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Blogging in Defense of Themselves: Social Media Implications for Rhetorical Criticism and the Genre of Apologia

Ramona Dee Wheeler

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Blogging in Defense of Themselves: Social Media Implications
for Rhetorical Criticism and the Genre of Apologia

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Master of Arts

The advent of social media has provided an arena where barriers to entry are low. Individuals may persuade, question others and defend both their philosophies and their actions. This study examines the classic role of rhetorical criticism as it may apply in new media venues. A blog written by a public figure was examined through a synthesis of rhetorical criticism analyses derived from Ware and Linkugel, Vartabedian, and Downey. Four strategies and associated positioning in the practice of apologia were identified in selected blog posts, indicating the genre of apologia applies to social media apologies and extends the genre of apologia. Rhetorical criticism was found to be an effective tool in identifying rhetorical postures and strategies used in social media.

Keywords: social, media, internet, blog, interaction, discourse, apologetic, apologia, rhetorical, criticism, generic, genre, denial, bolstering, differentiation, transcendence, reformative, transformative, strategy, strategies, justification, vindication, explanation, absolution, defense, posture, self-exoneration, self-absolution, self-sacrifice, self-service, self-deception

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Perhaps my thesis is also indebted in part to Dr. Robert Vartabedian, whose writings galvanized my understanding of apologetic discourse, and to Edwin Black whose seminal work and rye cynicism provided humorous perspective regarding the reprinting of his book on apologia, stating he hoped it would be a "revival … and not the exhumation of a deceptively twitching corpse." It appears he would have appreciated both the evolving impacts of social media on apologia and our current cultural fascination with the zombie apocalypse.

To my family and dear friends, thank you for your kindness and patience that helped see me through the challenges of these past five years, and for not running when you saw me waving a new transcript as I headed your way. Finally, to my husband and companion who walked beside me throughout this academic journey, I am forever grateful for your wisdom, support, and encouragement that bring enlightenment to my life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The role of social media continues to evolve with an explosion of online users who have moved beyond computer mediated communication and embraced multiple platforms that offer the social presence of interaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61) and cyberspace activities ranging from social networking to posting videos and images, microblogging, and more (Khang, Ki & Ye, 2012). Through the medium of social media, multiple voices can be connected and heard in a sea of opinion on any given topic, and therein lies its appeal. Continuing in the vein of Mumford's (1967) observation of the "dawn of consciousness," the rise of social media has "brought an increasing awareness of past experience, along with fresh expectations of future possibility" (p.29, para. 2). In an online world, electronic social interaction has redefined popular culture, changing society through an immediate and organic movement that has been heretofore not possible.

Research into social media is recent in academic terms, as scholars have attempted to identify and address each viable platform in a rapidly changing landscape. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) grouped social media applications into six distinct categories that were based on specific characteristics: (1) collaborative projects, (2) blogs, (3) content communities, (4) social networking, (5) gaming, and (6) virtual social worlds (p. 59). In 2012, Khang, Ki and Ye completed an extensive review of the literature that encompassed 14 years of social media research accumulated through the disciplines of advertising, communication, marketing, and public relations. The researchers identified 22 social media types using a broader definition that allowed for the inclusion of earlier forms of online social tools, such as discussion boards, personal home pages, and instant messaging. These types also included more current Web 2.0 user-generated content through social networking, podcasts, video and photo sharing, text

messaging, blogs and micro-blogging, and other online communities that include virtual gambling, and the highly-interactive environments of gaming and social worlds (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008; Khang, Ke & Ye, 2012;). Researchers in recent studies examining online habits of over 11,000 people have discovered that societal changes have resulted in a "fundamental shift" (The evolution of dating, 2012) in the way individuals connect with one another; fully 69% of adults online are users of social networking websites (Brenner, 2012), and real-life relationships are being forged through online connections, with one in six marriages and over 10 million couples in America all meeting in online social venues (Conger, 2011). Social media is also changing politics in countries around the world, from local concerns to national elections and international movements. During the 2012 elections it was reported, "58 percent of Americans get the majority of their political news from social media, and 88 percent of adults on social media are registered voters" (Stagg, 2012, para. 2). In response, savvy candidates used social media tools to reach their constituencies, influencing opinion and altering election outcomes.

The new media stage of social interaction has also become the cyberspace arena of accusation and defense in a manner very similar to the immediacy present in the amphitheater of the assembly during the time of Aristotle: the locale for discourse is personal, simultaneously intimate and public; the accused has a platform from which to speak in self-defense and be heard; and accusers have the opportunity to counter or respond. Social media provides a return to a somewhat familiar face-to-face interaction that is now in an electronic new media forum, facilitated by the technology of personal computers, cell phones, and Internet cameras called "web cams" that provide videos and interaction in real-time. There is a "social dimension" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 62) within the interactions of social media, in which individuals

engage in "self-presentation" through strategically controlled disclosure to create desired impressions. The greater the need for a higher social presence within a particular environment, the more important creating and maintaining the appropriate image and impressions have become.

One of the social media environments that has demonstrated longevity in terms of early adoption and sustained interest is that of the personal website known as the "blog." According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), "Blogs, which represent the earliest form of Social Media, are special types of websites that … come in a multitude of different variations" (p. 63, para. 2), although text-based blogs continue to be the most common blog format.

> The word blog — it works as both noun and verb — is short for Web log. It was coined in 1997 to describe a website where you could post daily scribblings, journal-style, about whatever you like — mostly critiquing and linking to other articles online that may have sparked your thinking … Blogs can be about anything: politics, sex, baseball, haiku, car repair. There are blogs about blogs. (Grossman, 2004, para. 3)

Typically, a blog is managed by one individual and is often written as though it were a private conversation-style communication between friends, but it provides the possibility of connecting with others through response comments and expanding its reach through links to external websites and other blog posts. Grossman (2004) added an important distinction to the discussion in his article on blogs that provides some insight as to why they are so effective:

> Blogs act like a lens, focusing attention on an issue until it catches fire … Blogs have voice and personality. They're human. They come to us not from some mediagenic anchorbot on an air-conditioned sound stage, but from an individual. They represent — no, they are — the voice of the little guy. (Grossman, 2004, para. 7-9)

> In a way, blogs represent everything the Web was always supposed to be: a mass medium controlled by the masses, in which getting heard depends solely on having something to say and the moxie to say it. (Grossman, 2004, para. 13)

Previously, when someone was dissatisfied with a company the only recourse was an attempt to work through the organization's customer service department. Where consumers once "voiced their dissatisfaction" (Ward & Ostrom, 2006) by complaining about a company's lack of service and their "personal grievances" to friends and family, they are "taking their complaints to the first mass media easily and cheaply available to the public ... constructing Web sites to tell the world about their dissatisfaction" (p. 220). Such complaints might take the form of something as simple as one short online post or, according to researchers Ward and Ostrom (2006), disgruntled customers sometimes construct an entire website to protest against an organization with "interlocking rhetorical tactics (injustice, identity, and agency framing) consumers use to mobilize mass audiences against a firm" (p. 220). When "Toot" the beloved family pet was run over by a delivery truck that was exactly what the family did.

SearsKilledMyDog.com

The Sears delivery truck pulled up to the house, and Toot bolted out the front door with a pack of family dogs to join in the excitement. A raised hand was mistaken for a greeting by the driver, and with a yelp the little dog was fatally injured and died. The devastated couple took their grievance to the store manager, who apologized for their loss. Then he told them it was their fault their dog had died, not once but on two separate occasions. With no resolution forthcoming, and now left with the burden of guilt added to their grief, the couple bought a website domain and published a web log to the Internet, and posted a link to their blog on Facebook. Less than 24 hours later SearsKilledMyDog.com had received thousands of web page

views, essentially going "viral" through the power of social media, and it was a hugely popular topic "trending" on Twitter, a prominent social microblog. Fortunately for Sears, the corporation's savvy social media manager was looking at the company's online dashboard that tracks social media traffic before heading home on a Friday night when the negative website blog post about the tragic loss of the little dog surfaced in reports. Within 24 hours he had contacted Toot's family to work with them in an effort to "make it right," and a public relations crisis was averted (Farnsworth, 2009; Ramirez, 2009; Sears Killed My Dog, 2009; Lindsay's Thought Corner, 2010).

One of the implicit early assumptions of social media was that conversations were authentic personal discussions; however, it soon became evident that not all blogs were a result of a natural discussion or a spontaneous grassroots occurrence. Organizations began adopting the new media communications channel and created blogs as another business strategy with the objective to interact with consumers. Some large companies managed to do it well, such as the hugely successful blog by tech-savvy Jonathan Schwartz at Sun Microsystems who candidly blogs in "geek-speak" (Gunther, 2006). Then there were a few organizations that viewed the online conversation as an extension of advertising and, according to some ethicists, misused social media when they created fake blogs, or "flogs" as part of a marketing campaign:

> When it was revealed that several blogs seemingly created by consumer evangelists were, in fact, sponsored by the companies whose very products the blogs espoused, the blognoscenti were quick to debate and criticize the ethics of this marketing practice. After each flog was exposed, the companies had to contend with the controversy in the blogosphere. (Burns, 2008, p. 41, para. 1)

The lessons learned from mistakes that continue to be made by enthusiastic corporate social media managers stand as examples of what not to do in the digital environment of social media.

Wal-Marting Across America

In an effort to improve its image, Wal-Mart hired the Edelman public relations firm to create a strategic publicity campaign. But it was the PR giant's supposed expertise in social media spaces that went awry when the firm hired a couple to blog about their experiences as they traveled cross-country in an RV and camped in Wal-Mart parking lots. While "Jim and Laura" actually were a couple in real-life, who did indeed camp at Wal-Mart stores from Las Vegas to Georgia and write blog posts about employees praising the giant box retailer, it turns out that was about the extent of the truth. Shortly after launching the fake blog it was revealed that "Wal-Marting Across America" was sponsored by a front group, which had been created by Edelman as part of the broader publicity campaign. Even their travel, fuel, and the spiffy RV emblazoned with the blog's name and the Working Families for Wal-Mart logo were all provided by Wal-Mart to freelance writer Laura St. Claire and her travel companion "Jim," who was in reality James Thresher, a *Washington Post* photographer (Burns, 2008).

> It's inevitable that a PR firm like Edelman would create a phony blog for one of its clients ... For all of the hype over "conversation" as the new media paradigm, no one has yet figured out how to use conversation to reliably achieve any business objectives. So Edelman naturally fell back on the approach that has worked for decades — control the conversation by manufacturing it, because if you can't control the conversation, then you can't make it do what you want. Edelman wanted to make consumers think that Wal-Mart is a hip place that you'd want to use as the anchor point for a roadtrip. The problem is it's not. And because blogging is not a control-based medium, Edelman couldn't make

> Wal-Mart appear to be something it's not. It rang false, and they got caught. (Karp, 2006, para. 1)

The blog posts written by Laura, who received a stipend for her writing, were glowing reports of happy employees they met during their travels, whose lives had been dramatically changed for the better through the benevolence of their employer. However, given the number of class actions lawsuits that had been filed against Wal-Mart by its own wage earners, the steady stream of positive stories had all the ear-markings of a publicity stunt according to some bloggers, who were cynical of the Wal-Marting blog's authenticity and challenged the couple's identity.

Within two weeks of its launch, *Businessweek* published an article that unveiled the deception and exposed the contrived blog (Gogoi, 2006). Initially silent, Edelman first tried to deflect blame for the fiasco but eventually made a full disclosure and ultimately claimed full responsibility for its mistakes that had caused the brouhaha. Richard Edelman, president and chief executive, publically apologized and then later revealed that the PR firm was also behind two additional fake blogs for its client: Working Families for Wal-Mart and Paid Critics.

Because blogs in general and social media in particular do not have the traditional media gatekeepers and editorial content control, unfiltered information is immediately disseminated directly to an audience in real time (Burns, 2008, p. 42). In the immediacy of expectations within the microwave society of Western culture, it should not be surprising that micro-blogging with its quick sound-bite messages of 140 characters or less is a phenomenon that has made social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter so compellingly popular, and consequently provides equally compelling risks.

Facebook Faux Pas CFO-style

According to TribeHR, its human resources software has compiled data which report that "four in 10 companies worldwide now say that misuse of social networks is an issue" (Hsu, 2012), and just in 2011 alone fully 42% indicated personnel problems associated with social media had resulted in disciplinary action. Social media savvy Gene Morphis was no exception. As chief financial officer of Francesca's Holding, Morphis had an impressive Internet presence, between Facebook posts, Twitter updates, and his personal blog titled Morph's View, in which he discussed everything from cigars to travel, basketball, and politics. In fact, that is exactly what got him fired (Coleman-Lochner, 2012; Hsu, 2012; Lutz, 2012; Silverman, 2012). It was bad enough that he used social media channels to vent work frustrations with posts such as this one to his personal Facebook account: "Earnings released. Conference call completed. How do you like me now Mr. Shorty?" (Silverman, 2012, para. 7). Earlier he had tweeted this update: "Dinner w/Board tonite [sic]. Used to be fun. Now one must be on guard every second," (para. 6). However, his employer determined that Morphis had stepped over the line when it was discovered that he had been regularly posting "financial results and details of meetings" (Daily Mail Reporter, 2012). An investigation was launched, and Morphis was fired.

Why Gottfried Got Fired

Researchers in the United Kingdom discovered an alarming 68% of Brits who use Twitter were found to have "little or no awareness of their legal responsibilities" (Whittaker, 2011), in a country that enforces strict libel and defamation laws. The British are in good company. The title of one such NPR news story could be used as the lead sentence in a never-ending series of stories of people making foolish choices in an online social media environment:

"Man tweets without really thinking about it first" (Pell, 2011). Such was the case of a comedian whose attempt at humor backfired in the face of tragedy.

The vocal talent behind what has been referred to as the Aflac iconic duck that would "quack" the insurance company's name in its commercials for over 11 years in its television commercials used to be comedian Gilbert Gottfried (Berkowitz, 2011; Savitz, 2011). At least, that was until he posted a series of insensitive and offensive jokes on Twitter, following the devastation of the Japanese earthquake and subsequent tsunami in March 2011, in which 13,000 lives were lost, and hundreds of thousands more were injured or displaced. In response to the tragedy, Gottfried "spent the weekend tweeting a slew of gags" (de Moraes, 2011, para. 3), including tweet comments such as: "Japan is really advanced. They don't go to the beach. The beach comes to them," and even more reprehensible: "I just split up with my girlfriend, but like the Japanese say, 'There'll be another one floating by any minute now'." (de Moraes, 2011, para. 8). Adding to the outrage of Gottfried's unconscionable Twitter updates is the fact that Aflac is the top insurance company in the Japanese market, doing fully two-thirds of its business in that country. Gottfried was summarily fired for his failure to think before tweeting.

Wrestling with the Right Response

Social media can be an effective tool in damage control, as evidenced by a recent Twitter exchange to a complaint by popular comedienne October Jones who has over 38,000 fans regularly following his Twitter text messages that are creatively posted to appear as though they are from his dog. Apparently Jones did not like the chicken sandwich he had purchased from a British supermarket chain, so his tweet stated that the sandwich "tastes like it was beaten to death by Hulk Hogan" (Snow, 2012, para. 2), to which grocer Sainsbury immediately tweeted back with a response that also referenced popular professional wrestlers from the 1980s and 1990s:

"Really sorry it wasn't up to scratch. We will replace Mr [sic] Hogan with Ultimate Warrior on our production line immediately." The innovative response by Sainsbury turned the initially negative attack into a clever exchange that has gone viral with thousands of views on the Twitter microblog post. Clearly, social media is the immediate conversation of today.

What is Aristotle Doing in Cyberspace?

When orators spoke in defense of themselves historically, the venue options and opportunities were specifically for the purpose of apologetic speech and typically rather limited. Since the age of the Greek philosophers, speakers have recognized the power they have to persuade others and the associated ethical responsibility to produce information in support of the conclusions they advocate. Aristotelian logic, while not necessarily reflective of reality by modern interpretation, was nonetheless a method of seeking truth in the first glimmerings of western epistemology. That original defense has evolved with the passage of time, and apologetic dialogue has taken on broader meaning and wider scope beyond the realm of the printed word (Foss, 2009, p. 6).

