control for Strategy Type	.964*
	Overall Control	1.21*
Promise and Reward	Control for Strategy Type	.727*
	Overall Control	.975*
Threat and Punishment	Control for Strategy Type	.771*
	Overall Control	1.02*
Cooperative Problem-Solving	Control for Strategy Type	.892*
	Overall Control	1.14*

\*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

Proposition 3.2 posited that the persuasive strategy has the greatest influence on level of involvement. Treatment effects on level of involvement were not found to be

significant,  $F(8,313) = 1.349$ ,  $p = .219$ ; therefore, P3.2 was not supported. Also, an evaluation of mean scores (found in Table 13) indicated that the informative strategy produced the greatest influence on level of involvement ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ), followed by the threat and punishment ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) and persuasive ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) strategies. Even if treatment effects were significant, P3.2 would not have been supported, as the strategy with the highest mean was informative.

Table 13. Means and Standard Deviations for Level of Involvement Across Treatments

<i>Treatment Condition</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Informative	3.47	1.31
Threat and Punishment	3.32	1.28
Persuasive	3.22	1.08
Control for Strategy Type	3.12	1.09
Bargaining	3.07	1.32
Promise and Reward	3.02	1.29
Overall Control	2.91	0.97
Facilitative	2.83	0.90
Cooperative Problem-Solving	2.82	1.02

#### *Hypotheses Related to the Theory of Reasoned Action*

As discussed previously, the coefficient values for the items measuring the theory of reasoned action constructs demonstrate high internal reliability. Therefore, the decision was made to use the collapsed indexes developed for attitude toward strategy, salient beliefs, attitude toward behavior, subjective norm, and behavioral intent in the testing of the hypotheses for this study.

Before testing the hypotheses related to the theory of reasoned action, a correlation analysis was conducted to examine the linear relationship between the variables of the theory. All correlations were significant and are shown in Table 14.

Results indicate that all variables were positively correlated, and the greatest correlation was found between subjective norm and behavioral intent,  $r = .755, p = .000$ .

Table 14. Correlations Between the Independent and Dependent Variables of the Theory of Reasoned Action

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Attitude Toward Strategy</i>	<i>Salient Beliefs</i>	<i>Attitude Toward Behavior</i>	<i>Subjective Norm</i>	<i>Behavioral Intent</i>
Attitude Toward Strategy		.417**	.651**	.414**	.298**
Salient Beliefs	.417**		.589**	.511**	.398**
Attitude Toward Behavior	.651**	.589**		.547**	.438**
Subjective Norm	.414**	.511**	.547**		.755**
Behavioral Intent	.298**	.398**	.438**	.755**	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

#### *Hypothesis 4*

H4 stated that salient beliefs predict attitude toward behavior. Linear regression analysis was conducted to test this hypothesis. Attitude toward behavior, the dependent variable, was regressed on the measure of salient beliefs. Salient beliefs accounted for 35% of the variance in attitude toward behavior,  $R^2 = .35$ ,  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .35$ ,  $F(1, 301) = 159.985, p = .000$ . The results indicate that salient beliefs produced a significant contribution to the prediction equation,  $\beta = .589, t(301) = 12.649, p = .000$ . Therefore, H4 is supported.

#### *Hypothesis 5*

H5 stated that attitude toward behavior and subjective norm regarding behavior predict behavioral intention. To test this hypothesis, behavioral intention, the dependent variable, was regressed on the measures of attitude toward behavior and subjective norm. The regression equation indicated that 56% of the variance in behavioral intention is explained by the independent variables,  $R^2 = .57$ ,  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .56$ ,  $F(2, 293) = 189.995$ ,

$p = .000$ . However, only subjective norm,  $\beta = .732$ ,  $t(294) = 15.881$ ,  $p = .000$ , was significant as a unique predictor of behavioral intent. Results, shown in Table 15, indicate that subjective norm, but not attitude toward behavior, influences behavioral intent.

Therefore, H5 is partially supported.

Table 15. Regression Model for Attitude Toward Behavior and Subjective Norm Predicting Behavioral Intent

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Subjective Norm	.684	.043	.732	.035
Attitude Toward Behavior	.037	.049	.035	.732

### *Hypothesis 6*

H6 stated that activist message strategies influence attitude toward strategy. A series of one-way ANOVAs were conducted to evaluate the relationship between strategy treatments and attitude toward strategy. Results revealed that the activist message strategies influence attitude toward strategy,  $F(8, 306) = 2.901$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $\eta^2 = .071$ ; therefore, H6 is supported.

An evaluation of mean scores indicated that the cooperative problem-solving strategy produced the greatest effect on attitude toward strategy ( $M = 5.35$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ), followed equally by the promise and reward ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) and threat and punishment ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) strategies. The means for attitude toward strategy across all treatments are shown in Table 16

A Levene's Test was not significant for attitude toward strategy,  $F(8, 306) = 1.889$ ,  $p = .061$ , indicating that the assumption of equality of error variances was not violated. The Bonferroni correction was then used for post hoc analysis to examine specific differences in means for attitude toward strategy across treatments. Results indicated that the mean



for the cooperative problem-solving strategy was significantly higher than the overall control,  $M$  diff. = 1.099,  $p = .007$ . This was the only significant difference between attitude toward strategy means across treatments.

Table 16. Means and Standard Deviations for Attitude Toward Strategy Across Treatments

<i>Treatment Condition</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Cooperative Problem-Solving	5.35	1.04
Promise and Reward	5.16	1.02
Threat and Punishment	5.16	0.87
Informative	5.05	1.32
Persuasive	5.04	1.14
Facilitative	4.91	1.17
Bargaining	4.67	1.40
Control for Strategy Type	4.58	1.29
Overall Control	4.25	0.78

#### *Hypothesis 7*

H7 stated that attitude toward strategy predicts salient beliefs. To test this hypothesis, the measure of salient beliefs, the dependent variable, was regressed on the measure of attitude toward strategy. Attitude toward strategy accounted for 17% of the variance in salient beliefs,  $R^2 = .17$ , Adj.  $R^2 = .17$ ,  $F(1, 306) = 64.370$ ,  $p = .000$ . Results indicate that attitude toward strategy produced a significant contribution to the prediction equation,  $\beta = .417$ ,  $t(306) = 8.023$ ,  $p = .000$ . Thus, H7 is supported.

#### *Hypothesis 8*

H8 stated that attitude toward strategy influences attitude toward behavior. Linear regression analysis was used to test this hypothesis. Attitude toward behavior, the dependent variable, was regressed on the measure of attitude toward strategy. Attitude toward strategy accounted for 42% of the variance in attitude toward behavior,  $R^2 = .42$ ,

Adj.  $R^2 = .42$ ,  $F(1, 298) = 219.395$ ,  $p = .000$ . The results indicate that attitude toward strategy produced a significant contribution to the prediction equation,  $\beta = .651$ ,  $t(299) = 14.812$ ,  $p = .000$ , and that attitude toward strategy influences attitude toward behavior. Therefore, H8 is supported.

### *Hypothesis 9*

H9 stated that attitude toward strategy influences behavioral intention. Linear regression analysis was used to test this hypothesis. Behavioral intent, the dependent variable, was regressed on the measure of attitude toward strategy. The regression equation indicated that 9% of the variance in behavioral intent is explained by attitude toward strategy,  $R^2 = .09$ , Adj.  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $F(1, 310) = 30.269$ ,  $p = .000$ . The results indicate that attitude toward strategy produced a significant contribution to the prediction equation,  $\beta = .298$ ,  $t(311) = 5.502$ ,  $p = .000$ , and that attitude toward strategy influences attitude toward behavior. Therefore, H9 is supported.

### *Exploratory Analyses*

A series of one-way ANOVAs were conducted to evaluate the relationships between treatments and receiver variables. The results revealed that activist message strategies significantly influence problem recognition, goal compatibility, and attitude toward strategy, which have all been discussed above. The results also revealed that attitude toward behavior is influenced by strategy type,  $F(8, 295) = 2.702$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $\eta^2 = .068$ .

An evaluation of mean scores indicated that the cooperative problem-solving strategy produced the greatest influence on attitude toward behavior ( $M = 5.30$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ), followed by the threat and punishment ( $M = 5.27$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) and informative

( $M = 5.21$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) strategies. The means and standard deviations for attitude toward behavior across all treatments are shown in Table 17.

Table 17. Means and Standard Deviations for Attitude Toward Behavior Across Treatments

<i>Treatment Condition</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Cooperative Problem-Solving	5.30	1.21
Threat and Punishment	5.27	0.90
Informative	5.21	1.18
Promise and Reward	5.18	0.98
Control for Strategy Type	5.08	1.01
Persuasive	5.06	1.38
Facilitative	4.91	1.16
Bargaining	4.61	1.33
Overall Control	4.27	1.04

A Levene's Test was not significant for attitude toward behavior,  $F(8, 295) = 1.633$ ,  $p = .115$ , indicating that the assumption of equality of error variances was not violated. The Bonferroni correction was used for post hoc analysis to examine specific differences in means for attitude toward behavior across treatments. Results of the procedure revealed that the mean for the informative strategy was significantly higher than the overall control,  $M$  diff. = .9334,  $p = .046$ . This was the only significant difference between means for attitude toward behavior across treatments.

A series of one-way ANOVAs were also conducted to evaluate the relationships between geographical region origination and receiver variables. The results revealed that, in this study, the geographical region from which a public originates significantly influences information seeking behavior,  $F(5, 301) = 2.393$ ,  $p = .038$ ,  $\eta^2 = .038$ , and approaches significance with regard to influencing problem recognition,  $F(5, 295) = 2.234$ ,  $p = .051$ ,  $\eta^2 = .036$ .

The five different regions that Florida was divided into can be seen in Figure 6. This is the map the participants saw when selecting their region of origination on the questionnaire. The option to select “Not from Florida” was available to incorporate origination outside of Florida. Table 18 reports the number of participants for this study from each region.



Figure 6. Map of Florida divided into 5 geographical regions

Table 18. Number of Participants from Each Geographical Region

<i>Geographical Region</i>	#
Southwest	163
Northeast	58
South	45
Not From Florida	36
North Central	5
Northwest	3

An evaluation of mean scores indicated that Northwest region of Florida origination produced the greatest influence on information seeking behavior ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ), followed by South region of Florida origination ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) and

not originating from Florida ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ). The means for information seeking behavior across geographical region origination are shown in Table 19.

Table 19. Means and Standard Deviations for Information Seeking Behavior Across Geographical Region Origination

<i>Geographical Region</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Northwest	4.67	1.94
South	2.85	1.29
Not from Florida	2.78	1.53
Northeast	2.50	1.30
Southwest	2.45	1.27
North Central	2.45	1.24

A Levene’s Test was not significant for information seeking behavior,  $F(5, 301) = .820$ ,  $p = .536$ , indicating that the assumption of equality of error variances was not violated. Therefore, the least significant difference (LSD) procedure was used for post hoc analysis to examine specific differences in means for information seeking behavior across geographical regions of origination. LSD is a post hoc analysis pairwise comparison of means that is used when the equality of error variance has been met (“Fisher’s LSD”). Results revealed that the information seeking behavior means for the Northwest region of Florida were significantly different than those for all of the other regions. The significant results of the analysis are shown in Table 20.

Table 20. Post Hoc Comparisons for Information Seeking Behavior Across Geographical Region Origination

<i>Geographical Region</i>	<i>Geographical Region</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Northwest	North Central	2.22	.022
	Northeast	2.16	.006
	South	1.81	.022
	Southwest	2.21	.004
	Not from Florida	1.89	.018

An evaluation of mean scores indicated that Northwest region of Florida origination produced the greatest influence on problem recognition ( $M = 5.56$ ,  $SD = 0.38$ ), followed by North Central region of Florida ( $M = 5.27$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) and South region of Florida ( $M = 5.19$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) originations. The means for problem recognition across geographical region origination can be found in Table 21.

Table 21. Means and Standard Deviations for Problem Recognition Across Geographical Region Origination

<i>Strategy Type</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Northwest	5.56	0.38
North Central	5.27	0.76
South	5.19	1.06
Southwest	5.07	1.18
Northeast	4.69	1.15
Not from Florida	4.60	1.07

A Levene's Test was not significant for problem recognition,  $F(5, 295) = 1.319$ ,  $p = .256$ , indicating that the assumption of equality of error variances was not violated. Therefore, the least significant difference (LSD) procedure was used for post hoc analysis to examine specific differences in means for problem recognition across geographical region origination. Results revealed that the problem recognition mean for the Northeast region of Florida was significantly different than the means for the South and Southwest regions. The mean for "Not from Florida" responses was also significantly different than the means for the South and Southwest regions. The significant results of the analysis are shown in Table 22.

Table 22. Post Hoc Comparisons for Problem Recognition Across Geographical Region Origination

<i>Geographical Region</i>	<i>Geographical Region</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
South	Northeast	.495	.030
	Not from Florida	.585	.023
Southwest	Northeast	.384	.031
	Not from Florida	.474	.026

In order to fully understand the results presented in this chapter, a comprehensive discussion is required. Each of the hypotheses and the meaning of the corresponding results will be explored in the following chapter. From this examination, conclusions are formed and recommendations are offered—both to activist organizations and for future research.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion

This study attempted to explain the communication effects of activist message strategies derived from Hazleton and Long's (1988) public relations process model using J.E. Grunig's (1997) situational theory of publics and Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action. To accomplish this objective, nine hypotheses and two propositions were tested.

H1, which stated that problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition predict information seeking behavior in publics, was supported by the results of this study. This finding supports the premise of the situational theory of publics and increases its validity. The literature reviewed for this research found level of involvement to be the strongest predictor of information seeking behavior (Aldoory & Sha, 2007). This assertion was also supported by the results of this study. Nearly 30% of the variance in information seeking behavior was found to be due to problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition, and, of this variance, 40% was due to level of involvement.

After a thorough review of the situational theory of publics, Aldoory and Sha (2007) identified a number of methodological challenges facing the theory. One of these challenges, discussed previously, is that of the low internal reliability of items measuring the constructs of the situational theory. While this study suffers from this limitation as



well, it still contributes to the enhancement of the situational theory of publics in other areas.