Significance for social media. The significant aspect of this study lies in the fact that it appears to be the first to examine the digital context of social media in search of evidence of apologia through a traditional rhetorical approach, by examining online discourse in search of apologetic artifacts. No published research that examined social media as the vehicle for apologia could be identified during the literature review for this thesis. In fact, only a few academic papers were identified during the research process that discussed rhetoric in new media and a handful explored leadership use of social channels to make a public apology. The advent of the Internet and the subsequent proliferation of social media have introduced a unique platform where barriers to entry are extremely low, creating a unique environment wherein

individuals in the general populace, for the first time ever, have unilateral access and genuinely equal and unrestricted opportunity for their voice to be heard.

Specifically, this study examined how the chief executive officer of a nationally recognized teaching hospital used social media as a strategic business tool on the Internet in the blogosphere when it was beneficial to his position. Paul Levy discussed a variety of topics from healthcare challenges to soccer, and set the watermark for other healthcare institutions through an approach that challenged the status quo and championed the need for greater transparency. Levy employed social media to further his organization and its accomplishments, and when the need arose he employed language of self-defense using the social platform of his blog for apologetic dialogue. Initially, Levy was praised in the media for his openness; however, when it was later revealed that he had been involved in an inappropriate relationship, Levy was conspicuously silent on the topic, ultimately condemned in the media, and eventually forced to resign from his high-profile position as CEO.

Research included examining blog posts written over a two-year period with specific focus on five distinct situations in which Levy defended himself and his organization in his online musings through the use of apologia. The first four situations presented opportunities for Levy to tell his side of the story in sensitive blog topics ranging from: (1) his salary as chief executive officer of a nonprofit organization; (2) hospital infection rates which are annually reported to regulatory bodies but not generally made public; (3) a "never event" in which his hospital operated on the wrong body part of a patient; to (4) economic challenges his hospital was facing and the very real probability of staff layoffs. The fifth and final topic is a series of blog posts written by Levy, which centered on his efforts at damage control surrounding allegations of misconduct in an inappropriate personal relationship. In keeping with the tradition

of rhetorical criticism and generic description critical methods, each of these situations was explored to discern common denominators of the group (German, 1985, p. 89).

The purpose of this thesis is to describe the rhetorical process used to examine social media in search of evidence of traditional apologia and to determine whether social media extends the genre of apologia. The nature of this topic requires: first, an understanding of social media in general, and specifically within the context of social media and the blogosphere; and secondly, an exploration of genre in the discipline of rhetorical criticism, to identify an appropriate system or combination of systems to be applied during the analysis process through the critical evaluation steps selected for this study, in search of apologia.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Redefining Social Theory of the Media

New media in an online venue enhances current theoretical understanding as it brings new perspective to theories from other disciplines into the communications environment. Consequently, the Internet infuses the study of computer-mediated communication with a new dynamic as it refreshes existing theories and expands current assumptions through the inclusion of online news and information, social media and interpersonal interaction online. Georgakopoulou (2011) illustrated this concept in her paper, stating:

> Academic studies of computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC) are currently flourishing in a variety of social discipline … [and] the range of topics and methodologies, as well as the pace of advances can only be rivaled by the rapid changes in the ever-growing medium itself. Research fascination with human-to-human interaction via computer networks such as the Internet cannot but be related to the fact that, particularly in the last decade, this type of interaction has taken the world of communication by storm, thus by now having secured a legitimate place for itself next to the older and well-established forms of mediated communication (e.g. telephone, television). As a result, it is hardly an exaggeration to claim the CMC has truly revolutionalized social interaction. (p.93)

The digital media convergence has brought about more changes than any other form of media in the history of the discipline of communications, effectively introducing new theory. As Herring (2004) observed, the "question is no longer: does technology shape human communication, but rather: under what circumstances, in what ways, and to what extent?" (p. 27).

Social Media: Informing the Public Discussion

The role of social media has continued to evolve; while it doesn't control popular culture per se, it certainly informs the discussion. Beyond the printed word, social media provides exposure to a multitude of different attitudes and an exploration of diverse viewpoints through expressive forms. These expressive forms are not the traditional journalistically-driven criteria. In other words, it is no longer the journalist that is driving the message; rather, it is in fact social media. New multimedia environments have proven to enhance understanding and retention by offering content that is more compelling and relevant through a non-linear presentation dynamic that is also more engaging. This emerging phenomenon is changing the way individuals interact with one another, bringing cultures closer to a global community (Paul & Fiebich, 2005).

Social networking sites have become prominent on the Internet, and social media has become the messenger welding an immediacy and ubiquity that is unprecedented. In August 2011 the Pew Research Center released results from a survey that indicated over "half of all adults in the United States said they used a social networking site" (Sengupta, 2011, para. 1), up from the 5% reported just six years ago. "The telescreens and Big Brother in Orwell's 1984 (1948) have become staples in commentary on the meaning of mass media" (Peters, 1999, p. 27), and Toffler (1984) first began speculating on the events of societal developments and future communications in earlier articles in the 1970s. In his 1984 landmark book *Future Shock,* Toffler accurately predicted that the increase of the ability to interact with electronic databases would create a reality where people could access a range of opinions on any topic that was statistically significant. Brunner (1975) expanded on these concepts by writing fiction stories which exemplified the effects that Toffler proposed. But these futurist authors neither foresaw

the current social media phenomenon nor the shifting cultural impacts it would have on society as a whole.

Moving through time and media. Fully a quarter century ago, Webster (1986) echoed the prevailing academic view that emerging new media effects would change audience behavior in his observation that "the mass audience has become increasingly fragmented" (p. 89). Although Webster's study focused on the innovation of television, his analysis on selective exposure was prophetic:

> As a modest beginning, theorists should recognize that viewers are, as never before, in a position to construct media environments that may be quite different from those of their neighbors. What determines these differences should be the subject of considerably more scholarly attention than is currently the case. (Webster, 1986, p. 89)

While Webster's observations were centered on the innovation of television, the contemporary critical approach to rhetoric should expand on these ideas to explore the implications for emerging new media such as the Internet and its exponentially growing usage.

Early in this century a debate raged around the validity of blogs as opposed to traditional journalism, but time and again during the past decade these previously labeled "unskilled amateurs" (Bowman & Willis, 2003, p. 13) have managed to scoop journalists in getting the real story. Social media have become a critical force that influences and often drives public opinion and discussion, as evidenced in the urgent warning from creative agency owner Leslie Ann Bradshaw (White, 2008), who argues that participation in the microblog conversation is critical to the survival of traditional media. According to Bradshaw, "Journalists need to 'adopt or be left behind,' to stay competitive, get information and distill it down" (White, 2008, para. 24) for today's consumers, if the news media are to remain viable. According to the *Seattle Times*

newspaper's editorial columnist Blethen (2009), the "Internet has not only changed the way people communicate and live, this societal shift is also grinding up newspapers and journalists" (para. 2). A perfect storm has struck traditional news organizations, as technological innovations bring about the deconstruction of the craft of delivering news amid shrinking advertising revenue in a declining economy. Throughout the nation, newspaper organizations have been suffering from historic lows in circulation, tumbling advertising, and tight credit, and nowhere is this more evident than in those metropolitan centers with two daily newspapers (Perez-Pena, 2009). The oldest newspaper in Colorado closed its doors for good in February 2009 when it failed to find a buyer after posting unprecedented losses. Copies of the final run for *The Rocky Mountain News* lay strewn about the newsroom, and "ashes were mostly all that was left" (Johnson, 2009, para. 4) of the newspaper's 150-year legacy. One month later, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* became "the biggest victim yet in a financial slump that is crushing the U.S. newspaper industry" (Clark, 2009, para. 3), when that major metro daily newspaper published its last print edition and moved to an online-only venue maintained by a skeleton staff of 20 journalists.

Print media is vanishing, being replaced by electronic formats as struggling newspapers move to an online publication in efforts to remain viable in today's fluid environment. News teams throughout the country are cross-training in a variety of multimedia formats to keep up with technological advances and meet consumer demands in the digital age (Fahmy, 2008). Social media in all its forms has become an expected staple of mainstream media, and "[p]ublications of all sizes mix blog posts with other news, both online and in print ... Still, big media is not dominating blogs or social media by any stretch. No one is," Baker and Green (2008, para. 44) contend. The authors echo the philosophy at the core of a growing number of journalistic endeavors that are experimenting with emerging multimedia technologies as a way to

supplement online news, in an attempt to remain current in the conversation. In fact, journalists around the world have come to depend upon the immediacy of social media, and Twitter updates in particular, to keep them abreast of news-worthy events in real-time. British journalist Guy Adams tweeted complaints about the tape-delayed coverage of the London 2012 Olympics, and his account was shut down after he included an email address for Gary Zenkel, head executive over NBC Olympic coverage. A subsequent firestorm ensued, and both Twitter and NBC quickly backpedaled after landing in disfavor with loyal Twitter users who re-tweeted the email address and included the topic-identifying hashtag #NBCFail in over 32,000 posts. Two days later Twitter acquiesced and reinstated Adam's account. "Doing a journalist's job without Twitter these days is nigh impossible," he said in response. "It is an essential tool of my trade. I'm now freed. So I can get on with my job" (Haughney, 2012).

The Face of Social Media (Make that 'Facebook')

Studies on evolving societal response to new media reveal positive effects of using the Internet on communication, social involvement, and well-being (Kraut et al., 2002; Pujazon-Zazik & Park, 2010). Computer-mediated communication has changed through social media interaction that provides opportunity for participants to relate with others, and learn to engage in critical thinking toward expressing themselves in a healthy and normative manner, according to researchers Pujazon-Zazik and Park (2010). The multimedia environment creates a changing audience as well, from readers to participants and contributors who identify by interest, not just geography. Audiences are growing numbers of users of online news and social media, for example, who develop a form of trust as they experience content in these environments (Paul & Fiebich, 2005). Social sites have become prominent on the Internet, and social media has become the messenger wielding an immediacy and ubiquity that is unprecedented. Facebook

announced in 2012 that the social networking site has over 901 million users, and the Twitter micro-blogging site has registered over 500 million people (Wasserman, 2012), who are among those willing to "tweet" quick messages of 140 characters or less and follow Twitter postings. "Though some social scientists may criticize Facebook … they say it can even spark social movements" (Iyamba, 2011, para. 10).

Tweeting Geopolitical Movements in Real-time

Social networking sites have played a prominent role in recent geopolitical movements because the "increasing pervasiveness of social media tools means, in part, that local leaders have less ability to keep a lid on issues of public concern" (Wigley, 2009, para. 7). In a review of events that have taken place over the past decade in which the engagement of social media has played an increasing role, researchers Kahn and Kellner (2004) observed:

> The global internet, then, is creating the base and the basis for an unparalleled worldwide anti-war/pro-peace and social justice movement during a time of terrorism, war, and intense political struggle … Correspondingly, the internet itself has undergone radical transformations during this time. (p. 88, para. 3)

Social media is a two-way communication that took off like a firestorm with the exposure of social unrest and recent civil clashes in the Middle East. The wave of demonstrations and protests fueled by policies and conditions under totalitarian rule in several Middle Eastern countries were captured through the interconnectivity of social media in what has come to be known as the Arab Spring (Blight, Pulham & Torpey, 2012).

Social Media and the "Path of Protest." On December 17, 2010, an educated jobless man tried to sell vegetables and fruit from a Tunisian street stall when police confiscated his produce. Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in a grim act of civil disobedience against a

system that was failing its citizens (Blight, Pulham & Torpey, 2012). As he lay dying in a hospital bed, messages about Bouazizi's act and the injustice that had spurred it swept around the globe through social media channels. Many people were angered about Bouazizi and the actions of police, and the outrage became a conflagration as hundreds of youth gathered outside regional government offices in protest ("Witnesses report," 2010), and "violent clashes ended with the arrest of scores of people" (para. 5). Less than a month after the massive protests began, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, former president of "one of the Arab world's most repressive regimes" (Chrisafus & Black, 2011, para. 1), fled his country as the world applauded the Tunisian people. During the next few months, social unrest cascaded across Africa spilling into the Middle East and creating rapid political change with digital media at its epicenter (Howard, 2011).

Following the example of Bouazizi's martyrdom, in mid-January 2011 four Algerians reportedly set themselves ablaze in less than a week, and a man in Egypt poured fuel over himself and then became a human torch "in an apparent attempt to highlight poor living standards" (Jones, 2011, para. 1) in the region. By the end of that month a deluge of thousands spilled into streets across Egypt in protests against the regime of Hosni Mubarek that were orchestrated through digital media. "We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world" (Howard, 2011, para. 2) one activist openly tweeted, describing the importance of social media as the "fundamental infrastructure" in organizing Egypt's citizens in their political unrest efforts. Despite hundreds of arrests in a violent crackdown over several days of protests (Beaumont, Shenker & Khalili, 2011), just 18 days after what has been dubbed "Egypt's Facebook revolt" (Giglio, 2011) began, Mubarak stands down and hands leadership power to the military (Blight, Pulham & Torpey, 2012).

Replicating examples of protests resulting in political changes in Tunisia and Egypt, hundreds of anti-government protesters hit the streets of Libya in February, in an overnight clash with police ("Libyan protestors," 2011). The initial protests were followed by six months of violence before Muammar Gaddafi went into hiding and rebels moved the government to Tripoli. In March of 2011 security forces killed Syrian protestors (Blight, Pulham & Torpey, 2012), and the death toll still continues to climb a year later as the result of the military's campaign to quell civil unrest. People in Middle Eastern countries have joined in protesting conditions and policies by governments in Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, among others. "It is difficult to know when the Arab Spring will end, but we can already say something about the political casualties and long-term regional consequences of digitally enabled political protest" (Howard, 2011, para. 3).

Use of social media has increased public exposure of the policies of restrictive governments, and the inhumane conditions in which citizens are forced to struggle. Therefore, if the people desire change, then that change could possibly be magnified and accelerated through the use of social media, which has been providing an unfiltered eye on circumstances as they really are, not only in Arab nations but around the world, and it is the people who choose to adopt and use the tool of social media to spread that message and facilitate change.

Cultural mindsets: Open vs. closed. During the early days of the Arab Spring movement, regimes were toppled under both internal and external pressures brought to an international awareness through the use of social networking channels. It is important to note, according to Howard (2011), that "digital media didn't oust Hosni Mubarak. The committed Egyptians occupying the streets of Cairo did that" (para. 3). When the people of one country saw what was happening in another region, they realized that they too had the potential to effect

change. Even in cultures and countries where totalitarian governments control official communication through traditionally rigid and punitive methods, efforts to get messages and images outside of the country have been successful in swaying public opinion, gleaning support for geopolitical movements. Social media has exposed previously closed policies, making changes in ways unforeseen even a decade ago. Openness is inevitable. For example, although China continues in its efforts to control Internet access and political discussion, the Chinese government has been forced to increasingly compromise its hard-line position. When mainland China was preparing for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games and touting strength of national pride, vivid messages and startling images of human rights violations in a violent military crackdown of Tibetans in the region circled the globe on the wave of social media outrage, when several people were killed and hundreds injured (Yollin, 2008).

Changing political processes. Social media is a two-edged sword. Throughout history it has been the nature of common man such that when he sees injustice, he ultimately will rebel. Even in a powerful, centralized government such as China, those in leadership will eventually have to deal with the populace. People caused change through their combined efforts in the Arab Spring, but they do not yet have the organization to stabilize the countries affected by regime changes. Organized groups within those unstable environments are then stepping in to take charge, which may not be in the best interests of the people who wanted the initial change. The Arab Spring does not bring democracy; it brings change. Social media used by the people has helped to expose injustice, falsehood, tyranny, and corruption.

Changing the Rules of Engagement

Kraut et al. (2002) posit that "the Internet permits social contact across time, distance, and personal circumstances" (p. 50), allowing people to connect with those who have similar

interests. The evolving condition identified by Webster (1986) ushered in an electronic era of rapid growth in online content, interest, and adoption. Mass media has metamorphosed over the years, and the changes have created an environment where the "mass media model to which we have become accustomed has rapidly changed, thanks in no small part to globalization, consolidation and the Internet" (Pritchard & Filak, 2010, para. 9).

Social media implications. "Maybe I am a bit naïve about the transformation social media can help bring about in corporate America and society," wrote Maruggi (2008) in what was referred to as a "satirical declarative" that speaks to the irony of a growing number of people who spend more time connecting online, working to enhance relationships by being constantly connected with their phones. Interestingly, society is responding to organizations through social media in ways that could not be foreseen just two decades ago. It is the concept of openness and striving to be transparent that has become critical to ethical operations and organizational survival, thus "ratcheting up the transparency (along with judicious amounts of authenticity and engagement) is a smart strategy" (Wigley, 2009, para. 7). In their article, academics Pritchard and Filak (2010) "argue that transparency is the public relations strategy that confronts this phenomenon during crisis" (para. 3). Participants who were assigned to the blog condition in a measure of relational online strategies, in a 2006 study conducted by Kelleher and Miller, perceived a "conversational human voice" (para. 1) for the organization. The researchers discovered that advantages of organizational blogs over traditional company websites included such findings as relational outcomes of trust, satisfaction, and commitment.

Interacting at the speed of new media. There is a profusion of scholarly research that attests to the importance of feedback in the effectiveness of communication, and rapid feedback "enables the sender to use certain communication patterns that minimize the time required to

achieve understanding" (Dennis and Kinney, 1998, p. 260). New multimedia channels have proven to enhance understanding and retention by offering content that is more compelling through a nonlinear presentation dynamic that is also more engaging. This emerging phenomenon is changing the way we tell stories, thus changing our very culture (Paul & Fiebich, 2005). Some companies identify "an untapped potential" in the contribution that organizational blogs can make to business goals (Stocker & Tochtermann, 2008). In a subsequent update to their widely-cited article on blogs, researchers Baker and Green (2008) postulate social media will shake up the culture of business, stating that blogs are "simply the most explosive outbreak in the information world since the Internet itself" (para.5). In addition, the authors make a prediction about the importance of blogs in reshaping the future business environment: "Given the changes barreling down upon us, blogs are not a business elective. They're a prerequisite" (Baker & Green, 2008, para. 5).

All the news that's fit to blog. Creative agency owner Leslie Ann Bradshaw considers bloggers to be the current watchdogs of the media, and Twitter offers immediacy as "a natural extension of short-form communication that humans have always used to get their points across, like psalms, Haiku, hieroglyphics, graffiti, slang and text messaging" (White, 2008, para. 23). However, growing expectations of real-time information access has its down side. Kurtz (2005), in his online article about what he perceives to be the unforgiving aspects of blogs, writes, "The blogosphere, with its lightning speed and rough-edged sense of justice, seems to be claiming more victims more quickly" (para. 1), as a result of what he refers to as "the one-strike-and-you're-out nature of trial by Internet" (para. 2). To support his argument, Kurtz recounts pivotal news stories that only became high-profile after bloggers raised awareness about the issues, highlighting four examples: (1) Eason Jordan was chief news executive at CNN until forced to

quit under pressure from online critics over his remarks about U.S. soldiers killing journalists in Iraq; (2) the debacle created by Trent Lott, R-Mississippi, when he made what was perceived to be a racist comment that was trending in the blogosphere and eventually got him ousted as Senate majority leader; (3) the falsified National Guard document used by CBS to make allegations about former President Bush's military service was exposed online and led to four high-level resignations, including long-time news anchor Dan Rather's departure; and, (4) White House reporter Jeff Gannon was unmasked as a "plant" by bloggers when he asked then-president Bush an inaccurate question.

American journalist and veteran magazine editor Jeff Jarvis spoke in an interview and addressed CNN's slowness in responding to the media outcry over the Jordan story: "Blogs are unforgiving of that lack of speedy responsiveness. We used to be the gatekeepers" responding to public criticism in what he termed "our own sweet time." That proved to be a huge deficit in real-time when it comes to the Internet. "You'd think we would understand the speed of news better than anybody, and we don't. We used to control that speed," Jarvis said (Kurtz, 2005, para. 3).

Enter the Corporate Blogger

Notable corporate blog pundits as well as academic scholars have made the observation that it is important for an organization to engage in the blog dialogue to gain an understanding of customer needs and to lay the groundwork to engender trust (Scoble & Israel, 2006). Within the corporate context, the blogosphere achieves popularity in a specific target audience for a number of reasons with the use of organizational blogs. "By restoring a human face to a company's self-presentation, blogging has been heralded as a paradigm shift in the way companies interact with customers" (Dwyer, 2007, p. 1). Researchers Efimova and Grudin (2007) examined the

emergence of blogging practices in the corporate environment and "found an experimental, rapidly-evolving terrain marked by growing sophistication about balancing personal, team, and corporate incentives and issues" (p. 1).

It takes more than blogging to enter the context of the online dialog, and no one in healthcare understood this better than Paul Levy did, at least at the outset of his foray into social media. At the time, Levy was president and CEO of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, where he "is credited with pulling BI back from the brink of financial disaster" (Alpert, 2011, para. 2). Not only was Levy an early adopter as one of the first healthcare leaders in the country to begin publishing a blog, he was also "facebooking" with a large contingent of cyber friends on Facebook and regularly tweeting updates on his Twitter account, all of which earned him a positive reputation particularly with the press. "Through discipline, openness to criticism and feedback, and, yes, a certain amount of golly-gee enthusiasm, Levy has taken the most self-indulgent medium of 21st-century communication and turned it into a business tool as sharp as any scalpel" (Flannery, para. 3), proclaimed the *Boston Magazine* article published in June 2009, mere months before Levy's biggest challenge would hit social media channels. Interestingly, Levy's position at Beth Israel Deaconess where he "successfully resuscitated BIDMC" (McNamara, 2010, para. 6) was his first foray into healthcare. Previously, Levy "oversaw the cleanup of Boston Harbor when he was at the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority" (McNamara, 2010, para. 6).

Laying the groundwork to engender trust. Most presidents stepping up to the microphone to announce difficult organizational decisions find themselves instantly unpopular amongst rank and file employees in the organization. Not so when Levy stood before a packed audience to deliver just such a message to employees in the spring of 2009. Amid the height of

the economic downturn that ravaged companies and destroyed promising careers across the nation, the hospital CEO stood before employees in a series of open meetings to discuss looming layoffs at Boston's recession-pinched Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC) and was met time after time with resounding applause (Solman, 2009a), as he rallied employees to protect the jobs of their lowest-paid coworkers. "But that breakthrough would have been impossible without the groundwork laid by his blogging," wrote journalist Paul Flannery (2009, para. 3) in an article published in *Boston magazine*. Levy's blog titled *Running a Hospital* began in autumn 2006 as an open web log about a variety of issues such as healthcare and medicine, challenges facing hospitals, and accomplishments shared by staff, as well as Levy's personal observations, photos of his travels, and general thoughts on life, cycling, and soccer.

Paul Levy: "Man on a Missive." As the chief executive officer of BIDMC, Levy honed an approach that made him a phenomenon in the blogosphere, and it was even more impressive that he was able to accomplish this in the healthcare environment, which has traditionally been noted for being conservative and institutional, lagging behind other industries when it comes to tech-savvy communication channels. Levy's blog style was breezy, yet thorough; his prose pointed, even compelling. His open forum approach regularly expounded on the critical need for transparency and gleaned him a large following. Occasionally the blog even provided the platform in which Levy could turn the tide of opinion.

While it would be foolhardy for Levy to expose the organization's tender underbelly to the wolves, time and again he broached historically sensitive topics such as executive compensation, hospital infection rates, and challenges his hospital faced. "In his blog, aptly named *Running a Hospital*, Levy has pulled back the curtain on his day job, trampling the genteel conventions of hospital executives," Goldstein (2007, para. 3) reported during the first

year Levy was writing his hospital blog. But not all controversy was laid bare for dissection and discussion, and it becomes evident Levy was very aware of perception as he weighed the pros and cons of revealing vulnerabilities in the occasional issues-specific blog post.

Trustee: "Is unilateral public disclosure really necessary?" When asked by a trustee member of the hospital board whether it was wise to be so open about clinical outcomes with the public, Levy responded in the open forum of his blog to make the case for transparency. Posted to Levy's blog on November 2, 2008:

> Regular readers will know that BIDMC is remarkably open in publication of clinical outcomes, taking transparency to a place seldom seen in American hospitals. Our governing boards are comfortable with this and are strongly supportive even though it occasionally leads to publicity of the sort that can sometimes get them nervous… (Levy, 2008d, para. 1)
>
> My answer had three parts: First, an acknowledgement that what we are doing is an experiment; second, that there has been no evidence at all that it has adversely affected our clinical volume or our standing in the marketplace; and third, that studies of organizational change suggest that public disclosure has extra motivational value in encouraging people to engage in continuous process improvement. (Levy, 2008d, para. 3)

Strategies in a New Media World

During an interview on PBS NewsHour, Levy shared his version of the four-step recipe that develops credibility in an organization: (1) Be transparent with employees. Explain the situation in simple, declarative sentences, with real numbers and real trends; (2) Provide a forum for people to offer suggestions. In addition to the BIDMC town-hall meetings, they established a no-holds-barred chat room; (3) Be respectful of people's input. Levy made it clear he listened to

what people had to say; and the capstone step, (4) Explain the logic of final decisions (Solman, 2009b).

The overarching purpose of transparency should be improvement and discussion, according to Maruggi (2008), who describes transparency as "a function of improving, of shared learning, that makes something greater than the individual better" (para. 12). The process of acting in an open, transparent manner translates into increased dialogue and trust. Research suggests consumers respond well to "provocative informational content with expressions of benevolent intent ... showing evidence of increased subject matter involvement, liking and trust" (Dwyer, 2007, abstract). Levy wasn't "some office drone complaining about TPS reports or lamenting the quality of his iced latte" (Flannery, 2009, para. 8). Through the use of multimedia, Levy had gotten "comfortable airing some of his hospital's dirty laundry—and mixing things up with competitors and critics" (Flannery, 2009, para. 8), which made *Running a Hospital* one of the must-follow blogs in both business and media circles. Flannery (2009) summed it up best in his article about Levy that was published in *Boston magazine* with the observation: "These kinds of posts, too, serve a strategic purpose: They balance out the more high-minded offerings and establish the casual, conversational tone of a guy who's just telling it like it is" (para. 9). But over the course of the next year as the details of Levy's inappropriate personal relationship unfolded, a very different point of view became obvious, revealing just how strategic Levy's blog posts had been.

Rhetorical Criticism: "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves"

The most common form of communication for centuries was face-to-face, in a rich interaction that provided personal contact in which people used words, vocal cues, voice inflection, and nonverbal body language "to transmit factual information about the task or topic

under discussion, and social information about the personal characteristics of those … involved in the communication" (Dennis & Kinney, 1998, p. 257). Classical apologia in ancient Greece was generally an occurrence in the judicial arena, when an accused individual would often hire a rhetor to speak in his, or more rarely her, defense.

Much is to be learned by examining thoughts on the concept of rhetoric: extensive philosophic ideas attributed to the likes of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (Black, 1978; Downey, 1993) on democracy and the role of government; the premise that all great works of men arise from rhetoric, as put forth by Isocrates in his writings "On the Antidosis" (Foss, 2009; Van Hook, 1919); and Demosthenes' oration on defense in his discourse, titled "On the Crown," which has been deemed "so compelling that it made the speech the most popular work of Greek prose" (Yunis, 2005) and has been argued to be "the finest work of ancient eloquence" by Thomas Leland, in a 1782 sermon he delivered in Dublin (Foss, 2009; Smollett, Morley, Flemming & Leigh, 1901). While rhetoric is a term that has come to encompass negative connotations in some common uses (Foss, 2009), historically the purpose of the art of rhetoric has been that of communication and persuasion. Rhetoric, according to German (1985) in her article on its evolution, "functions as a means for discovering rational, truthful appeals to audiences" (p. 91). Through a focus on the three proofs as first identified by Aristotle, the rhetor works to persuade an audience using *logos*, or the use of logical argument and persuasive reasoning; *ethos*, in terms of ethical appeal and credibility of the speaker; and *pathos*, in the use of persuasion and motivational appeals in an effort to establish an emotional connection with the audience (Braet, 1992; Campbell, 1998; Connors, 1979; Medley, 2005).

To better understand how rhetorical criticism has evolved, it should be noted that modern rhetorical theory has expanded beyond the confines of its classical form to encompass a broad

spectrum of artifacts which today include such considerations as words, texts, music, images, art, gestures, dance, film, performance, advertising, and more (Foss, 2009, p. 6). In instances where "several elements dominate the rhetorical artifact, then the traditional approach" (German, 1985, p. 91) provides some methodologies that may be an appropriate critical application. Research by German (1985) illustrates that rhetoric is a product of its time, which is one of the causal reasons for the historical differences in rhetorical form. A major evolution in the understanding of genre occurred as the result of a rhetorical criticism conference titled "Significant Form," held June 1976 in Lawrence, Kansas. The conference was organized around the concept that there are identifiable patterns that recur in discourse or action. The product of the conference was a book compilation of essays titled, *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Actio*n, edited by Campbell and Jamieson (1978). According to participating scholars, the recurring identifiable patterns found in discourse include the repeated use of arguments, configurations of language, and structural arrangements, as well as the use of metaphors or images, or any combination of these elements, which are at the core of the creation of genres within rhetorical criticism.

Foss (2009) argued that there are two concepts central to the creation of rhetoric: first, humans create and use symbols in rhetoric; and second, rhetoric involves symbols rather than signs. She further elucidated this distinction in her observation that:

> A symbol is something that stands for or represents something else by virtue of relationship, association, or convention. Symbols are distinguished from signs by the degree of direct connection to the object represented. Smoke is a sign that fire is present, which means that there is a direct relationship between the fire and the smoke. Similarly, the changing color of the leaves in autumn is a sign that winter is coming; the color is a direct indicator of a drop in temperature. (p. 4)

Symbols are a construct created by humans and, accordingly, names humans assign to objects (i.e., cup, table, door) are symbols that have been arbitrarily selected but have come to be the way we relate to those objects. In other words, humans are "the creators of rhetoric" (p. 3) and use "symbols as the medium for rhetoric." Foss's definition included three primary dimensions: (1) humans as the creators of rhetoric; (2) symbols as the medium for rhetoric; and (3) communication as the purpose for rhetoric" (2009, p. 3). She expanded on the communication aspects regarding audiences and stated:

> As rhetors develop messages, genres influence them to shape their materials to create particular emphases, to generate particular ideas, and to adopt particular personae. Similarly, audience members' recognition of a particular artifact as belonging to a specific genre influences their strategies of comprehension and response. (p. 137)

Generic Criticism: Emergence of the Genre

The study of generic distinctions in rhetorical form is not to be confused with the mistaken idea of a criticism that is general in nature, connoting a ubiquitous commonality that is universally applied. Rather, within the discipline of rhetoric, generic criticism is the process of focusing on a specific aspect of the discourse in terms of "genre." The word genre comes from the Latin word *genus,* meaning "stem" and is a word that has been borrowed from the French by critics for application in the classification of rhetorical phenomenon, because it "signifies a distinct species, form, type, or kind" (Jamieson, 1973, p. 162). Elaborating on its importance, Jamieson (1973) postulated that the "human need for a frame of reference lures the mind to generic classification" (p. 167), important for both the rhetor and the audience. Thus, examples are found in such typological constructs as arranging books by genre, and the categorical identification of musical sounds grouped into specific genres.

The first communications academic to use the term generic criticism was Black (1978) in his 1965 critique of neo-Aristotelian discourse. Black contended that "critics can probably do their work by seeing and disclosing the elements common to many discourses rather than the singularities of a few" (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 273). German (1985) examined the concept of generic phenomena and concluded: "Genre criticism attempts to identify types of rhetoric through the common characteristics or functions of the members of that group" (p. 94). Still viewed as a valuable contribution toward evaluating rhetoric today, Black proposed the generic frame for rhetorical criticism, in which he suggested that there are distinctive situations that reoccur in the context of discourses which have common features: (1) "there is a limited number of situations in which a rhetor can find himself" or herself; (2) "there is a limited number of ways in which a rhetor can and will respond rhetorically to any given situational type"; and (3) "the recurrence of a given situational type through history will provide a critic with information on the rhetorical response available in that situation" (as cited by Foss, 2009, p. 138). Foss extends Black's observations, stating: "Generic criticism is rooted in the assumption that certain types of situations provoke similar needs and expectations in audiences and thus call for particular kinds of rhetoric" (p. 137). Adapting concepts originally put forth by Bazerman (1994), Foss argued:

> The purpose of generic criticism is to understand rhetorical practices in different time periods and in different places by discerning the similarities in rhetorical situations and the rhetoric constructed in response to them—to discover "how people create individual instances of meaning and value within structured discursive fields." (Foss, 2009, p. 137)

It is the distinct process of creating individual meaning while attempting to meet situational expectations of the audience that shapes the genre. For example, "Even if the speaker has never heard or read a eulogy, he [sic] will … deliver eulogistic rhetoric. The situation demands it. The

audience expects it" (Jamieson, 1973, p. 163). The continuity of rhetorical forms continues to emerge in reoccurring situations:

> When one knows what makes an inaugural an inaugural and not an apology, one has isolated generic characteristics. When one knows what characteristics will inform an inaugural not yet composed, one has isolated the generic membranes of the inaugural. (Jamieson, 1973, p. 163)

Although traditional genres such as the eulogistic genre, the apologetic genre, or those genres evident in inaugural speech continue to be a staple in critical approaches to generic criticism, "they do not ossify it" (Jamieson, 1973, p. 168). To better understand how genres function in rhetoric, it is important to note that the critic should not view genres "as static forms but [rather] as evolving phenomena" (p. 168) in which rhetors "perpetually modify," create, or abandon genres as situational expectations or cultural expediency necessitate. According to Hart (1997), "the generic critic operates on several assumptions, one of which is that generic patterns reveal societal truths" (as cited in Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 2003, p. 31). While there is not a formulaic approach that guarantees the discovery of truth, the critical study of generic distinctions provides a way to examine individual meaning in discerning how apologists attempt to meet situational expectations.