Operationalization of information seeking behavior is one of those areas. The traditional measure of information seeking behavior asks respondents how likely they are to call or send for free information brochures. Because of new, globalized technologies, the items that measure information seeking behavior should reflect the present global media environment. According to Hill and White (2000), “the World Wide Web is becoming a significant communications tool for businesses and organizations” (p. 31). The Internet is heavily relied upon as a source of information, both by those seeking it and those disseminating it. This study incorporated these insights into the operationalization of information seeking behavior by including statements such as “I would visit a Web site for further information on situations involving the gopher tortoise,” and “I would send an email requesting further information on situations involving the gopher tortoise.” There was strong reliability ( $\alpha = .87$ ) among the four items that measured information seeking behavior in this study, which offers support for the extended operationalization of information seeking behavior.

Another recommendation for enhancing the situational theory is the incorporation of experimental research. Aldoory and Sha (2007) reported that, in their review of the literature on the theory, they found no published reports of experiments testing the situational theory. They recommend the use of experimental design “for purposes of measuring predictability and control in the relationship among variables” (p. 350). By using an experimental method, this study does just that. The results indicate that the independent variables of the situational theory predict information seeking behavior. It

also reveals relationships among the variables. For example, level of involvement is the strongest contributor to variance in information seeking behavior, and problem recognition ceases to be a unique contributor when goal compatibility is included.

This study also extends the situational theory through the inclusion of goal compatibility as an additional independent variable of the theory. H2 was supported by the results of this study, which adds validity to the concept of goal compatibility as a predictor of information seeking behavior. This result is consistent with previous research (i.e. Page, 2000b, 2000c) and indicates the value of this variable to both public relations research and practice.

In relation to the other independent variables of the theory, the addition of goal compatibility yielded an interesting finding. When goal compatibility was included among the independent variables, problem recognition ceased to make a unique contribution to the prediction of information seeking behavior. This result was found by Werder (2006) as well. Additional research is needed to explicate the concept of goal compatibility; not only to determine its value as an attribute of publics, but to further explore the relationship between it and problem recognition. When correlation analysis of the situational theory variables was conducted, the strongest relationship was found between goal compatibility and problem recognition. Intuitively, the relationship makes sense. Those who have goals similar to the organization's are likely to recognize the same problems as the organization. Future research should be conducted to reveal which of these variables is the strongest predictor of information seeking behavior.

H3 posited that activist message strategies would influence problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and goal compatibility in publics. The

results provided partial support for H3, since only problem recognition and goal compatibility were influenced by the strategies.

As described previously, Werder's (2006) study examined communication effects when strategies are used by a corporation responding to activism. She found that the facilitative and cooperative problem-solving strategies had the greatest influence on problem recognition. This study, which examined the effects of strategies when used by an activist organization, found that the persuasive strategy had the greatest influence on problem recognition, followed by cooperative problem-solving and facilitative strategies. These results indicate that P3.1 was not supported since the proposition posited that the facilitative and cooperative problem-solving strategies would have the greatest influence on problem recognition.

Werder's (2006) finding supports J.E. Grunig's (2000, 2001) philosophy that organizations should practice symmetrical communication, relationship building, and ethical behavior. Cooperative problem-solving and facilitative strategies embody these elements. Werder posits that since these strategies are based on cooperation and reaching a common understanding in solving problems, some "admission" of a problem is required on the part of the organization when these strategies are used, which creates greater problem recognition in the minds of those receiving this type of organizational communication.

While J.E. Grunig (2000, 2001) suggested that the organizational principles discussed above would benefit activist organizations as well, others believe that activists' needs are different from those of other organizations (Holtzhausen, 2007). With regard to influencing problem recognition in publics, the results of this study demonstrate

support for both positions. Cooperative problem-solving and facilitative strategies yielded the second and third highest problem recognition means, which suggests that J. E. Grunig's philosophy of symmetrical communication, relationship building, and ethical behavior is applicable to activist organizations as well. However, the highest mean for the problem recognition measure resulted when the persuasive strategy was used, which signifies a difference between 'typical' organization and activist organization communication.

This difference can be explained by the nature of activist organizations. One goal of activist organizations is to rectify the conditions (problems) they have identified. In order to successfully achieve this goal, the organization must convince others that there is a problem that needs solving. Another goal is to effectively maintain the organization and to compete for limited resources (i.e. members, time, money, energy, etc.) in order to survive. Persuasion is an important asset to activist organizations that "must rely on the attractiveness of 'the cause' or 'the goal' in order attract and maintain membership" (Hrebner & Scott, 1982, p. 20). To successfully compete, activist organizations need to make the issues they have identified as salient as possible (Smith & Ferguson, 2001), and persuasion is an effective approach to increasing saliency. Persuasive strategies appeal to a public's values or emotions and are effective when a problem is not recognized or considered to be important by a public (Hazleton, 1993). These characteristics, as they relate to the activist organizations' goals, provide an explanation for the influence of the persuasive strategy in this study.

The results of this research revealed that goal compatibility was also influenced by activist message strategies. The threat and punishment strategy was found to have the

greatest effect on goal compatibility, followed by persuasive and promise and reward strategies. As previously discussed, there is a strong relationship between problem recognition and goal compatibility, so it is logical that they are both influenced by persuasive strategies. In addition to having characteristics that are similar to persuasive strategies, coercive strategies have features that make them even more conducive to influencing goal compatibility. Coercive strategies assume that the source of the message controls an outcome that is important, be it positive or negative, to the receiver of the message. The more important the outcome is to the receiver, the higher the goal compatibility. Werder (2006) did not find goal compatibility to be significantly influenced by message strategies, so comparison between corporations and activist organizations is not possible.

Finally, the results of this study indicated that message strategies did not significantly influence level of involvement. Therefore, P3.2 was not supported, and no verifiable conclusions can be made about strategy influence on level of involvement. However, for exploratory purposes, a cursory examination of means revealed that the informative strategy produced the highest mean for level of involvement, followed by threat and punishment and persuasive strategies. Werder (2006) found the persuasive strategy to have the greatest effect on level of involvement. It is possible that the different strategies' influence on level of involvement between organization types is due to the issue under consideration. The gopher tortoise issue elicits emotions, so providing unbiased facts via an informative strategy may be sufficient to increase publics' level of involvement. As it may be more difficult to feel involved with the problems of a large

corporation like McDonald's, the persuasive strategy is more effective for corporations in increasing feelings of involvement.

The predictions of the theory of reasoned action—that salient beliefs predict attitude toward behavior, and attitude toward behavior and subjective norm predict behavioral intention—were tested by H4 and H5. These predictions were partially supported by the results of this study. Salient beliefs were found to predict attitude toward behavior; however, only subjective norm was found to significantly predict behavioral intent. The effect from attitude toward behavior was not significant.

Research on the theory of reasoned action has offered a great deal of support for the mutually dependent, yet separate, variables that predict behavioral intent (i.e. Ryan, 1982). Each has an important place in social and behavioral research (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, attitude toward behavior is not a sufficient predictor of behavioral intent alone. Subjective norm must also be considered. In some situations, attitude toward behavior will be a stronger predictor (Werder, 2003), while in other situations subjective norm will have a greater effect, as in this study.