Defining the Genre of Apologia

Apologia is one type of rhetorical genre that has received much academic attention regarding its features, through centuries of scholarly inquiry into its form and function (Downey, 1993, p. 42). As a genre, apologia is identified by the "recurrent theme of accusation followed by apology" (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, pp. 273-274) that is prevalent in public address recorded throughout human history. The very "questioning of a man's *moral nature, motives,* or

reputation" is considered "an attack upon a person's character," and a rhetor will take his or her "case to the people in the form of an apologia, speech of self-defense" (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 273), in an effort to respond to such threats through "motives ranging from self-actualization to social repair to survival" (Downey, 1993, p. 42). When speaking in defense of oneself under such circumstances, the rhetor would choose a stance from the four "defensive postures of absolution, vindication, explanation, or justification" (Downey, 1993, p. 42), dependent upon the situational factors and response requirements necessary for successful apologetic discourse.

As apologia has evolved from its early Aristotelian beginnings, it has become more sophisticated as a genre and expanded in application. In its Classical Greek form, the primary function of apologetics was within a judicial forum in which the prosecution made a charge and the defendant replied with an apologia to rebut the charges, such as the example found in Socrates' defense in which he vindicates his activities in Athens (Eisel, 1990). The act of presenting a formal apologia should not be confused with mere apology. While apologetic discourse can be the speech of self-defense in regard to one's actions, it is also actualized as a defense of one's position or even a defense of one's opinion. Apologia in terms of a religious construct is the centuries-old discipline of defending Christian theology (Basinger, 2007; Miller, 2002). Apologists in this vein were traditionally Christian writers who put the doctrine of the church into the context of the times, in an effort to defend their faith and convince others of its validity and worthiness as a religion. Similarly and yet in dramatic divergence, another genre of apologetics emerged in the form of literary apologia, which defends the aesthetic and poetic characteristics of various types of literature (Brantlinger, 1999; Ingleheart, 2006; Rudolf, 1990). Evidence of this phenomenon is frequently found in literature dating from the eighteenth century, in which authors preface modern plays with language that both explains and defends a given

literary piece, and an apologetic text was often penned within the dedications written by authors in conjunction with their published books and poems.

During the last century, political apologetics came into play after the social and cultural upheaval of the 1960s when the contemporary period ushered in an environment in which apologia became less judicially-based and entered into the political arena. For several decades, politicians and pundits alike have embraced the tenets of apologetic theory and spoken in self-defense as they have navigated the political waters of popularity and disgrace, defending their opinions, their policies, and occasionally their actions and behavior.

The book that wouldn't die. Edwin Black (1978) is an academic author who wrote *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, originally published in 1965. Most reviewers of Black's vanguard approach in his book "agreed in predicting that it would provoke controversy among its readers. The prophecy proved correct" (Black, 1978, p. ix). Although the nation was undergoing a societal shift during the 1960s (Downey, 1993, p. 58), Black had challenged concepts still held and adhered to by traditionalist academic rhetoricians, and his book was perceived to be highly controversial. While Downey ascribes to Black's tenets of generic criticism, her remarks revisit the criticism initially levied at Black's book as she echoes similar observations shared by genre scholars such as Fisher (1980), and Campbell and Jamieson (1978): "Generic criticism is fundamental to the enterprise of rhetoric; it is also, however, consistently condemned" (Downey, 1993, p. 43). The initial publisher only released one edition of Black's book; another 13 years would transpire before it would get a second chance. "Being unobtainable, the book did not live, but it would not quite die either" (p. ix), Black would later quip. In an author's note for the book's second printing in 1978, he refers to that first ill-fated edition as "a spectral rumor of a book haunting the shadows of rhetorical criticism, an eristic

ghost equivocal only in its own mortality" (p. ix). The allusion culminates in this final line: "The very persistence of that half-life prompted the University of Wisconsin Press to undertake this new printing, in the hope that it is a revival the Press is sponsoring and not the exhumation of a deceptively twitching corpse" (Black, 1978, p. ix). It is important to note that the second publication of Black's book took place several years after the first edition, only after the resounding success of the 1976 conference "Significant Form" had re-energized the field of rhetorical criticism and renewed interest in the discipline.

While Black argued that it wasn't possible for criticism to be objectified and fixed into a scientific system of analysis that could be replicated, he observed that rhetorical criticism methods have "varying degrees of personality" (Black, 1978, p. xi), and that criticism in particular is at the "personal end of the methodological scale ... and the engagement is ... a direct one" (pp. xi-xii). Black (1978) posited that a critical instrument also "refers to methodological systems or programs" in which "the critic is the instrument of criticism, [and] the critic's relationship to other instruments will profoundly affect the value of critical inquiry" (pp. xi-xii).

Evolution of the Genre of Apologia

Rhetorical conventions can differ dependent upon the issue, artifacts, and defensive posture chosen by the rhetor (German, 1985). Downey (1993) observes that the "genre approach is a systematic comparison and contrast of recurrent features of similar discourses in order to clarify the relationships between text and context to provide insight into the human condition" (pp. 44-45), an approach indebted to the seminal work of Ware and Linkugel (1973).

Key apologist strategies. Scholars Ware and Linkugel (1973) were the first to identify common, repeating elements in apologia (Vartabedian, 1985b), attributing the genesis of their approach to earlier theory developed by Abelson (1959). In his work on intrapersonal conflict

and belief dilemmas in the field of psychology, Abelson identified what he determined to be four "modes of resolution": (1) denial; (2) bolstering; (3) differentiation; and (4) transcendence. In their essay on self-defense rhetoric, Ware and Linkugel (1973) expounded upon Abelson's original concept and referred to these as "factors" (p. 275) that consistently appear in apologetic speeches in which the speaker defends himself or herself (Downey, 1993). Each apology factor is a strategic operant in rhetoric, most effectively examined not as an independent function but rather in conjunction with other factors that play a part in apologetic rhetoric.

As a central point in his essay, researcher Vartabedian (1985a) subscribed to this approach in examining apologetic text, employing the same four factors of denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Vartabedian (1985a) referred to these factors as "strategies" (p. 53) as he explored components of apologia in two speeches given by then-president Richard M. Nixon. The strategy of denial "amounts to a disavowal by the speaker" (p. 53) to establish distance from that which the audience finds offensive, according to Vartabedian (1985a), and when bolstering efforts are used in speech the speaker is attempting to personally identify with some element that is perceived to be "viewed favorably by the audience" (p. 53). He argues that the differentiation strategy is more complex in that it is the specific speaker's "particularization of the charges" (p. 53). In other words, the individual provides his or her side of the story in terms that will most likely be viewed as a favorable, "less abstract perspective" (p. 53). Finally, the strategic approach of transcendence is a deliberate effort made by the speaker to move the audience in a new direction "away from the particulars of the charges at hand, while at the same time moving toward a more abstract and general view of their character" (p. 53), in an effort to redirect focus, rising above specifics and beyond the moment.

Reformative vs. transformative. As he examines two of the former president's texts for apologia content and context, Vartabedian (1985a) presented an analysis of stylistic form that placed these four key genre strategies into two distinct categories of apologetic types: reformative and transformative. Accordingly, the reformative strategies are designed to reform, or in essence revise the thoughts of the audience. The two strategies that are considered to be reformative in nature are denial and bolstering. Conversely, transformative strategies attempt to change the opinions of the audience entirely. Thus, the two strategies that seek to transform, comprising the transformative category, are differentiation and transcendence. In examining apologetic rhetoric the "critic must discern the most crucial reformative and transformative strategies operating in the selected apologia" (Vartabedian, 1985a, p. 54), in an effort to determine which strategy from these categories is at work within the discourse.

Rhetorical postures and sub-genres in apologia. Research by Vartabedian (1985a) supported Ware and Linkugel's (1973) belief "that the speech of self-defense needs to contain both reformative and transformative elements and thus results in any combination of one strategy from each category" (Vartabedian, 1985a, p. 54). It is the deliberate combination of these strategies that create unique sub-genres used most frequently in generic criticism analysis to identify discourse types when explicating apologetic speech: (1) absolution—primarily combining denial (a reformative strategy) and differentiation (a transformative strategy); (2) vindication—using essentially denial (again, reformative) and transcendental (a transformative strategy); (3) explanation—which is highly dependent upon bolstering (a reformative strategy) and differentiation (which is transformative); and, (4) justification—based mostly on bolstering (again, reformative) and transcendental (a transformative strategy) efforts (Downey, 1993; Foss, 2009; Vartabedian, 1985a). These sub-genre types are aptly referred to by Downey (1993) as

"rhetorical postures" (pp. 49-53), in her essay which surveys the historical evolution of rhetorical criticism, and corresponding features and functions of apologia.

Historical Shifts in the Genre

In her essay on the evolution of functions of apologia over time, Downey (1993) adopted a method of classification that "meets the requirement of relevance to rhetorical practice" (p. 53), as identified earlier by researchers Campbell and Jamieson (1978), and followed by Miller (1984). According to Campbell and Jamieson (1978), "rhetorical forms that establish genres are stylistic and substantive responses to perceived situational demands" (p. 19). Foss (2009) further contended that in discourse the situational requirement is "the perception of conditions in a situation that call forth particular kinds of rhetorical responses" (p. 137).

Downey (1993) examined the "interdependence of text and content" (p. 47) in her research of apologia in various historical periods. A footnote in her paper indicated that Downey's (1993) identification of four discourse clusters were convenience groupings primarily created around a particular expanse of time, rather than scientifically designated historical periods (p. 46). For ease in the organization and analysis, Downey (1993) defined the clusters as follows: the classical Greek period is essentially 1200 B.C. to 1 B.C.; the medieval period encompasses 1000 to 1700; the modern period is from approximately 1700 to 1900; and finally, the contemporary period is comprised of 1900 to the present (p. 62), broken into two time periods: the first spans from 1900 to 1960, and the second part of this cluster is established with the advent of the counterculture and social revolution of the 1960s and continues into the present. Throughout history "shifts in the genre's function" (Downey, 1993, p. 42) have taken place, causing "significant changes in form" (p. 42) throughout the initial four discourse clusters, which have "produced five distinct versions" (p. 42) creating what Downey concluded to be a new sub-

set of rhetorical distinctions that are functions with a specific purpose in the realm of apologia and persuasive language: self-exoneration, self-absolution, self-sacrifice, self-service, and self-deception.

Classical Greek Period. Apologists in the classical Greek period (1200 B.C. to 1 B.C.) relied upon "similar argumentative devices" (Downey, 1993, pp. 47-48) that were "syllogistically structured to secure acquittal" through use of the "if … then" argument to successfully shift responsibility. Despite its emergence millennia ago, rhetors even today will employ the tactic of shifting responsibility through persuasive argument in an effort to be perceived more favorably by an audience. Pericles' classic defense stated if he persuaded men to go to war, he could not be charged with injuring them after the fact once the war was over (Downey, 1993; Kagan, 2010).

Substantive and Stylistic Feature: Vindication is the dominant rhetorical posture.

Function: Classical apologia functioned as self-exoneration.

Medieval Period. During the medieval period (1000 to 1700), apologia were "optional confessions" that appeared to be "merely sprinkled with suggestions of defense" according to Downey's (1993) discourse cluster (pp. 49-50). Apologists made arguments that were "grounded in logos" as they "sought release from a predetermined outcome" through the use of appeals to emotion. As one example, Thomas Wentworth the Earl of Stafford stated, "if I had the least suspicion of my own guilt … I would cast the first stone" (Downey, 1993, p. 49), in his 1641 response to the charge of treason.

Substantive and Stylistic Feature: Justification is the dominant rhetorical posture.

Function: Medieval apologia functioned as self-absolution. Although Downey does not elucidate reasons why apologia functioned in this manner, one possible speculation could include influence of the Roman Catholic Church during this period in history.

Modern Period. Apologetic discourse in the modern period (1700 to 1900) evolved into what Downey (1993) describes as a hybrid that "validated the reemergence of classical form" (pp. 50-52), while still retaining the stylistic features of the medieval period. Through the use of bolstering and differentiation tactics, apologists adopted a manner of "defiant resignation" to build *ethos*, and "martyrdom materialized as the theme binding modern apologia" (Downey, 1993, p. 51). American revolutionary abolitionist John Brown's revolt against slavery in the 1850s is a classic example in that audiences were sympathetic, which accordingly "exerted pressure upon the context of apologia" (p. 51) in a situation within this period that was new to apologies in an historical context.

Substantive and Stylistic Feature: Explanation is the dominant rhetorical posture.

Function: Modern apologia functioned as self-sacrifice.

Contemporary period. Following the modern period, a complex period emerged that is best represented in two distinct parts.

Contemporary period prior to 1960. The period from 1900 to 1960 ushered in an era of unprecedented innovation and expansion in which apologia becomes rather complex: "resolution was somewhat arbitrary… [and] success depended largely upon popular press or public opinion," according to Downey (1993, pp. 53-55). In a paradigm shift from traditional apologia, contemporary apologists used "categorical denial" and attempted to link their actions to cultural values in an effort to get the audience to identify with them, resorting to "causal reasoning, inquiry order devices, arguments by analogy, namecalling" and more, to "clear" their names.

Downey (1993) makes the observation that, for the first time historically, "apologias were not strictly defensive reactions but strategically offensive actions" (1993, p. 53) with the shift from judicial defense to the political arena. If one were successful in speaking in defense of him or herself, the "dual motive" apologia went as far as to repair *ethos* while also elevating the image of the accused in the eyes of the audience. Harry Truman's appointment of a controversial Assistant Secretary to the Treasury offers one such example. Truman was accused of being a communist for hiring Harry Dexter White, who was later incriminated by credible sources who alleged he was a Soviet agent. However, Truman "attributed the assault on his character to political machinations" (Downey, 1993, p. 53) by his detractors.

Substantive and Stylistic Features to 1960: Absolution and explanation are the shared dominance postures.

Function to 1960: Contemporary apologia prior to 1960 functioned as self-service.

Contemporary period after 1960. The later part of the contemporary period is marked by a dramatic break from tradition, as suddenly "apologia need not require accusation, audience, setting, or resolution" (Downey, 1993, p. 58). Despite ambiguities in various apologetic situations, a bevy of implied charges, and the absence of a "well-delineated enemy" (p. 56), contemporary apologias after 1960 retained one consistent goal: manage damage control and potential repercussions. However, the emergence of two contradictory themes become the norm during this period, where rhetors make a gesture that accepts "full responsibility for the events in question" but then ironically "shift blame for their circumstances" (Downey, 1993, p. 57) in a manner that "masks moral responsibility" (King, 1985). The situational and stylistic dimensions of apologetic discourse, during this period, "merged to produce calculated avoidance" (Downey, 1993, p. 58) as one of the apologetic stances.

Substantive and Stylistic Features after 1960: Explanation is the dominant posture.

Function: Contemporary apologia after 1960 functioned as self-deception.

While most scholars lean heavily on the stylistic and substantive approach to genre criticism, Downey's classification of function is noteworthy in that it introduces an additional dimension to the rhetorical discussion. Stating that one function was typically prominent in a particular period, Downey (1993) remarks that "interdependence of text and content in different historical periods produced five purposes of apologia—exoneration, absolution, sacrifice, service, and deception" (p. 59). These sub-classifications will help to inform current apologetic discourse exploration in the new venue of social media.

During the research process that began with generic description for this thesis, an apologetic rubric was used to examine social media artifacts in the form of blog posts in the search for evidence of apologetic discourse. By examining the context of social media in the blogosphere and exploring several different situations that took place over a period of time and were similar in nature, this study sought to identify whether there was evidence of apologetic discourse in an effort to determine if social media extends apologia.

Research Questions

This study examined selected social media artifacts, in discreet instances within the social media context of the blogosphere, with the goal to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Does the apologia genre apply to social media apologies?

RQ2: Does social media extend the genre of apologia?

Chapter 3: Method

This thesis draws upon the phenomenon of social media in recent literature, in combination with the historic tradition of rhetorical analysis as a critical approach. In their analysis of blogs, scholars Miller and Shepherd (2004) argue that: "The blog is a new rhetorical opportunity, made possible by technology that is becoming more available and easier to use, but it was adopted so quickly and widely that it must be serving well established rhetorical needs" (para. 5). Some of these rhetorical needs would appear to be those found within the tradition of rhetorical criticism. For that reason, the analysis applied in this study can fall into a particular method that applies traditional rhetorical analysis techniques to the new medium of social media.

Establishing the method to critically analyze social media discourse for this study required an appropriate approach offering clarity with an increase in understanding of the artifacts involved (German, 1985, p. 85). When done appropriately, the method can become "a tool which allows the critic to better understand rhetoric and … enables us to understand the interaction between ideas and people" (pp. 86-87).

First, this study examined social media through the rhetorical analysis approach of generic criticism to determine whether a genre exists. Second, it was determined during the generic criticism analysis portion of this study that a genre did exist, and apologetic discourse elements were identified within the social media blog posts that were examined. Finally, the apologia analysis rubric was applied to specific social media artifacts selected from blog posts during the course this study.

Selecting the Type of Generic Criticism Analysis

Foss (2009) posited that the generic critic has three research approach options, the choice of which is dictated by the type of analysis that is ultimately deemed most appropriate for the

situational factors: (1) generic participation; (2) generic application; and, (3) generic description. In generic participation the critic selects "an artifact that seems like it should belong or has been assigned to a particular genre but does not seem to fit" (p. 140) logically within that genre category. Conversely, in generic application the critic will examine an artifact in an assessment to determine how it functions within the genre context and whether it conforms to that particular genre. Finally, generic description requires a comprehensive approach in criticism in which the goal is to "define a genre and formulate theoretical constructs about its characteristics" (p. 140) through an examination of selected artifacts.

The Generic Description Process

The generic description approach was selected as the critical approach for this study, to determine whether a genre existed within a specific set of social media artifacts. The process of generic description, according to Foss (2009), involves four steps: "(1) observing similarities in rhetorical responses to particular situations; (2) collecting artifacts that occur in similar situations; (3) analyzing the artifacts to discover if they share characteristics; and (4) formulating the organizing principle of the genre" (p. 141). To understand how generic description analysis was applied in this study, it is important to have a thorough understanding of the steps that are applied in determining whether a genre exists:

The first step. The initial stage of generic description in rhetorical criticism entails the "observation that similar situations, removed from each other in time and place, seem to generate similar rhetorical responses" (p. 141). When warranted, the critic then speculates whether a particular genre of rhetoric does indeed exist in the artifact evidence. Foss cautions that the "suspicion of the presence of a genre is not to be confused with a preconceived framework that predicts or limits the defining characteristics of the genre," but rather the impression or "hunch

simply serves as a prod" (p. 141) to stimulate investigation and research, and generate new ideas as the process unfolds.

The second step. In this portion of the generic description analysis much groundwork is done in assembling a "collection of a varied sample of artifacts that may represent the genre" (Foss, 2009, p. 141). During this stage of the process the critic searches through situations of various rhetorical acts in an effort to identify those artifacts that appear to have similar characteristics and constraints (Black, 1978; Foss, 2009; Ware & Linkugel, 1973).

Symbolic artifacts. It is the nature of humans to use and respond to symbols in communication, and Foss (2009) describes the process of rhetorical criticism as the "systematic investigation and explanation of symbolic acts and artifacts for the purposes of understanding the rhetorical processes" (p. 6). Artifacts examined in generic criticism are typically a number of texts which can be from diverse sources that include traditional discourse as found in essays, speeches, and literature; or the artifacts can originate from unusual, nontraditional forms such as art, music, advertising, and more (Foss, 2009, p. 140). The artifacts will generally span a period of time, but most importantly will share some similarities:

> Description of a genre, then, in which various artifacts are examined to see if a genre exists … involves examining a variety of artifacts that seem to be generated in similar situations to discover if they have common substantive and stylistic strategies and an organizing principle that fuses those strategies. If, in fact, they do, you have developed a theory of the existence of a genre. (Foss, 2009, p. 143)

According to German (1995) methodology is, in essence, a concept in which the critic "has a responsibility to increase our understanding of the unique qualities of the rhetorical artifact" (p. 87, para. 1). The generic description process helps to accomplish this task.

The third step. Examining the artifacts required a close analysis and thorough process to best determine whether "there are substantive or stylistic features shared in the various artifacts," (Foss, 2009, p.141) to identify commonalities in how the perceived problem was addressed by the rhetor. The critic must focus on aspects that stand out in the situation, such as "metaphors, images, sentence structure, failure to enact arguments, or an infinite variety of other elements," (Foss, 2009, p. 141). The evaluation of the artifacts is a pivotal point in the process of generic description, and the critic might find that the primary element that emerges is "the character of the rhetor, the words themselves, or a strong image in the artifact which dominates the effect of the discourse" (German, 1985, p. 87-88). Hart (1997) contended that the critic must be thorough and imaginative in the examination of the artifacts, searching for "the story behind the taxonomies" (as cited in Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 2003, p. 31) in working under the realization that "what is 'not there' may hold more interesting revelations than what is present" (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 2003, p. 31).

In this step of generic description, the critic may discover substantive strategies that focus specifically on content or perhaps might find stylistic strategies in which form is central to the discussion. The use of form in stylistic application will be an important part of the analysis in this thesis, in which elements of apologetic discourses exist, "to discover similarities among the various artifacts in the use of emotional appeals, for example," (Foss, 2009, p. 141).

Analyzing the artifacts. Generic criticism also includes a four-step process in analyzing a rhetorical artifact: (1) selecting an artifact; (2) analyzing the artifact; (3) formulating a research question; and (4) writing the essay" (Foss, 2009, p. 140). In analyzing artifacts, the critic will first begin by looking at specific elements that comprise the features of each artifact through an inductive process, which will include explaining the criteria and how it was applied, followed by

an interpretation of the results and an evaluation of the artifact in light of the analysis. Only then is the critic in a position to generalize that information and identify a rhetorical genre, "a constellation, fusion, or clustering of three different kinds of elements so that a unique kind of artifact is created" (Foss, 2009, p. 137).

The fourth step. This final step in generic description is a synthesis of the information gleaned from examining the sample collection. During this process the critic formulates "the organizing principle that captures the essence of the strategies" (Foss, 2009, p. 141) common to the rhetorical artifacts, which the critic examines to identify any elements that appear to emerge around a unique core principle.

Identifying Apologetic Discourse

Over the centuries many have "stood trial before the bar of public opinion regarding the propriety of some public or private action" (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 274), and it is the "recurrent theme of accusation followed by apology" (pp. 273-274) in which the rhetor takes his or her "case to the people in the form of an apologia, speech of self-defense" (p. 273) that identifies the rhetorical genre of apologia. Ware and Linkugel (1973) concluded in their essay on the viability of apologia that the genre is "as important in contemporary society as in years past" (p. 274). While apologetic discourse can be the speech of self-defense in regard to one's actions, it is also actualized as a defense of one's position or even a defense of one's opinion. The application of generic criticism in this study revealed that the predominant rhetorical genre evident in the social media artifacts examined for this study was apologia.

Applying an Apologia Rubric

Ware and Linkugel (1973) were the first to recognize repeating elements of commonality within apologetic discourse and identified rhetorical strategies in apologia: (1) denial; (2)

bolstering; (3) differentiation; and (4) transcendence. Each apologetic factor is a strategic operant in rhetoric, most effectively examined not as an independent function but rather in conjunction with other strategies (see Figure 1). While Ware and Linkugel's (1973) system is the basis of a solid framework on which to begin the analysis of the selected social media artifacts, research for this thesis is primarily based on Vartabedian's approach in his articles that compare and contrast rhetorical perspectives on what he referred to as the classic apologia of speeches made by Richard Nixon, both before and during his presidency: the "Checkers" speech of 1952, and the 1973 speech given in response to the "Watergate" scandal (Vartabedian, 1985a); as well as a comparative analysis of Nixon's rhetorical speeches on Vietnam and Cambodia (Vartabedian, 1985b); and an examination of Clinton's political exigencies and rhetorical choices in his address to the nation in the Monica Lewinsky affair (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 2003, p. 28).

The strategy of denial "amounts to a disavowal by the speaker" (Vartabedian, 1985a, p. 53) to establish distance from that which the audience finds offensive, and when bolstering efforts are used in speech the speaker is attempting to personally identify with some element that is perceived to be "viewed favorably by the audience" (p. 53). Vartabedian (1985a) argues that the differentiation strategy is more complex in that it is the specific speaker's "particularization of the charges" (p. 53). Or more specifically, the individual provides his or her side of the story in terms that will most likely be viewed favorably, in a "less abstract perspective" (Vartabedian, 1985a, p. 53). Finally, the strategic approach of transcendence is a deliberate effort made by the speaker to move the audience in a new direction "away from the particulars of the charges at hand while at the same time moving toward a more abstract and general view of their character"

(Vartabedian, 1985a, p. 53), in an effort to redirect focus and rise above specifics and beyond the moment.

1. **Denial** – amounts to a disavowal by the speaker.
2. **Bolstering** – speaker attempts to identify with something viewed favorably by audience.
3. **Differentiation** – speaker's particularization of the charges; less abstract perspective.
4. **Transcendence** – move audience away from particulars of charges, toward more abstract perspective.

Figure 1. The four key rhetorical strategies (Vartabedian, 1985) central to the analysis of apologetic discourse were first adapted for use in generic criticism by Ware and Linkugel (1973), who referred to them as "factors."

Reformative vs. transformative. Vartabedian (1985a) presented an analysis of stylistic form that placed the four apologia strategies previously outlined, into two distinct categories: reformative and transformative (see Figure 2). The two reformative strategies designed to reform thoughts of the audience are denial and bolstering. Conversely, the two transformative strategies that attempt to change opinions of audience members are differentiation and transcendence. In examining the rhetoric for this study, it was important to "discern the most crucial reformative and transformative strategies operating in the selected apologia" (Vartabedian, 1985a, p. 54).

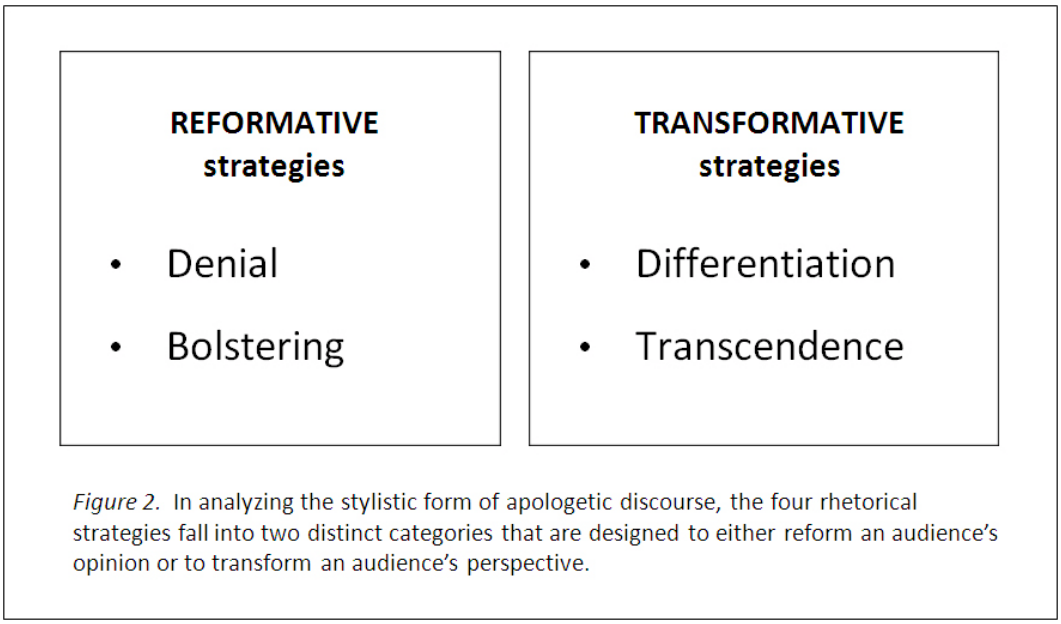

Figure 2. In analyzing the stylistic form of apologetic discourse, the four rhetorical strategies fall into two distinct categories that are designed to either reform an audience's opinion or to transform an audience's perspective.

Rhetorical postures and sub-genres in apologia. Research by Vartabedian (1985a) supported Ware and Linkugel's (1973) supposition "that the speech of self-defense needs to contain both reformative and transformative elements and thus results in any combination of one strategy from each category" (Vartabedian, 1985a, p. 54). It is the deliberate combination of these strategies that create unique sub-genres (see Figure 3) used most frequently in the generic criticism analysis of apologia to identify discourse types that are referred to as rhetorical postures: (1) absolution—primarily combining denial (a reformative strategy) and differentiation (a transformative strategy); (2) vindication—using essentially denial (again, reformative) and transcendental (a transformative strategy); (3) explanation—which is highly dependent upon bolstering (a reformative strategy) and differentiation (which is transformative); and, (4) justification—based mostly on bolstering (again, reformative) and transcendental (a transformative strategy) efforts (Downey, 1993; Foss, 2009; Vartabedian, 1985a).

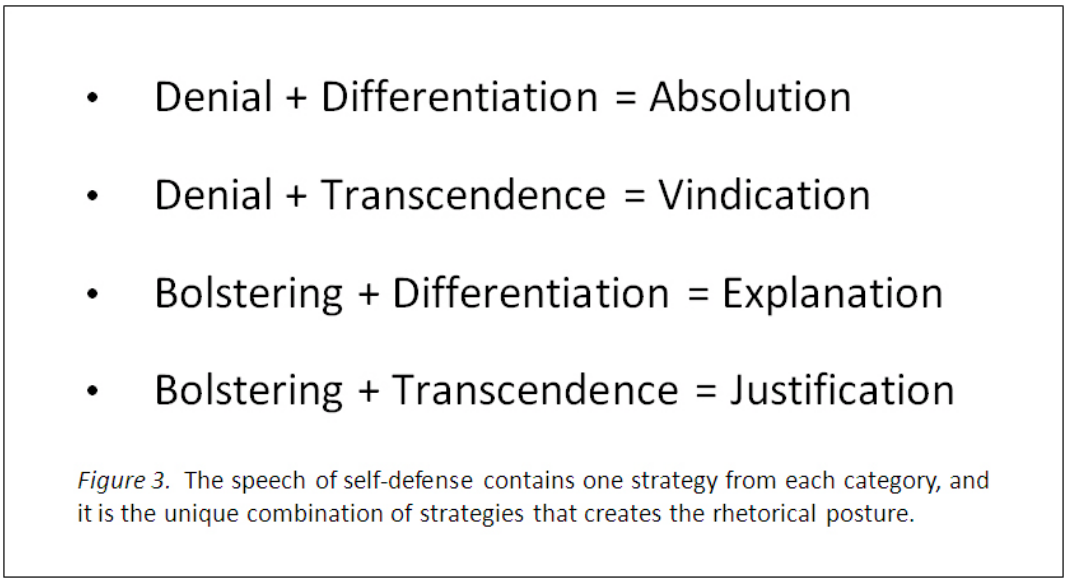

Figure 3. The speech of self-defense contains one strategy from each category, and it is the unique combination of strategies that creates the rhetorical posture.

According to scholars Campbell and Jamieson (1978), "rhetorical forms that establish genres are stylistic and substantive responses to perceived situational demands" (p. 19). Foss (2009) further contended that in discourse the situational requirement is "the perception of conditions in a situation that call forth particular kinds of rhetorical responses" (p. 137). Downey (1993) examined the "interdependence of text and content" (p. 47) and argued that throughout history "shifts in the genre's function" (Downey, 1993, p. 42) have taken place, causing "significant changes in form" that have resulted in a new sub-set of rhetorical distinctions referred to as functions: self-exoneration, self-absolution, self-sacrifice, self-service, and self-deception. These apologetic functions are subordinate to the rhetorical postures typically used to explicate components of apologia; nonetheless, they were used as a secondary component in the analysis portion of this study and have been briefly acknowledged in the findings section of this thesis for each social media artifact.