There are a number of possible explanations for the overwhelming influence of subjective norm on behavioral intent in this study. One reason could be the issue addressed. Environmental protection is a salient issue that is discussed frequently in the media. Since the subject of this research involved the protection of the gopher tortoise—a significant contributor to a viable ecosystem—participants may have felt greater than normal motivation to comply with specific referents due to the amount of attention environmental issues are currently receiving. Werder's (2003) study did not address an issue as salient as environmental protection; therefore, participants in the study may have

relied more on their attitude than their subjective norm in assessing their behavioral intent towards McDonald's.

Another explanation for the strength of the subjective norm component could be the population used in this study. The average participant was a 19-year-old freshman (38%) or sophomore (29%). At this stage in life, people still rely heavily on others' opinions; they place high importance on how others view them. Perloff (2003) suggests that two actions are required to implement change within the paradigm of the theory of reasoned action. The first action is to target relevant beliefs through strategies such as campaign messages. The second action is to locate relevant reference groups, to which he offers an example of teens being more influenced by peers than the Surgeon General not to smoke.

Based on the results of Werder's (2003) study, the hypothesis that activist message strategies influence attitude toward strategy was developed. The assumption of this hypothesis is that individuals form attitudes toward messages from organizations. These attitudes then influence salient beliefs, which, then, influence attitudes toward behavior and behavioral intention.

The results of this study, like Werder's (2003), revealed that activist message strategies do influence attitude toward strategy; therefore, H6 was supported. The cooperative problem-solving strategy was found to have the greatest effect on attitude toward strategy, followed equally by the promise and reward and threat and punishment strategies. Werder also found that cooperative problem-solving had the most influence on attitude toward strategy. Threat and punishment, however, had the least influence of all

the strategies in her study. These results, again, offer support for both similarities and differences between ‘typical’ organizations and activist organizations.

The cooperative problem-solving strategy is the most symmetrical strategy, and it is characterized by an open exchange of information. The cooperative effort between public and organization required to define and solve problems makes this strategy appealing to publics of both corporations and activist organizations. However, coercive strategies may be more effective for activist organizations than they are for other organizations. According to Werder (2003), “although many activist organizations rely on threat and punishment strategies to achieve their goals, organizations targeted by activist groups should devise more cooperative, balanced strategic responses to these groups” (p. 22). Coercive messages from activist organizations may be appealing due to the clarity they provide with regard to the outcome of an action. These messages enable activist organizations to clearly demonstrate a problem as well as a solution to the problem. Removing the ambiguity of the consequences may remove the publics’ uncertainty of the results of their action. This enables activist organizations to successfully compete for limited resources, namely, the publics’ attention and action.

Hypotheses 7, 8, and 9 tested the effect of attitude toward strategy on beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions. Attitude toward strategy was found to predict salient beliefs, which supports H7. This finding supports the premise of the theory of reasoned action since the theory proposes that outside factors such as attitude toward target variables—in this case message strategies—affect behavioral intention through their influence on salient beliefs. Specifically, attitude toward strategy accounted for 17% of the variance in salient beliefs.



H8 posited that attitude toward strategy influences attitude toward behavior. Thus study found a significant positive correlation between these two measures, which is supported by previous research (Werder, 2003). A more rigorous statistical test to examine the relationship between the two variables was the next logical step. The results of the linear regression analysis revealed that H8 was supported since attitude toward strategy was found to influence attitude toward behavior. Attitude toward strategy accounted for 42% of the variance in attitude toward behavior, and, since both variables are measures of attitudes, a strong relationship is logical.

H9 predicted that attitude toward strategy influences behavioral intent. The results of this study provide support for this hypothesis and are consistent with previous research (Werder, 2003). Although the theory of reasoned action suggests that outside factors only influence behavioral intent through salient beliefs, the results of this study revealed that attitude toward strategy accounted for 9% of the variance in behavioral intent. It is likely this influence is due to the fact that the outside factor was an attitude measure. Even though it was not an attitude regarding a behavior, it was an attitude, which has been shown to affect behavioral intent, just not as strongly as behavioral attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The small amount of variance in behavioral intent accounted for by the attitude toward strategy supports this supposition.

Exploratory data analysis revealed that message strategies influence attitude toward behavior. Even though activist message strategies only accounted for 7% of the variance in attitude toward behavior, this is still a surprising finding since the theory posits that attitude toward behavior can only be influenced via salient beliefs. Since the

outside factors tested in this study were attitudes (attitude toward strategy) it is possible that attitudes toward behavior were affected as well, producing confounding results. In fact, the correlation analysis of the theory of reasoned action revealed that the relationship between attitude toward strategy and attitude toward behavior was high,  $r = .651$ . The only higher correlation found was between subjective norm and behavioral intent,  $r = .755$ , and the close relationship between these variables has already been discussed.

The results revealed that the cooperative problem-solving strategy had the greatest effect on attitude toward behavior. This same result was found with respect to attitude toward strategy. Threat and punishment was the strategy with the second greatest influence on attitude toward behavior. Again, this result was found in regards to attitude toward strategy as well. Threat and punishment and promise and reward strategies actually had equal means for attitude toward strategy. If the coercive strategies are combined, the strategy with the third greatest influence on attitude toward strategy is the informative strategy. In this case, the strategy with the third greatest influence on attitude toward behavior was also informative.

Even if the coercive strategies are not examined as one unit, attitude toward strategy and attitude toward behavior are most influenced by the same four strategies—only the bottom two, informative and promise and reward, are reversed. Regardless, cooperative problem-solving and threat and punishment had the greatest influence on both attitude toward behavior and attitude toward strategy. Even though attitude toward behavior should not be directly influenced by message strategies, it is reasonable to assume that this is due to the variable's close relationship with attitude toward strategy.

Another area of exploratory research concerned the relationship between participants' geographical region of origination and receiver variables. Results revealed that the geographical region from which a public originates significantly influences information seeking behavior and approaches significance with regards to problem recognition. Northwest region of Florida origination had the greatest influence on both information seeking behavior and problem recognition. While there were only three participants from this region, a limitation to the findings, the results are what one would expect nonetheless.

The gopher tortoise habitat ranges throughout the coastal plain of the southeastern United States, with most being found in northern Florida and southern Georgia. A map of the range of the gopher tortoise can be seen in Figure 7. While their numbers have declined range-wide, there has been a great reduction of historic numbers along the Florida Panhandle ("About the gopher tortoise"). It is reasonable, then, to assume that participants from the Northwest region are nearer to the issue; thus they have a greater recognition of the problem and a desire to seek more information. The South Florida region and the outside of Florida region had the second and third greatest effect on information seeking behavior. Those not from Florida and from the Southern region of Florida have less proximity to the gopher tortoise situation. Therefore they have less knowledge of the situation and will need to seek more information for greater understanding.



Figure 7. Map of the range of the gopher tortoise (from [www.gophertortoiseadvocacygroup.com](http://www.gophertortoiseadvocacygroup.com))

North Central region origination had the second greatest effect on problem recognition. Like those from the Northwest, their location places them in close proximity to the issue, thus they are more likely to recognize a problem with this situation. Those who originated from the South region also recognized a problem. The Southern region of Florida is experiencing changes in its eco system through population growth and the introduction of invasive species. People from this region are more likely to be aware of environmental effects, and, therefore, are more likely to see a problem.