Examining selected social media artifacts. Although modern rhetorical theory has expanded beyond the confines of its classical form to encompass a broad spectrum of artifacts that include such considerations as music, images, art, gestures, dance, film, performance, and

advertising (Foss, 2009, p. 6), for the purpose of this study the focus remained true to traditional rhetorical criticism through an emphasis on words and text during analysis. Foss's (2009) definition included three primary dimensions in generic criticism: (1) humans as the creators of rhetoric; (2) symbols as the medium for rhetoric; and (3) communication as the purpose for rhetoric" (p. 3). Foss (2009) expanded on the communication aspects regarding audiences and posited that:

> As rhetors develop messages, genres influence them to shape their materials to create particular emphases, to generate particular ideas, and to adopt particular personae. Similarly, audience members' recognition of a particular artifact as belonging to a specific genre influences their strategies of comprehension and response. (p. 137)

Generic description required a comprehensive approach in criticism in which the goal was to "define a genre and formulate theoretical constructs about its characteristics" (Foss, 2009, p. 140) through an examination of artifacts. The process of generic description, according to Foss (2009), involves four steps: "(1) observing similarities in rhetorical responses to particular situations; (2) collecting artifacts that occur in similar situations; (3) analyzing the artifacts to discover if they share characteristics; and (4) formulating the organizing principle of the genre" (p. 141).

This thesis offers comparison and contrast analyses of rhetorical situations within social media in a series of critical occasions in which apologetic discourse was presented through the social media context of a blog initially titled, *Running a Hospital*. Research for this study examined multiple posts written over a two-year period; the selected blog posts comprised the set of social media artifacts. Each artifact had a specific focus within one of five pivotal topics in which Levy defended himself and his organization through the use of apologetic discourse. The

first four situations presented opportunities for the apologist to tell his side of the story in blog topics ranging from: (1) his salary as chief executive officer of a nonprofit organization; (2) hospital infection rates which are annually reported to regulatory bodies but not generally made public; (3) a "never event" in which hospital medical staff operated on the wrong body part of a patient; to (4) economic challenges the hospital was facing and the very real probability of significant staff layoffs. The fifth and final topic was a series of blog post responses that centered on Levy's efforts at damage control surrounding allegations of misconduct in an inappropriate personal relationship.

In keeping with the tradition of rhetorical criticism and generic description critical methods of determining the genre, each of these situations was explored to discern common denominators of the social media set (German, 1985, p. 89). Special focus in the analysis portion of this study was given to the manner in which Levy, as the rhetor, approached each situation through apologetic discourse that employed the speech of self-defense in the public environment of social media and the blogosphere conversation.

Delimitations. The delimitations of this study include those characteristics that limit the scope of inquiry and define the boundaries of research. Such characteristics are identified during the development of the proposal, as part of the decision process about what criteria should ultimately be included in the study and what are excluded due to relevance, interest, and feasibility. This study has been delimited to an examination of information about Levy that is specifically defined as content that was: (a) published by him in social media, looking only at post that were specifically made to his blog, even though Levy regularly posted to additional social networking channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and occasional wrote follow-up comments to healthcare related blogs by others; and, (b) news reports published in newspapers,

primarily from local news outlets; (c) regarding five separate and distinct situations that presented challenges; with, (d) potential and apparent similarities; (e) which took place over a period of time; (f) in an effort to determine whether there is evidence of apologia. Among these delimitations are the deliberate choices regarding which five situational problems that were finally selected for inclusion in the study: (1) Levy posted his salary and asked the question, "Do I get paid too much?" on January 28, 2007; (2) next Levy went very public with a report that is typically just filed with appropriate government agencies when he posted the hospital's central line infection rates on April 11, 2007, and challenged BIDMC's colleagues (i.e., competitors) to do the same; (3) the July 5, 2008, blog post was dedicated to addressing issues surrounding the "never event" in which a medical team at BIDMC operated on a patient's wrong body part; (4) Levy posted a blog on March 6, 2009, in which he both provided an update on impacts of the economic downturn on BIDMC and an invitation that solicited solutions; and finally, (5) beginning with a cryptic blog post titled, "I was wrong. I am sorry," first published on May 3, 2010, through its culmination in his resignation from BIDMC in January 2011, the fifth and final situation was a personal and professional crisis that is the result of what the board said was "a serious lapse in judgment" (Levy, 2010a, para. 4).

Chapter 4: Findings

Traditional apologia has historically been the speech of self-defense, and analysis typically examines speeches and other conventional forms of apologetic discourse. The advent of the Internet and the subsequent proliferation of social media have created an environment where individuals have equal access and opportunity for opinions to be expressed. This study examined social media artifacts, selected from discreet instances in the blogosphere, to determine: (1) whether the genre of apologia applies to social media apologies; and (2) if social media extends the genre of apologia.

For the analysis portion of this study, an apologia rubric was used in the examination of blogs posts that were written in response to five distinct and separate situations during a two-year period. Through the application of generic description and critical apologetic methods, each of the five situations was examined to discern common elements within the selected social media artifacts from the blog, in search of specific characteristics of apologia. The rubric that was used to identify apologia characteristics was devised by adopting Ware and Linkugel's (1973) original system and incorporating the apologetic strategies delineated by Vartabedian (1985a; 1985b). Ware and Linkugel (1973) recognized repeating elements within discourse and identified four specific apologetic strategies: (1) denial; (2) bolstering; (3) differentiation; and (4) transcendence. Vartabedian's (1985a) analysis of stylistic form placed the four apologia strategies into two distinct categories: reformative and transformative. While the two reformative strategies designed to reform the thoughts of audience members are denial and bolstering, the two transformative strategies that attempt to change audience opinion are differentiation and transcendence. The deliberate combinations of these strategies create the unique sub-genres used in the analysis portion of this study to identify discourse types referred to

as rhetorical postures: (1) absolution; (2) vindication; (3) explanation; and (4) justification (Downey, 1993; Foss, 2009; Vartabedian, 1985a). As an additional, albeit secondary, component to this rubric, Downey's (1993) exploration of genre function was included in the analysis of each of the blog posts that comprise the fifth and final apologetic situation, because of the rhetorical distinctions offered by the sub-set within the specific purposes of apologia: self-exoneration, self-absolution, self-sacrifice, self-service, and self-deception.

The Intersection of Social Media and Apologia

During the course of this study it was discovered that apologetic discourse does exist within the context of social media, thus the genre of apologia does apply to social media apologies and the answer to RQ1 is yes. After a thorough investigation of the literature and a lengthy review of social networking and social media from a wide variety of sources, it became clear that there are indeed distinct instances of apologia within the context of the blog artifacts that were selected for examination. Research for this study included examining blog posts written by Levy over a two-year period, with specific focus on the five critical situation topics in which Levy defended himself or his organization, from which the set of social media artifacts were extracted and then analyzed through the context of apologia. To accomplish the goals of this study, the traditional steps of generic criticism were applied to all posts written by Levy within the scope of these apologetic topics. The analysis revealed that while Levy's blog posts were written over a period of time and differed by topic, they all shared similarities and contained identifiable artifacts that proved to be apologetic in nature. The research process used in this study identified apologetic discourse in each of the blog postings that comprised the five situations. In analysis it became evident that the particular set of social media artifacts contained evidence of apologetic discourse which exhibited characteristics similar to traditional apologia.

In fact, research revealed that specific characteristics discovered in the set of social media artifacts not only embody elements of the original system as defined by Ware and Linkugel (1973), but it was revealed that traditional characteristics which the apologia genre shared with the set of social media artifacts examined in this study encompass all four rhetorical strategies: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Furthermore, the artifacts selected from the blog that comprised the social media artifact set used in the apologetic analysis exhibited various combinations of reformative and transformative strategies, which encompassed the scope of all four rhetorical postures: explanation, justification, absolution, and vindication.

The Extension of Apologia into Social Media

As a result of the analysis of selected blog artifacts, it was determined that social media does extend the genre of apologia; therefore the answer to RQ2 is conclusively yes. Social media extends apologia both through function and expanded opportunity. Elements of apologetic discourse identified within the social media blog posts were distinctive in that they had identifiable characteristics and were conclusively traditional apologia, not only in terms of solid apologetic strategies and discernable rhetorical postures, but also in the way each artifact functioned within the overall blog context.

Historically, rhetors have had restricted opportunity to respond to accusation and charges in limited venues, and over the centuries shrinking options had dwindled traditional apologia and effectively relegated it mostly to political arenas. The advent of the Internet and subsequent access to social media has shattered former constraints by providing a unique environment where everyone has an opportunity to be heard. Social media has become the platform of accusation and self-defense, as social networking options turn a previously closed environment into one that is open and immediate in real-time through electronic social interaction. Not only does the social

media phenomenon extend the genre of apologia, but it effectively expands its reach through a dynamic of new dimensions.

Selected Apologetic Artifacts

To better understand the implications of social media in the apologetic strategies employed by Levy in his blog, research for this thesis identified specific postings in which there was evidence of persuasive language with elements of apologia. The contexts of these blog posts comprise five distinct situations that included components of defense, either of himself or his organization. Utilizing Vartabedian's (1985b) approach as the template for this research, these distinct blog posts were viewed as an apologia under the system detailed by Ware and Linkugel (1973) and were found to suggest apologetic elements that reveal a "skillful redefinition" (Vartabedian, 1985b, p. 371) of Levy's rhetorical situations. Thus, drawing from the four rhetorical strategies of denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence, the analysis identifies crucial combinations of reformative and transformative strategies that create the rhetorical postures adopted by Levy in his online conversations.

During the analysis portion of this study, eight separate blog postings written by Levy were selected for review, comprising the set of social media artifacts. Four of these blog posts were written around different situations, and in each instance Levy specifically chose to write about the topic. In other words, while each of the first four blog post artifacts represents a challenging situation, Levy initiated the social media discussion in his blog and was in control of the message. However, in the final situation a personal failure created a crisis that demanded a public response; the situation was neither chosen by Levy, nor could he ignore it. The final four blog post artifacts that are examined in this study were published on Levy's blog in response to this last situation.

The following eight blog posts comprise the set of artifacts that were analyzed during the research process, and for each social media artifact the analysis findings below include: (1) the topical situation and discussion around the original text; (2) news items germane to each situation published during the same time period are briefly addressed; (3) the analysis results identify the apologetic strategies that were used within the blog text and the corresponding sub-genre discourse type; and finally, (6) the rubric analysis identified the rhetorical posture created by the apologetic strategies and revealed how the artifact functions within social media as an extension of apologia.

Apologia Initiated By the Apologist

Situation one: "Do I get paid too much?" Levy began writing his blog *Running a Hospital* in August 2006. Just six months later a newspaper article in *The Boston Globe* (Rowland, 2006) published its annual news report on salary compensation paid to local area hospital CEOs, and Levy responded through a discussion of his salary on his public blog, in which he gave a nod to critics and offered detailed information about the process the board used to establish executive compensation and benefits. Posted by Levy (2007a) to his blog on January 28, 2007:

> Every year, *The Boston Globe* publishes a story listing the total compensation received by the CEOs of the major Boston hospitals. The story is derived from the Forms 990 that are filed by every non-profit, and the numbers are interesting enough that the story always gets good placement in the newspaper. (para. 1)

At this point in his blog, Levy interjected a lengthy background explanation about how compensation for CEOs is set by a public board of trustees, and he included information about the process of regulatory review. Then he got personal and blogged details about his pay:

> As noted by the *Globe*, my total compensation was about $1 million in fiscal 2005. Of this, $650,000 was the base salary. Also, I was eligible for a 30% incentive compensation payment if the hospital achieved specified results for clinical quality, patient satisfaction, and financial performance. (Levy, 2007a, para. 4)

As part of his reasoning, Levy provided background on BIDMC. Finally, he put it directly open to the public for discussion, debate and criticism: "So, if you were on my board, how would you set an appropriate salary?" (Levy, 2007a, para. 6)

Comments posted to the blog: Levy's candid and open blog about his salary invited comments, and fully 57 people availed themselves of the opportunity to join the conversation. Five years later those comments were still online, with the addition of seven more recent comments.

Concurrent news stories: *The Boston Globe* published a modestly short follow-up article which asked what it referred to as the "million dollar question," renaming and reframing Levy's original title and putting it before readers for consideration: "Does he get paid too much?" The online article includes a link back to Levy's original blog (Cooney, 2007).

Applying apologia to social media in support of RQ1. During the analysis of this blog post as a social media artifact, the apologetic rubric was applied. As the text was examined, it became obvious that there was no personal denial of charges, thus the key reformative strategy is clearly bolstering, which Levy used in an attempt to identify with something that would be viewed favorably by his audience. Also fairly easy to discern was Levy's use of transcendence in an effort to transform the audience's opinion and move them away from the particulars of the charge of over-compensation.

Levy's follow-up comment. It is interesting to note that in late 2009 after his hospital had successfully navigated the economic downturn crisis, Levy posted an addendum to the comments section of this particular topic. Here, Levy adopts a crucial transformative strategy where his use of differentiation provides clear insight into his strategic focus, as he recounts his personal sacrifices to avoid hospital staff layoffs, and he mentions that hospital vice president leaders took similar cuts in pay to help avert pending layoffs (see Figure 4).

Extending the genre of apologia in support of RQ2. According to the analysis, Levy's choices in reformative and transformative apologia strategies in his online arguments for this particular topic combined to create an effective rhetorical posture of justification. Justification first emerged as a rhetorical posture during the medieval period, and Levy adopts it as a substantive and stylistic form to respond to critics regarding his salary. Downey's (1993) sub-set genre classification suggests that the form and function of justification as it operates within the apologetic discourse of this social media post is primarily one of self-absolution.

ANALYSIS

1. No personal denial; reformative strategy is **bolstering**.
2. Use of **transcendence** to transform audience opinion, away from over-compensation.
3. Apologia strategies combined to create an effective rhetorical posture of **justification**.
4. Justification is a substantive and stylistic form that operates here primarily as **self-absolution**.

Figure 4. These are the findings for the apologetic rubric analysis of Levy's blog post: "Do I get paid too much?" published January 28, 2007.

Situation two: "Central Line Infection, both better and worse." Information about hospital infections is regularly tracked on the calendar and reported to appropriate government agencies by hospitals and health systems throughout the United States. In keeping with his publically promoted commitment to transparent disclosure, Levy opened the hospital's record to the public by publishing BIDMC's infection rates in his blog on April 11, 2007:

> Here are our latest figures for central line infections, measured in cases per thousand ICU patient days… As always, we treat them as sentinel events and try to learn what went wrong and why. (Levy, 2007b, para. 1)
>
> Our folks are really serious about this and, in my opinion, deserve a lot of credit. A friend of mine … had one of these lines put in his chest … His wife, a medical professional, watched the doctor and nurse insert the line and was very impressed with their understanding of, and rigorous application of, the protocol. (Levy, 2007b, para. 2)

Comments posted to the blog: Levy published the month-end hospital infection rates from Oct 2005, through Feb 2007. Comments were open to the public; this blog post received four comments from readers, and Levy also posted replies with two additional comments.

Concurrent news stories: An article in *The Boston Globe* reported on local hospital infections, identifying BIDMC in the above-average scoring groups, at 76 percent better than the national average (Cooney, 2010). Two sites linked to this blog, and Levy posted those reciprocal links to their articles in return; both pieces contributed to Levy's bolstering strategies, and one published the following statement: "I want to point out something startling: A hospital CEO engaging in transparency … If this pattern keeps up, patients might actually feel better informed, and more tolerant when errors occur" (Turkewitz, 2007). However, while Levy had a sizeable fan club, there were also those who were critical of Levy's apparent tactics. An article in *The*

Boston Globe revealed an emerging pattern of which hospital leadership disapproved: "Levy, though, cannot seem to stop talking. Despite being warned to cease using his blog to take shots at rival hospitals, his daily postings are alternately unctuous and self-serving or defensive and slightly paranoid. (McNamara, 2010, para. 14)

Five years after its initial writing, the blog post on central line infections stood altered from its original form; the challenge Levy issued in 2007 for healthcare executives at competing hospitals to publically disclose their facility's infection rates has been removed from his blog as if it never existed. That was not the only change Levy made to his blog regarding previous arguments to the central line infection discussion. Five days after the original central line post was published, Levy wrote a follow-up blog post on the same topic titled, "What's in a number?" (2007c), in which he asked probing questions about more effective and meaningful ways to analyze the data to improve outcomes. That was then, back when Levy's messages were written as the hospital's CEO and he was interested in touting his organization's successes. That was before he was forced to step down from his position because of a lapse in professional judgment in an inappropriate personal relationship, and before he became a self-appointed spokesman for patient safety and quality. Today, Levy's former discussion explaining what the numbers mean regarding infection rates can no longer be accessed on his blog; the entire post has been eradicated. Maybe after five years he felt it was no longer timely, justifying its deletion; yet older posts with less relevance are still available on his blog. Perhaps the numbers explanation was deemed to be in conflict with another blog post on the topic. Most probable, it was necessitated by a change in his persuasive rhetorical purpose as evidenced in Levy's more recent post titled, "When is a comparison not a comparison?" (2012), in which he states: "If there was ever a metric that did not need a benchmark or an adjustment, it is the rate of central line

infections. The target for this metric should be zero" (para. 5). This position is very different from Levy's original position, in which the now-banished challenge to competitors essentially asked for a public comparison of hospital infection rates. Further into the comparisons blog post, Levy expounds upon his newly-framed opinion through the use of bolstering strategies designed to reinforce his position as a quality expert on patient treatment and outcomes.

Applying apologia to social media in support of RQ1. As this was a proactive effort on Levy's part to make publically available in his blog a regulatory report that is typically filed exclusively with appropriate governmental agencies, his social media post for this situation was not a personal denial of charges. Rather, the crucial strategies Levy used in this blog post are bolstering and differentiation. His fundamental strategy of bolstering was designed to reform perceptions toward one that is more favorable, as Levy deliberately sought to demonstrate an organizational openness that would be associated with transparency (see Figure 5).

Extending the genre of apologia in support of RQ2.

The dominant strategies of bolstering and differentiation combine in this blog post as a rhetorical posture of explanation. The substantive and stylistic feature of explanation in contemporary apologia, according to Downey (1993, p. 58), functions as self-deception. Interestingly, there appears to be evidence that self-deception holds true as a function for this particular posting—it has been altered since it first appeared in the blog. In its original form when it was published in 2007, Levy issued a challenge to his "colleagues" (i.e., locally competing hospital leaders) to follow his lead and publish their central line infection rates.

ANALYSIS

1. The fundamental strategy of **bolstering** was used to reform perceptions of the hospital.
2. Crucial strategies were used toward **differentiation**.
3. The dominant strategies combine as a rhetorical posture of **explanation**.
4. In contemporary apologia, explanation tends to function as **self-deception**.

Figure 5. These are the findings for the apologetic rubric analysis of Levy's blog post: "Central Line Infection," which was published April 11, 2007.

Situation three: "The message you hope never to send." Few issues send fear through the ranks of conscientious healthcare providers more than "never events," medical mistakes so critical that they should never happen in a hospital. A surgical team at BIDMC made a critical clinical error during elective surgery on a patient and operated on the wrong body part. Levy chose to go openly public with a message that was first created for an internal audience, and he quoted heavily from the open letter to hospital staff for his blog post on July 5, 2008:

> This week at BIDMC, a patient was harmed when something happened that never should happen: A procedure was performed on the wrong body part. With the support of all our Chiefs of service, we are sharing this information with the whole organization because there are lessons here for all of us. (Levy, 2008b, para. 1)

The open letter quoted in the blog was written by Dr. Kenneth Sands, senior vice-president of health care quality at BIDMC, and it included detailed facts about the error while protecting patient privacy and maintaining confidentiality. The letter referred to the mistake as an

aberration, which isolated the situation by characterizing it in such a manner as to make the sequence of events appear extremely rare and unusual by expounding on the particularly hectic surgical schedule that day and missed "time out" steps. Dr. Sands continued in his letter:

> What a horrifying story. What important lessons. We learned that when teams are busy and distracted, it makes it easier to overlook something. We learned that key safety steps, like the "time out," need to occur every single time, since even one failure can be serious. We learned that serious events rarely relate to the performance of any single person. We learned that we have vulnerabilities that we were not even aware of, and that there are surely others out there. (Levy, 2008b, para. 3)

Following the republished letter within the post, Levy directed readers through a hypertext link to a favorable article in *The Boston Globe* before he added his personal remarks to the text:

> The things that went wrong … simply should not have happened. The test for our place is to figure out how to make the right things happen 100% of the time … While I feel incredibly badly about the event, I feel good about the actions taken by individuals and groups right afterward. (Levy, 2008b, para. 9-10)

This approach proved to be one of Levy's most significant differentiation efforts for the wrong-site surgery situation. After enumerating the efforts BIDMC's physician leaders had employed to correct processes, Levy summed it up by again differentiating the hospital's current culture:

> I could not say with any certainty that all three of these things would have happened even three years ago, when people would have been a lot more protective and skittish about this kind of disclosure. But the focus of our hospital on improving quality and safety and our emphasis on eliminating preventable harm and on transparency of our clinical results has taken hold in a very strong way. This is a cooperative effort of the clinical and

> administrative and lay leadership – and it takes all three groups to make it happen. (Levy, 2008b, para. 11)

Levy's insistence that the goal for this disclosure had been that of learning and transparency was a message that was repeated in local media. However, specific apologia tactics appear to be the goal in Levy's posting, and the point was not missed by some of the blog's readers who were highly critical in personal comments posted to the blog. Researchers Blaney and Benoit (2001) explored the use of apologia in image restoration and defined this type of strategic approach as one intended to reduce the offensiveness of an event. Further evidence of the Blaney and Benoit (2001) interpretation appeared to be the corrective actions promoted by Levy in response to a Board member's criticism of his decision to take the discussion public on his blog. Levy expounded on management's plan for a training strategy solution that would use new media video in a concerted effort to incorporate this particular story into a broader narrative. Plans included sharing the new training video with staff at department meetings and new employee orientation.

Comments posted to the blog: Fully 55 comments were initially posted to this blog, both from inside BIDMC and out, with five additional comments added over the next four years. Levy himself posted seven times within the comment section in reply to a particular comment or criticism. Because of the high-profile nature of this critical issue, multiple stories were published about the medical error at BIDMC, and Levy links to 28 articles and website blogs. Levy (2008c) posted the follow-up blog post titled "A lesson from Tom," which was inspired by one of the hospital teams and carried a message about having the courage to disclose errors.

Concurrent news stories: Subsequent articles about BIDMC's serious medical mistake (Smith, 2008) that hospitals call a "never event" were published in large-circulation publications

such as *U.S. News & World Report, The Boston Globe*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. All hospitals are required to include a "timeout" prior to starting any surgery (Cooney, 2008; Goldstein, 2008; Kenen, 2008) as part of the accreditation process of The Joint Commission (Comarow, 2008). First implemented in mid-2004, when the timeout is called, all activity in the operating room stops, and a verbal check is performed by the surgical team to confirm that it is the correct patient, procedure, and correct side of the body for the surgical procedure.

Two years later the story still had legs, and Levy continued to get media coverage as the leader who turned a horrible mistake into a message of learning, as evidenced in a news article published in *The New York Times:*

> The difference between apologizing and simply offering "regret" may seem semantic. Yet some ethicists and analysts say that different words do, in fact, reflect divergent approaches to accountability… (Singer, 2010, para. 13)
>
> OPENLY apologizing also has the potential to turn a problem into a teachable moment for employees thereby preventing a repeat occurrence, says Paul Levy. (Singer, 2010, para. 22)
>
> The medical profession, he says, was initially hesitant to embrace contrition. But, he says, "as in any field, once you have a few leaders do it and the world doesn't end, and, in fact, is made better, then people tend to follow." (Singer, 2010, para. 24)

What was interesting about this particular rhetorical situation was that Levy's choice of disclosure was specific and deliberate; there was already a public relations spin on the message before it was ever posted to his blog. Hospital leadership had analyzed the situation, determined a solution, and launched a retraining program, which had been reported in local news stories that praised the hospital for turning the mistake into a teachable moment. However, there was no

public blog or open note of apology later that same year when a medical error at BIDMC killed a young mom named Karen Vasques, who died during childbirth. Less than three months after the hospital was praised in the media for its transparent response to the wrong-site surgery, another article ran in *The Boston Globe* highlighted by a title that belied Levy's claims: "Errors test openness at Beth Israel Deaconess" (Wen, 2008). Even though Levy had "more than ever before staked his reputation on 'transparency,' particularly about medical errors inside his Harvard teaching hospital" (Wen, 2008), he chose to ignore the newspaper's allegations, and no blog response was forthcoming. Clearly, the medical mistake Levy was willing to discuss publically in a demonstration of transparency was not life-threatening, and he only went public in his blog when the situation could be framed in positive terms about steps they had taken to change processes that would reflect favorably on the hospital. Just two days after he resigned as hospital CEO, Levy was already attempting to recast himself in the role of quality expert on patient safety when he posted his apologetic discourse titled, "The moral component to transparency" (2011b). In the later blog post Levy subtly exploited the birthing tragedy to rhetorically bolster his own agenda through the use of quotes from the newspaper article he had previously ignored, as another method to expound upon the need for greater transparency.

Another critical news story published in December 2010 revealed Beth Israel Deaconess had experienced a spate of medical errors and wrongful surgeries prior to Levy's resignation in January 2011, as the hospital came under fire for critical medical errors that purportedly happened in the fourth quarter of 2010. Three of those cases were errors made during spine surgeries that resulted in poor patient outcomes. According to the *The Boston Globe* report:

> Surgeons at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center operated on the wrong location on three patients who underwent spine surgery since September, despite taking

> recommended steps to prevent such errors, prompting federal and state health inspectors to cite the hospital for problems in its surgical service. (Kowalczyk, 2010f)

Applying apologia to social media in support of RQ1. Analysis of this social media artifact again revealed no direct denial of charges, nor is there a clear admittance of guilt, either. The reformative strategy was difficult to pinpoint, as there were underpinnings of denial in the subtle shifting of blame to specific circumstances which occurred that day. Ultimately, the predominant reformative strategy for the overall blog post was observed in Levy's efforts at bolstering, which was evident in the characterization of the incident and the organization's approach to take corrective action (Blaney & Benoit, 2001, p. 16). The transformative strategy is more easily identifiable; the blog clearly acknowledged that a serious mistake had occurred and use of the open letter to employees that provided details regarding the surgery work in a manner to differentiate circumstances surrounding the "never event" surgical case (see Figure 6).

Extending the genre of apologia in support of RQ2. Levy's specific use of interchanging apologetic strategies that present a stylistically bolstering stance, combine with substantive differentiation tactics to create shared-dominance rhetorical postures of absolution and explanation. According to Downey's (1993) examination of apologia in discourse, this particular dual rhetorical combination in the social media artifacts that comprise the blog post leans toward the apologetic function of self-service.

ANALYSIS

1. Underpinnings of **denial**; but stylistically **bolstering** strategies.
2. Open letter differentiated circumstances around event.
3. Interchanging apologetic strategies and **differentiation** create shared-dominance postures of **absolution** *and* **explanation**.
4. The rhetorical combination functions as **self-service**.

Figure 6. These are the findings for the apologetic rubric analysis of Levy's blog post: "The message you hope never to send," published July 5, 2008.

Situation four: "Update on the economy and its effect on BIDMC." Even critical budget difficulties were openly explored in the public venue of his blog early in 2009, when Levy blogged about ongoing internal meetings and discussions as his hospital struggled under crushing budget issues in a down economy, threatened by potential layoffs of as many as 600 employees. But this blog post was not just a tell-all about the hospital's treasury troubles; Levy never introduced a topic for discussion without a goal in mind and a solid strategic approach, and the economic challenges his hospital faced were no different. Logic would reason that a wise hospital executive would bend every effort to bolster both perceptions of his hospital, and by extension, perceptions of Levy himself as its leader during critical discussions, and that is exactly what Levy attempted to do through his online dialogue. On March 6, 2009, Levy posted to his blog:

> Back in November, I wrote to our staff with an explanation of what the economic trends might mean for our hospital (2009a, para. 1)… We have taken steps to date to reduce expenditures... Now, sadly, we have to crank up the expense reduction. (2009a, para. 8)
>
> Part of the solution to this problem will be to lay off people. I'm not sure how many yet, and I am hoping you can help me figure out how to minimize the number by using more creative and less disruptive ways to solve the problem. (2009a, para. 10)

Levy then outlined a series of information gathering efforts in his blog about the organization's quest for solutions to help resolve the financial crisis while still saving jobs. Although he invited employees to contact him directly with suggestions including face-to-face discussions, it is his utilization of social media that gleaned the most responses in the effort to gather ideas. Levy employed the use of internal chat rooms, and externally he invited suggestions from his followers on Twitter and Facebook, and he solicited input through comments on his blog, ultimately collecting over 3,500 messages that would direct efforts (Solman, 2009b).

Comments posted to the blog: The initial post received a total of 28 comments, and only two of those responses were posted by Levy. He then wrote a follow-up post titled, "Town meetings @ BIDMC" (Levy, 2009b), after the series of town hall-style meetings had taken place. Along with a recap of the meetings in which employees lauded Levy's request to protect the lowest wage-earners, the *Running a hospital* blog carried this observation:

> In this era of sometimes cynical and sometimes selfish behavior, I was heartened by the response of our folks. They are kind people who view themselves as a family and who are approaching our hospital's financial problems with a true generosity of spirit. (Levy, 2009b, para. 6)

For a sequel blog, this particular post was hugely popular with his readership audience, gleaning an interested response rate of 65 comments; seven were additional comment replies made by Levy.

Concurrent news stories: Following this very public disclosure, the most notable article was a column by Cullen (2009) titled "The head with a heart" that was published in *The Boston Globe*, offering an insider's view of the process and the man at the helm during stormy times. The column recounts Levy's heartfelt appeal to employees at the open town meetings, in which he impassionedly stated, "I'd like to do what we can to protect the lower-wage earners—the transporters, the housekeepers, the food service people" (Cullen, 2009, para. 9). When Levy explained to hospital employees that protecting these workers would mean "the rest of us will have to make a bigger sacrifice" (Cullen, 2009, para. 10), the auditorium erupted in applause: "Thunderous, heartfelt, sustained applause" (Cullen, 2009, para. 11). Levy would later recall that moment during another interview, stating he "couldn't talk for a little while because it was very moving" (Solman, 2009a).

Applying apologia to social media in support of RQ1. Through the use of bolstering reformative strategies, Levy's economic update post to his blog was a direct extension of the town hall-style meetings that were promoted in his blog and held in various hospital locations. Both in his blog and in staff meetings, Levy's dominant transformative dialogue centered on transcendence strategies designed to connect proposed actions with a greater meaning. In addition, Levy's call to action is yet another dominantly transcendence strategy in which he invited employees to help him save the jobs of their colleagues, and asked them to share ideas and make personal sacrifices (see Figure 7). He closed with a persuasive statement that continued in the vein of apologetic discourse designed to transform the situation: "I am confident

that we will apply our usual spirit of collaboration and teamwork to this current set of problems. I look forward to your suggestions and thoughts" (Levy, 2009a, para. 17).

Extending the genre of apologia in support of RQ2. Based on reformative strategy of bolstering in combination with the transcendence strategy used to transform, the analysis of this blog post revealed that the dominant rhetorical posture in Levy's update on the economy was justification, which functions as self-absolution within this social media artifact.

ANALYSIS

1. Strong use of **bolstering** reformative strategies.
2. Dominant transformative dialogue centered on **transcendence** strategies.
3. Clear strategies revealed the dominant rhetorical posture was **justification**.
4. In this situation, the apologia functions as **self-absolution**.

Figure 7. These are the findings for the apologetic rubric analysis of Levy's blog post: "Update on the economy and BIDMC," written March 6, 2009.

Lapse of Judgment: Exposure Requiring Apologetic Response

This section of the analysis examined four separate posts Levy blogged during the period encompassed by what was referred to as a personal "lapse of judgment" and his subsequent resignation. Apologia typically "results from moral choices that have been subjected to ethical challenges and unless character repair is made, there can be negative future consequences" (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 2003, p. 30). In similar previous situations where prominent individuals have been faced with a preponderance of evidence indicating questionable behavior,

the rhetorical exigencies have required a response because the situations called for it and their audiences expected it (Jamieson, 1973, p. 163). The primary posts Levy published on his blog that were examined for evidence of apologetic discourse in conjunction with the goals of this study, include these four central topics: (1) "I was wrong, I am sorry" (Levy, 2010a), which was published on Levy's blog several days after the hospital's board had called its first emergency meeting; (2) "Going public" (Levy, 2010b) was Levy's next attempt at offering an explanation, but the message belies its title and the post no longer exists on his blog; (3) "Why am I here?" (Levy, 2010c) was published several months after the original disclosure of his misconduct and presents a longitudinal review of Levy's accomplishments as CEO of BIDMC; and finally, (4) "Transitions" (Levy, 2011a), Levy's post that announced his resignation. Although Levy ultimately wrote all four of these postings in response to the singular rhetorical situation, each individual piece written for the blog was strategically designed for a specific apologetic purpose, so he adopted a different rhetorical posture in each unique instance.