In the final chapter conclusions are formed and recommendations are offered to activist organizations in regards to activist message strategy use. Implications and limitations of this study, as well as areas for future research, are also discussed.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions

“The goal is not to look for similarities between activist organizations and corporations; the goal is to discover and theorize about the differences between the two” (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000, p. 19). This statement by Dozier and Lauzen summarizes the framework for this study; the purpose of which was to discover if the influence of message strategies on variables related to the receiver of the communication was different based on the origination—an activist organization or a corporation—of the message. Differences were found, thus possible explanations for the variations could be explored.

Strategies that most influence receiver variables were found to be different depending on whether they originated from a corporation or an activist organization. Results of the study revealed that persuasive and coercive strategies were more effective for activist organizations than corporations. This is most likely due to the environment in which activist organizations function. There are an infinite number of issues in the world that publics can become active on, and almost as many grassroots operations, special interest groups, and social movements vying for their attention. Activist organizations, therefore, need to make their issue of concern as salient as possible in order to successfully compete with other organizations for publics’ attention and to persuade those publics to become active on their issue.

Power can also explain the use of persuasive and coercive strategies by activist organizations. As Holtzhausen (2007) states, “power plays a major role in both the formation and life cycle of activist groups and organizational responses to it” (p. 373). The historic view of activist organizations is that they lack power compared to that of ‘typical’ organizations (Coombs, 1998), and Zaltman and Duncan (1977) suggest using persuasive strategies when the ability to use power is low. Considering the perception of activist organizations provided by Coombs and the suggestion from Zaltman and Duncan, it is evident why persuasive strategies are recommended for use by activist organizations. Based on a different power perspective, coercive strategies are also recommended for use by activist organizations. Coercive strategies imply that the source of the message controls an outcome that is desired or feared by the receiver of the message. By employing coercive messages, activist organizations can use their issue and the solution to the issue (outcome) to persuade publics to act. Overall, the results of this research suggest that, of the seven activist message strategies, activist organizations will be most successful using persuasive and coercive strategies.

Another suggestion offered by the results is that any communication is better than no communication. For all of the variables activist message strategies significantly influenced, the overall control, in which participants saw no message from the activist organization, had the least effect. When post hoc analyses revealed a significant difference between treatments, it was always between one or more strategy and the overall control. Even the control for strategy type, in which the participants saw a message unrelated to the issue, had a greater influence on receiver variables than the overall control.

Linearity is assumed by the paradigm in which this study was conducted. The results of this study, then, are based on the assumption that “humans are rational animals that systematically utilize or process the information available to them” and that “the information is used in a reasonable way to arrive at a behavioral decision” (Fishbein, 1980 as cited in Petty & Cacioppo, 1996, p. 193). While a multitude of paradigms exist from which the world can be examined, a linear, rational paradigm was appropriate for this study based on the research performed and the assumptions of theories used.

This study contributes to public relations theory development in several important ways. First, it provides support for the use of public relations message strategies derived from Hazleton and Long’s (1988) public relations process model to understand and predict communication effects. Specifically, this study used message strategies derived from the taxonomy to explore the effects of activist communication on receiver variables. The results of this study provide insight into public relations message strategy use and effectiveness, and validate the taxonomy’s use across situations.

This study also provided support for the premise of the situational theory of publics through experimental research and contributed to the extension of the theory. The inclusion of goal compatibility as a predictor of information seeking behavior is one contribution that adds another dimension to the theory’s independent variables. Another important contribution was the use of items related to the Internet to measure information seeking behavior. This finding is particularly relevant to activist organizations. As described above, activist organizations tend to have less power than ‘typical’ organizations, but as Coombs (1998) states, “now activists have a new weapon which can change the organization-stakeholder dynamic—the Internet” (p. 289). The Internet also

provides an opportunity for relationship building (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). It is evident, then, that increasing the behavior of a public visiting a Web site is desired by activist organizations, and should thus be used as an operationalization of information seeking behavior.

While the predictions of the theory of reasoned action were only partially supported in this study, contributions to the theory were made in other areas. For example, this research offered support for the proposition that it is through attitude toward strategy that message strategies influence behavioral intention. Attitude toward strategy was found to influence behavioral intention directly as well as indirectly via salient beliefs and attitude toward behavior. Also, even though attitude toward behavior was not found to have a significant influence on behavioral intent, the results reiterated the importance of subjective norm to the prediction of behavioral intent.

The premise of the theory of reasoned action is that the single best predictor of behavior is the behavioral intention regarding that behavior. Most often studies stop short of examining actual behavior due to the difficult and lengthy process required to conduct such research (Werder, 2003). An attempt to measure actual behavior was made during this research. A Web site, [www.4gopher.com](http://www.4gopher.com), that contained a petition for visitors to sign was developed. After the questionnaires were collected from participants, quarter page flyers with the text “Take action now to save the gopher tortoise. Visit our Web site today,” the Web address, and the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group logo printed on it were distributed. The intent was to catalog visitors to the site in order to compare their actual behavior of visiting the Web site and signing a petition with their reported intent to do so. Differences in behavior based on treatments were also to be examined.



Unfortunately, there was only a single visitor to the Web site, so it was not possible to further research behavior in this study. Though there were fewer visitors than hoped, this study made an attempt to extend the theory by studying actual behavior, and it is advised that this attempt be made again in the future to further enhance research in this area.

#### *Areas for Further Research*

There are other areas addressed in this study, in addition to measuring actual behavior, where future research would be beneficial. The first of these areas concerns the situational theory of publics. While the inclusion of goal compatibility as an independent variable has been explored by this study and others, more research needs to be performed to further explicate its value. Also, this study revealed a strong relationship between goal compatibility and problem recognition. Future research should seek to further understand and explain this relationship.

Activist message strategies would benefit from further research as well. The post hoc analyses, for example, did not reveal many significant differences between strategies, and the manipulation check revealed only mixed support for the manipulations of activist message strategy type. Future research should involve continued examination and development of messages that better represent the strategies. Strategy use and effectiveness should also be tested in diverse settings, using a variety of methodologies, in order to gain a fuller understanding of how message strategies contribute to the public relations process.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

The population in this study is appropriate as college students are often active and involved in campus organizations, activities, and events. This is a demographic that

participates in activist causes and would thus be a target for activist organization communications. However, the participants in this study do not constitute a random sample of the entire student population, and college students do not represent all publics of an activist organization. Therefore, one limitation of this study is that the results cannot be generalized beyond the subjects tested.

The possibility of selection bias is another limitation that needs to be recognized. Selection bias occurs if assigning participants to comparison groups results in unequal distribution of subject-related variables. In this study, there may be preexisting attitudes among participants regarding animal rights or environmental issues that would cause certain responses. Thus it is difficult to know whether the participants' attitudes or the treatment conditions caused the responses to the treatments. Random assignment of the treatment conditions and inclusion of two control groups lessened selection bias, but it is still possible that there will be unequal distribution of attitudinal characteristics among the treatments that could have an impact on the results of this study. Also, the wording of some of the items may have predisposed participants to agree due to social desirability.

The low internal reliability of the items that measure the situational theory of publics is another limitation. Future research should focus on the development and use of valid and reliable multi-item scales for each of the variables

Finally, weak and untested strategy differentiation is another limitation of this study. The manipulation check revealed that the strategic activist messages used in this study only weakly reflected the definitions articulated in the publics relations strategy taxonomy identified by Hazleton (1993). Also, the post hoc analyses did not reveal many

significant differences between strategies. These weaknesses are likely due to the lack of research on the strategies.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the understanding of the influence of activist message strategies on variables related to the receiver of activist communication. This research is also important as it furthers understanding of both message and receiver variables in public relations. It also adds to the extension of both the situational theory of publics and the theory of reasoned action.

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Appendix A  
First Manipulation Check Instrument

Please carefully read all of the seven strategy definitions below then use the following scale to respond to each statement. You may refer back to the article before responding.

1 = Strongly Disagree    2 = Disagree    3 = Undecided    4 = Agree    5 = Strongly Agree

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**Informative strategy:** An informative strategy is based on the presentation of unbiased facts. Informative messages do not draw conclusions, but presume the public will infer appropriate conclusions from accurate data. They are characterized by objectivity and the use of neutral language.

\_\_\_\_\_ The message in the magazine article I read is an informative strategy.  
.....

**Facilitative strategy:** A facilitative strategy is accomplished by making resources available to a public that allow it to act in ways that it is already predisposed to act. Resources may be tangible items, such as tools or money, or they may be directions or information needed to accomplish specific tasks.

\_\_\_\_\_ The message in the magazine article I read is a facilitative strategy.  
.....

**Persuasive strategy:** A persuasive strategy is characterized by appeals to a public's values or emotions. This strategy may include a selective presentation of information. It may use language that is not neutral and reflects the importance of the issue and/or the involvement of the source in the situation. Persuasive messages are directive in the sense that they provide a call for action either indirectly or directly.

\_\_\_\_\_ The message in the magazine article I read is a persuasive strategy.  
.....

**Promise and reward strategy:** A promise and reward strategy uses positive coercion and involves the exercise of power to gain compliance. It includes a request for action and a related outcome that may be directly or indirectly linked to an individual's performance of the request. This strategy implies that the source of the message controls an outcome **desired** by the receiver of the message.

\_\_\_\_\_ The message in the magazine article I read is a promise and reward strategy.  
.....

**Threat and punishment strategy:** A threat and punishment strategy uses negative coercion and involves the exercise of power and threat to gain compliance. It includes a request for action and a related outcome that may be directly or indirectly linked to an individual's performance of the request. This strategy implies that the source of the message controls an outcome **feared or disliked** by the receiver of the message.

\_\_\_\_\_ The message in the magazine article I read is a threat and punishment strategy.  
.....

**Bargaining strategy:** Bargaining strategies are characterized by an organized exchange of messages between communicators. Bargaining strategies use contrasting symbols, such as 'we' and 'they,' to differentiate groups. These strategies require feedback in order to understand each party's acceptable range of alternatives.

\_\_\_\_\_ The message in the magazine article I read is a bargaining strategy.  
.....

**Cooperative problem-solving strategy:** A cooperative problem-solving strategy reflects a willingness to jointly define problems and solutions to problems. These messages are characterized by an open exchange of information to establish a common definition of the problem, common goals, and to share positions and responsibilities about the issue. These strategies use inclusive symbols, such as 'we' and 'us.'

\_\_\_\_\_ The message in the magazine article I read is a cooperative problem-solving strategy.

Appendix B  
Second Manipulation Check Instrument

Items 1-7 in the left column are definitions of seven activist message strategies. The items in the right column are messages from the activist organization Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group. Please write the number of the strategy that best matches/defines each message in the right column

Background: The gopher tortoise is an important part of Florida's ecosystem. Many species rely on its burrows for survival. For the past 16 years, Florida's Pay-to-Pave program has allowed corporate developers to pave over gopher tortoise burrows resulting in the death of more than 94,000 tortoises.

1. An informative strategy is based on the presentation of unbiased facts. Informative messages do not draw conclusions, but presume the public will infer appropriate conclusions from accurate data. They are characterized by objectivity and the use of neutral language.

2. A facilitative strategy is accomplished by making resources available to a public that allow it to act in ways that it is already predisposed to act. Resources may be tangible items, such as tools or money, or they may be directions or information needed to accomplish specific tasks.

3. A persuasive strategy is characterized by appeals to a public's values or emotions. This strategy may include a selective presentation of information. It may use language that is not neutral and reflects the importance of the issue and/or the involvement of the source in the situation. Persuasive messages are directive in the sense that they provide a call for action either indirectly or directly.

4. A promise and reward strategy uses positive coercion and involves the exercise of power to gain compliance. It includes a request for action and a related outcome that may be directly or indirectly linked to an individual's performance of the request. This strategy implies that the source of the message controls an outcome **desired** by the receiver of the message.

5. A threat and punishment strategy uses negative coercion and involves the exercise of power and threat to gain compliance. It includes a request for action and a related outcome that may be directly or indirectly linked to an individual's performance of the request. This strategy implies that the source of the message controls an outcome **feared or disliked** by the receiver of the message.

6. A bargaining strategy is characterized by an organized exchange of messages between communicators. It uses contrasting symbols, such as 'we' and 'they,' to differentiate groups. These strategies require feedback in order to understand each party's acceptable range of alternatives.

7. A cooperative problem-solving strategy reflects a willingness to jointly define problems and solutions to problems. These messages are characterized by an open exchange of information to establish a common definition of the problem, common goals, and to share positions and responsibilities about the issue. These strategies use inclusive symbols, such as 'we' and 'us.'

\_\_\_\_\_ Gopher tortoises that are victims of the Pay-to-Pave Program suffer a slow torture of starvation and immobility before they die. Help stop the inhumane treatment of gopher tortoises. Write to Governor Crist and demand he end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws that require corporate developers to relocate tortoises.

\_\_\_\_\_ If no action is taken to end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws requiring corporate developers to relocate gopher tortoises, the threat of extinction will become a reality within 20 years. Write Governor Crist and demand he end the Pay-to-Pave Program or risk watching the demise of the gopher tortoise and the many species who rely on its burrow for protection.

\_\_\_\_\_ More than 1.7-million acres of Florida land that was once gopher tortoise habitat has been developed into home sites, roads, shopping centers and parking lots. The gopher tortoise is losing its habitat and faces extinction. Relocation is an alternative to paving over gopher tortoises burrows during corporate development.

\_\_\_\_\_ The State has not done enough to protect the invaluable gopher tortoise. Join us in our fight against developers who are burying tortoises alive and the State that gives them permission to do so. We feel your input is crucial to the satisfactory resolution of this problem. In an effort to better understand your needs and concerns, we would like your feedback. Contact the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group at 1-800-4GOPHER. Help us fight them.

\_\_\_\_\_ In cooperation with advocacy groups such as the Sierra Club, we are working closely with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws for gopher tortoise relocation. If you would like to join us in this cooperative effort, please visit our Web site at [www.4gopher.com](http://www.4gopher.com). Together, we can protect the gopher tortoise's habitat and save it from extinction.

\_\_\_\_\_ The gopher tortoise needs your help. Relocation is an alternative to the inhumane burial of tortoises. Write Governor Crist and demand he end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws that require corporate developers to relocate gopher tortoises. You will be rewarded with the survival of these animals for future generations to enjoy.

\_\_\_\_\_ Relocation is an alternative to paving over gopher tortoise burrows during corporate development. If you want to save the gopher tortoise, you can help by visiting [www.4gopher.com](http://www.4gopher.com) to sign a petition to Governor Crist demanding he end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws that require gopher tortoise relocation.

Appendix C  
Informative Treatment



# THE GOPHER TORTOISE

## A Keystone Species of Florida



The gopher tortoise is considered to be a keystone species in Florida. This means that other animals depend on the gopher tortoise for survival. Their burrows offer shelter to more than 300 other species, including the gopher frog and the eastern indigo snake, which is a federally protected species. Gopher tortoise burrows also provide protection to a variety of wildlife during fires.



Wildlife experts estimate that gopher tortoises have existed for 60-million years. However, a 2006 study led by University of South Florida Professor Henry Mushinsky revealed that the population of gopher tortoises in Florida has declined by more than half in the past 60 years. This resulted in the reclassification of the gopher tortoise as "threatened," which is one step below "endangered." The main threat to the gopher tortoise is habitat loss.



For 16 years, Florida's Pay-to-Pave Program has permitted corporate developers to pave over gopher tortoise burrows. Because of their low metabolic rate, tortoises can take months to die. The Pay-to-Pave Program grants permits to developers in exchange for a monetary contribution used to buy land for tortoises elsewhere. As of May 2007, permits issued through the Pay-to-Pave Program have resulted in the death of more than 94,000 gopher tortoises.



**More than 1.7-million acres of Florida land that was once gopher tortoise habitat has been developed into home sites, roads, shopping centers and parking lots. The gopher tortoise is losing its habitat and faces extinction. Relocation is an alternative to paving over gopher tortoise burrows during corporate development.**



The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group was formed in 1978 by a group of biologists and others concerned about the range-wide decline of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). The Advocacy Group offers professional advice for management, conservation, and protection of gopher tortoises; encourages the study of the life history, ecology, and management of gopher tortoises and other upland species; conducts active public information and conservation education programs, and seeks effective protection of the gopher tortoise and other upland species throughout the southeastern United States.



Appendix D  
Facilitative Treatment

# THE GOPHER TORTOISE

## A Keystone Species of Florida



The gopher tortoise is considered to be a keystone species in Florida. This means that other animals depend on the gopher tortoise for survival. Their burrows offer shelter to more than 300 other species, including the gopher frog and the eastern indigo snake, which is a federally protected species. Gopher tortoise burrows also provide protection to a variety of wildlife during fires.



Wildlife experts estimate that gopher tortoises have existed for 60-million years. However, a 2006 study led by University of South Florida Professor



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**Relocation is an alternative to paving over gopher tortoise burrows during corporate development. If you want to save the gopher tortoise, you can help by visiting [www.4gopher.com](http://www.4gopher.com) to sign a petition to Governor Crist demanding he end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws that require gopher tortoise relocation.**



The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group was formed in 1978 by a group of biologists and others concerned about the range-wide decline of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). The Advocacy Group offers professional advice for management, conservation, and protection of gopher tortoises; encourages the study of the life history, ecology, and management of gopher tortoises and other upland species; conducts active public information and conservation education programs, and seeks effective protection of the gopher tortoise and other upland species throughout the southeastern United States.



Appendix E  
Persuasive Treatment



# THE GOPHER TORTOISE

## A Keystone Species of Florida



The gopher tortoise is considered to be a keystone species in Florida. This means that other animals depend on the gopher tortoise for survival. Their burrows offer shelter to more than 300 other species, including the gopher frog and the eastern indigo snake, which is a federally protected species. Gopher tortoise burrows also provide protection to a variety of wildlife during fires.



Wildlife experts estimate that gopher tortoises have existed for 60-million years. However, a 2006 study led by University of South Florida Professor



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For 16 years, Florida's Pay-to-Pave Program has permitted corporate developers to pave over gopher tortoise burrows. Because of their low metabolic rate, tortoises can take months to die. The Pay-to-Pave Program grants permits to developers in exchange for a monetary contribution used to buy land for tortoises elsewhere. As of May 2007, permits issued through the Pay-to-Pave Program have resulted in the death of more than 94,000 gopher tortoises.

**Gopher tortoises that are victims of the Pay-to-Pave Program suffer a slow torture of starvation and immobility before they die. Help stop the inhumane treatment of gopher tortoises. Write to Governor Crist and demand he end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws that require corporate developers to relocate tortoises.**



The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group was formed in 1978 by a group of biologists and others concerned about the range-wide decline of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). The Advocacy Group offers professional advice for management, conservation, and protection of gopher tortoises; encourages the study of the life history, ecology, and management of gopher tortoises and other upland species; conducts active public information and conservation education programs, and seeks effective protection of the gopher tortoise and other upland species throughout the southeastern United States.



Appendix F  
Promise and Reward Treatment

# THE GOPHER TORTOISE

## A Keystone Species of Florida



The gopher tortoise is considered to be a keystone species in Florida. This means that other animals depend on the gopher tortoise for survival. Their burrows offer shelter to more than 300 other species, including the gopher frog and the eastern indigo snake, which is a federally protected species. Gopher tortoise burrows also provide protection to a variety of wildlife during fires.



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**The gopher tortoise needs your help. Relocation is an alternative to the inhumane burial of tortoises. Write Governor Crist and demand he end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws that require corporate developers to relocate gopher tortoises. You will be rewarded with the survival of these animals for future generations to enjoy.**



The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group was formed in 1978 by a group of biologists and others concerned about the range-wide decline of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). The Advocacy Group offers professional advice for management, conservation, and protection of gopher tortoises; encourages the study of the life history, ecology, and management of gopher tortoises and other upland species; conducts active public information and conservation education programs, and seeks effective protection of the gopher tortoise and other upland species throughout the southeastern United States.



Appendix G  
Threat and Punishment Treatment



# THE GOPHER TORTOISE

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**If no action is taken to end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws requiring corporate developers to relocate gopher tortoises, the threat of extinction will become a reality within 20 years. Write Governor Crist and demand he end the Pay-to-Pave Program or risk watching the demise of the gopher tortoise and the many species who rely on its burrow for protection.**



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Appendix H  
Bargaining Treatment

# THE GOPHER TORTOISE

## A Keystone Species of Florida



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**The State has not done enough to protect the invaluable gopher tortoise. Join us in our fight against developers who are burying tortoises alive and the State that gives them permission to do so. We feel your input is crucial to the satisfactory resolution of this problem. In an effort to better understand your needs and concerns, we would like your feedback. Contact the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group at 1-800-4GOPHER. Help us fight them.**



The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group was formed in 1978 by a group of biologists and others concerned about the range-wide decline of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). The Advocacy Group offers professional advice for management, conservation, and protection of gopher tortoises; encourages the study of the life history, ecology, and management of gopher tortoises and other upland species; conducts active public information and conservation education programs, and seeks effective protection of the gopher tortoise and other upland species throughout the southeastern United States.



Appendix I  
Cooperative Problem-Solving Treatment



# THE GOPHER TORTOISE

## A Keystone Species of Florida



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**In cooperation with advocacy groups such as the Sierra Club, we are working closely with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to end the Pay-to-Pave Program and enact new state laws for gopher tortoise relocation. If you would like to join us in this cooperative effort, please visit our Web site at [www.4gopher.com](http://www.4gopher.com). Together, we can protect the gopher tortoise's habitat and save it from extinction.**



The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group was formed in 1978 by a group of biologists and others concerned about the range-wide decline of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). The Advocacy Group offers professional advice for management, conservation, and protection of gopher tortoises; encourages the study of the life history, ecology, and management of gopher tortoises and other upland species; conducts active public information and conservation education programs, and seeks effective protection of the gopher tortoise and other upland species throughout the southeastern United States.



Appendix J  
Strategy Type Control Treatment

# GOPHER TRACKS

## An Educational Book

### Project

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The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group has distributed *Gopher Tracks*, a book published by Florida State University, to every public elementary school within the range of the gopher tortoise, as well as to a number of schools located in adjoining counties. Written at the fourth grade level, *Gopher Tracks* introduces gopher tortoise ecology, upland habitats, the role of fire, and environmental stewardship through the adventures of two girls.



August 2007.

This allowed us to distribute *Gopher Tracks* to 2,785 schools located in 70 counties, and we have received numerous calls, e-mails, and letters from teachers and librarians who greatly appreciated the book and are using it in their classrooms. Many people have contacted us requesting additional copies of the book. Unfortunately, we only printed enough copies for our project and do not have extras available. Perhaps if the demand continues, Susan Jane Ryan (the book's author) will have it reprinted again sometime in the future.



**Thanks again to everyone who donated money towards the reprinting.**

**Contributors to the *Gopher Tracks* book project include: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Audubon Society of Southwest Florida, Coastal Wildlife Club, Lemon Bay Conservancy, Seminole Audubon Society, Southern Ecosystems Research, and The Tortoise Reserve, Inc.**



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Appendix K  
Instrument



## INSTRUCTIONS

Most questions in this questionnaire make use of rating scales with seven places. Please answer the following questions by circling the number that best describes your opinion. Some of the questions may appear to be similar, but they do address somewhat different issues. Please read each question carefully, be sure to answer all items, and circle only one number on a single scale. There are four sections total on two pages, front and back.

### Problem Recognition

- 1) I do not believe corporate development is a threat to the gopher tortoise's habitat.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 2) I believe there is a problem with the Pay-to-Pave Program.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 3) I believe there is a problem with the current method of handling gopher tortoises during corporate development.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 4) I do not view issues related to the gopher tortoise as problematic.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

### Level of Involvement

- 5) I am personally affected by situations involving the gopher tortoise.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 6) I am concerned about the gopher tortoise, but I am not personally affected by its habitat loss.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 7) I do not feel I have any involvement with situations involving the gopher tortoise.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 8) The survival of the gopher tortoise affects me.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

### **Constraint Recognition**

- 9) I do not think there is anything I can do to help improve the gopher tortoise's chances of survival.

*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

- 10) My actions will improve the gopher tortoise's chances of survival.

*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

- 11) I am able to make a difference in situations involving the gopher tortoise.

*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

- 12) My actions will be too inconsequential to impact gopher tortoise habitat loss.

*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

### **Goal Compatibility**

- 13) In regards to protecting the gopher tortoise, I take the same position as the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group

*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

- 14) The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group has goals that are similar to mine.

*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

- 15) My goals are not compatible with the goals of the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group.

*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

- 16) The Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group and I do not want the same thing.

*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

### **Information Seeking Behavior/Behavioral Intent**

- 1) I plan to seek out additional information about ways that I can help the gopher tortoise.

*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

- 2) I plan to visit a Web site for further information on situations involving the gopher tortoise.

*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

- 3) I would send an email requesting further information on situations involving the gopher tortoise.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 4) I would sign a petition to change permitting laws to protect gopher tortoises.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 5) I would forward an email about situations involving the gopher tortoise to my friends.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 6) I would donate money to the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group for the protection of the gopher tortoise.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 7) I would write a letter to the governor asking that permitting laws be changed to protect the gopher tortoise's habitat.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 8) I would attend a meeting of the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

**Attitude Toward Strategy**

- 1) Messages from the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group are  
*Unbalanced*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Balanced*  
*Not Informative*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Informative*  
*Not Credible*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Credible*  
*Untrustworthy*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Trustworthy*

**Salient Beliefs**

- 2) I believe that environmental protection is important.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 3) I believe that animal rights advocacy is important.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

- 4) I believe habitat loss is a problem for the gopher tortoise.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 5) I believe corporate development is important to economic success.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

**Subjective Norm**

- 6) If aware of situations involving the gopher tortoise, people who are important to me would think that there is a problem.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 7) People who are close to me would want me to sign a petition to protect the gopher tortoise.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 8) If my friends and family knew about the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group, they would want me to support it.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*
- 9) Writing a letter to a politician to encourage gopher tortoise relocation is something people like me do.  
*Strongly Disagree*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Strongly Agree*

**Attitude Toward Behavior**

- 10) My attitude toward the Gopher Tortoise Advocacy Group is  
*Unfavorable*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Favorable*  
*Negative*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Positive*  
*Bad*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Good*
- 11) My attitude toward situations involving the gopher tortoise is  
*Unfavorable*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Favorable*  
*Negative*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Positive*  
*Bad*   1   :   2   :   3   :   4   :   5   :   6   :   7   *Good*

**Demographics**

Gender (please circle):      Male              Female

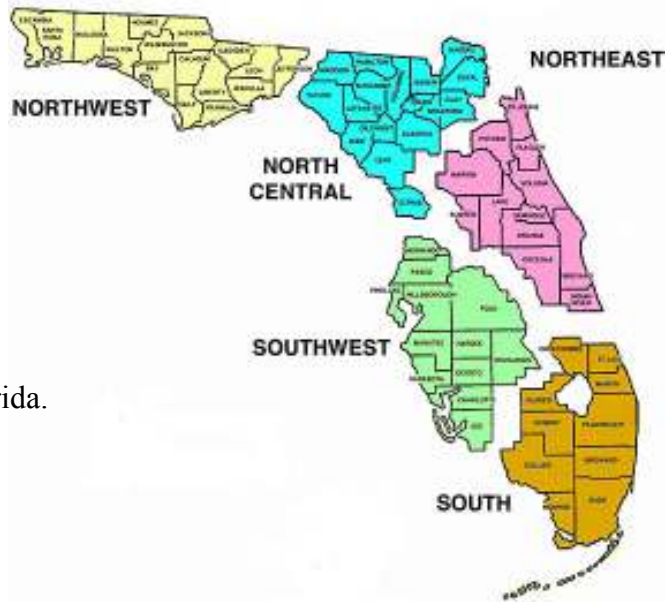
Age \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Major \_\_\_\_\_

Class standing (please circle):      Freshman      Sophomore      Junior      Senior  
Graduate      Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the geographical region of Florida that best describes where you are from:



I am not from Florida.

Thank you for your participation