Situation 5A: "I was wrong. I am sorry." Not surprisingly, Levy was scooped when the first media articles were published days before he would blog about what was initially released as an unspecified personal issue that would eventually prove to be a cataclysmic "lapse of judgment in a personal relationship" (Kowalczyk, 2010a, para. 1) for the transparency advocate. While initial reports did not reveal the nature of the allegations, news stories indicated there had been an emergency meeting of the board, and written statements were issued by Stephen B. Kay, chairman of the Board of Directors for Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, in which he stated that Levy "showed poor judgment and the board expressed its disappointment" (Levy, 2010a, para. 5). Although the board gave Levy a vote of confidence in his ability to lead the organization, the statement issued by the chairman indicated that the board

would take appropriate action, which included censuring Levy and fining him with a $50,000 penalty. While Levy offers an apology in the title of this particular blog post, he skirts the core issue of his behavior by ignoring it to avoid addressing the seriousness of the charges. Levy posted the board's statement to his blog on May 3, 2010:

> Although in this instance, Mr. Levy has not lived up to the standards we set for our CEO, the Board also considered his exemplary record over the course of his tenure at BIDMC, the current performance of the hospital, his role as the chief architect of the hospital's leading position in quality and safety, and his bold voice of leadership on public policy. Under Mr. Levy's direction, the hospital has reclaimed its rightful place as one of the region's preeminent providers of health care, medical education and research. The board again expressed its full support and confidence in his continued leadership, and considers this matter closed. (Levy, 2010a, para. 7)

After the full statement by his board, Levy then included another official statement from himself within the same blog post, introducing his own comments within the text in a very formal manner (emphasis is from the original text):

> I have issued the following statement, which has likewise been distributed to the media and to the entire hospital community.
>
> *I appreciate the Board's thoughtful consideration of this issue. I agree with their conclusions that I made an error of judgment, and I believe the Board has acted appropriately.*
>
> *Today I met with the Board, apologized to them again, and accepted their actions in resolving this matter. I regret that my behavior had such wide repercussions for the entire BIDMC community, and I will always feel sorry for any discredit I brought upon*

> *BIDMC. With the Board's vote, I look forward to putting this chapter behind us and working together in carrying out our public service mission.* (Levy, 2010a, para. 8-10)

Recognizing that press-conference-style apologia where an apology is executed at the podium and the chief walks away would not suffice in the interactive social media community he had spent so much time and effort wooing, Levy's blog continued in a more personal rhetorical tone:

> For those of you who have come to rely on me for my pursuit of quality and safety of care and continuous process improvement in our hospitals, I hope that this series of events and revelations will not undercut the importance or validity of what I have been saying. I especially apologize to you if you feel that I have let you down and, in so doing, in any way weakened the case I have been making. We in the medical community have much to do in these areas. I hope we can together continue to engage in vigorous activity to help make health care safer and more patient-centered. I can't imagine more important goals for all of us to pursue. (Levy, 2010a, para. 12)

Comments posted to the blog: The initial blog received 37 comments; 25 appear to offer general support of Levy; 10 were critical of his actions; and two strove for balance somewhere in between, citing lack of information regarding the charges.

Concurrent news stories: An article published in *The Boston Globe* presented a different version of the statement Levy claims to have sent to employees and the media: "The board appropriately conducted a review of my tenure here and found an instance in which I exercised poor judgment" (Kowalczyk, 2010a, para. 9), which grossly under-emphasized the nature of the circumstances surrounding the board's actions. Fully three weeks after the initial media storm surrounding the emergency board meeting, a column ran in *The Boston Globe* that outlined details of the lapse of judgment in the purportedly inappropriate relationship:

> Levy hired a young woman he once taught and mentored at MIT. The two had a very public relationship. The woman initially worked directly for Levy until she was given a management job that hadn't existed before. Last fall, she was fired because of the relationship. (McGrory, 2010, para. 7)

It is interesting to note that Levy had actually contacted McGrory (2010) and indicated he'd be willing to do an interview. In his column titled, "Attitudes at altitudes," McGrory (2010) sums up the interview experience:

> So I found myself in Levy's office in Brookline Avenue on Monday afternoon, face to face with a man who is widely considered to be among the most charming members of Boston's leadership elite. I came away with two distinct thoughts: This guy is good, and he just doesn't get it. (McGrory, 2010, para. 4)

Within the article McGrory included this revealing quote from Levy:

> "The leadership mistake was putting the hospital in a situation where people who worked there were made to feel discomforted, resentful, and distracted, thinking she might get special treatment," Levy said Monday. "That was the core of what I did wrong." (McGrory, 2010, para. 7)

Applying apologia to social media in support of RQ1. In the post on his blog, Levy's bolstering efforts are most revealing in his strategic use of the board's official statement, which also encompass his transcendental techniques. Before making an apology to his blog followers, Levy invoked identification with his commitment to improving healthcare, which the audience would view favorably, by using apologetic language to move away from the specificity of the charges and transform audience perceptions. Although Levy apologized, he did not actually "admit responsibility for the wrongful act and ask for forgiveness, engaging in mortification"

(Benoit, 1995, p. 79, para. 2), which is an expression of remorse and regret. This is one of the key reasons Levy's apologia eventually failed in accomplishing the task; he expressed regret in a number of passages in his blog but never admitted guilt or remorse for his actions. Even with initial audience support to this particular blog post, his apology is not perceived to be believable or sincere, because he trivialized his behavior when he continued to refer to it as a judgment error, thus the wrongful act was never completely pardoned (see Figure 8).

Extending the genre of apologia in support of RQ2. By using bolstering as his key reformative strategy, combined with efforts to transform the audience and move it away from the particulars of the charges, Levy attempted to adopt a rhetorical posture of justification. Clearly, Levy was working to maintain rhetorical apologetic strategies of bolstering and transcendence, which appear to function in his apologia as an effort at self-absolution, as evidenced by his particularization of the charges during his interview with McGrory (2010).

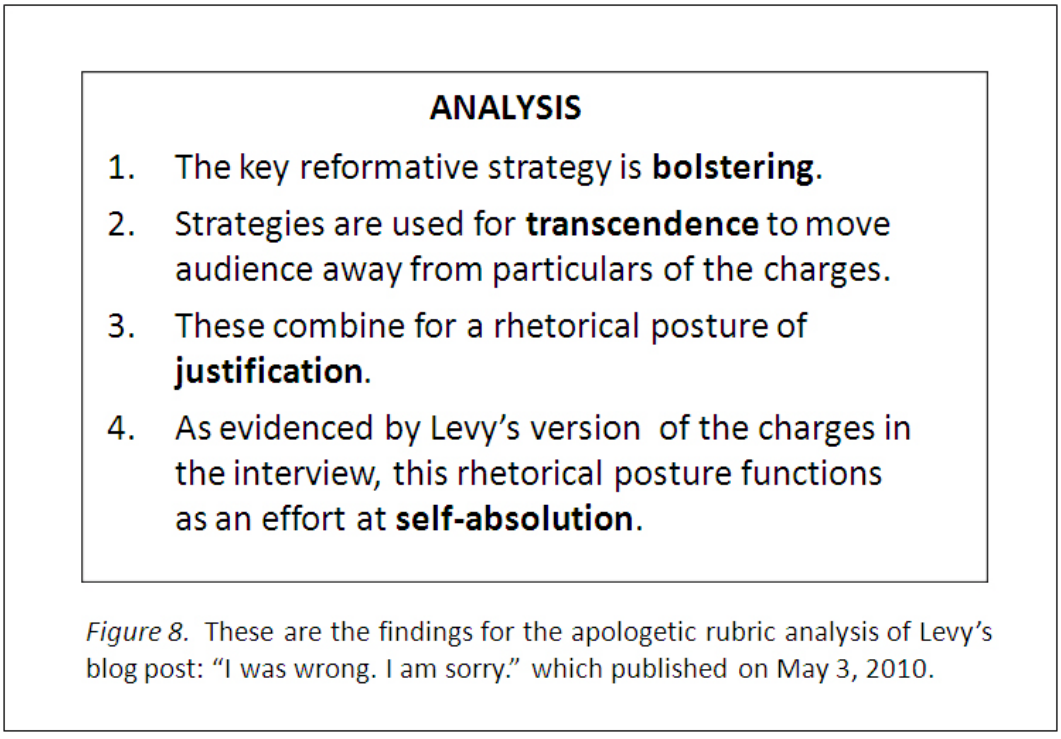

Figure 8. These are the findings for the apologetic rubric analysis of Levy's blog post: "I was wrong. I am sorry." which published on May 3, 2010.

Situation 5B: "Going public." One week after Levy's initial apologia regarding this situation, he posted "Going public" (Levy, 2010b), which by Levy standards was a relatively short blogging effort. Posted to Levy's blog on May 10, 2010:

> Many of you may have wondered why I have not been more outspoken to date about issues surrounding my recently disclosed leadership errors. The reason was that my Board of Directors at BIDMC was still considering the issues. Therefore, it wasn't yet timely for me to address them beyond authorized formal statements, what you have seen here and in the media. On Thursday night, the chair of our Board suggested to me that it would now be appropriate for me to meet with the media and discuss the case. (Levy, 2010b, para. 1)
>
> I did so yesterday in the first of several interviews, which will likely continue into next week. (Levy, 2010b, para. 2)

Within the context of the first paragraph, Levy provided a hypertext link back to the original blog apologia regarding this situation, "I am sorry. I was wrong" (Levy, 2010a). The second paragraph indicated that Levy had begun a round of media interviews and posted links directly to the coverage by three news outlets.

Comments posted to the blog: The blog received 23 comments; several were supportive of Levy, who only chimes in with one comment toward the end of the posts.

Concurrent news stories: Neither the two newspaper articles nor the television video clip portrayed a flattering image of the hospital's chief executive, who couldn't explain his actions and didn't make a convincing case for why he shouldn't be fired. Kowalczyk's (2010c) story in *The Boston Globe* titled, "Beth Israel chief apologizes for relationship with employee," was the second of two interview articles published by the newspaper that day:

> Paul Levy, chief executive of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, said today that for years senior staff and board members warned him about his relationship with a female employee, but for reasons he does not fully understand he ignored them.
>
> Levy, in his first interview since the situation came to light three weeks ago, said he made a mistake in believing that he could employ his "close personal friend" at the hospital without creating discomfort for other employees and potentially damaging the reputation of the institution.
>
> Levy, who declined to detail the exact nature of the relationship, said he was very sorry for his poor judgment and hoped to win back the trust of employees, patients, and the broader community. He said he has not thought seriously about resigning.
>
> "I really love this place. I've mainly thought about how much I'd like to stay here. We're doing really good things for patients and families," he said. (Kowalczyk, 2010c, para. 1-4)

Even more damaging to Levy's previous apologetic attempts in his blog to identify with something that would be viewed favorably, was his broadcast interview with Boston's WBZ-TV News. Political analyst Keller (2010) initially pitched soft-ball questions to Levy during the interview and gave him more than one opportunity to deny the charges, which Levy never did. However, he did not admit guilt, either. When Keller asked Levy about his relationship to the woman during the interview, Levy gave the same patent response he used in all of his interviews, which proved to be an ineffective reformative effort toward bolstering: "She is a close personal friend." Keller attempted to clarify the nature of their relationship by stating, "Then it was a platonic relationship," to which Levy reiterated, "She is a very close friend" (Keller, 2010).

The interviews Levy granted local media only just began to cover the breadth and depth of the media frenzy that ensued in the three-week interim after an anonymous letter was received by the board detailing the inappropriate relationship and demanding action. After its fourth emergency meeting in two weeks and the decision to fine Levy $50,000 for his poor leadership judgment, the board issued a formal request to Attorney General Coakley asking for a review (Kowalczyk, 2010b). Almost as soon as the interviews regarding the scandal were published, it was quickly followed by a series of articles proclaiming that the decision of Beth Israel's board was under review by the Massachusetts attorney general. Less than 24 hours later it was revealed that Levy had financial ties to the Attorney General Coakley, as Beth Israel executives and Levy personally had contributed significantly to her recent campaign (Kronenberg, 2010). A number of uncensored blogs picked up the Levy scandal to capitalize on potential visitor traffic interest the sensationalized scandal might add to their sites, attracting both supports and detractors who opted-in with comments.

Applying apologia to social media in support of RQ1. A thorough examination of this particular post to identify developed self-defense strategies was a difficult task, as Levy neither fully makes a disavowal of the charges, nor does he attempt to identify with something that would place him in a favorable light. Instead, Levy made a vague reference to what he carefully and specifically termed "leadership errors" and attempted to minimize the offense by directing his readership audience to the board's particularization of the situation in its official statement, as an indirect denial of the charges. His use of differentiation strategies provided a weak attempt to favorably transform or change the opinions of multiple audiences (see Figure 9).

Extending the genre of apologia in support of RQ2. Levy's subtle invocation of denial and his attempt at differentiation efforts to separate himself from certain elements of the situation

combine in a rhetorical posture of absolution. According to the analysis, absolution in this social media artifact tends to function within the text as self-service.

ANALYSIS

1. Examination of this post to identify developed self-defense strategies was difficult.
2. Subtle invocation of **denial**.
3. Attempt at **differentiation** efforts to separate himself and minimize the offense.
4. Combine in a rhetorical posture of **absolution**.
5. Absolution functions within the text as **self-service**.

Figure 9. These are the findings for the apologetic rubric analysis of Levy's blog post: "Going public," which originally published on May 10, 2010.

Situation 5C: "Why am I here?" A thorough explication of the discourse in this post for the analysis was challenging, because Levy used crucial transformative strategies that include both differentiation and transcendence devices. First, Levy drew a subtle comparison of himself to the source of inspiration for the title of this piece, former presidential-hopeful Admiral James Stockdale, as he borrowed the candidate's searching question for the core of his writing at the beginning of the blog post; however, he did it through the caveat, "But, I hope with a more successful result!" (Levy, 2010c, para. 1). At the outset of this blog entry, Levy proceeded to set himself up as the proverbial savior of the hospital. This was posted to his blog on September 13, 2010:

> I joined BIDMC in 2002 to carry out a public service, to save a great academic medical center that had fallen on hard times. That done, we proceeded to develop strategic plans for our clinical, research, and educational missions. Those have been successfully implemented, with growth in market share and clinical affiliations, expansion of a world-class research program, and enhancement of both undergraduate medical education and residency programs. (Levy, 2010c, para. 3)

Levy highlighted accomplishments under his leadership, in which he recapped the hospital's efforts toward transparency and described the next phase of operations as he blogged about employee "lean process" staffing changes that would make BIDMC more efficient in the future. What is interesting to note is Levy's pattern of using past performance reminiscences to remind his readership of his accomplishments. When Levy first blogged this piece in 2010, he included a link back to an earlier, favorably-written self-review published to his blog in 2008. "Looking back after six years at BIDMC" (Levy, 2008a) was another positive reflection of his performance that encompassed his first six years at the hospital, and in that post he even included excerpts of yet another previous message he had written to hospital staff, when he first stepped into the leadership role at BIDMC in 2002. However, today the 2010 flashback to the 2008 flashback no longer exists in his content, as the link in this post to the earlier piece has been deleted.

At this point in his blog post, Levy transitioned to transcendence strategies through the use of literary conceits: "If you had come to me in 2002, 2005, or 2008, that's the answer I would have given. But I have gone through an evolution as to why I am here as a person" (para. 7). Levy got personal and downright sentimental as he recounted poignant stories of "Tom" and "Mary," two patients who invited him inside their personal pain. He expanded on his efforts "to join patients who are dying and to have heart-warming conversations about things that really

matter" (para. 8), lest the audience assume he only took care of Tom and Mary. Levy's final thoughts were a capstone effort as he attempted to identify favorably with his audience through the use of pathos and ethos:

> In short, I have learned to be here to be emotionally present as part of the human condition. There is no more dramatic place in the world than a hospital. There is pathos, humor, pain, and relief. I have allowed myself to be open to the possibility that the CEO can play a role that is totally separate from the business aspects of the hospital. People choose to invite me into their lives to a degree that is truly humbling. They offer me the blessing that my presence is helpful to them and others. I am ever grateful for that. (Levy, 2010c, para. 9)

On the surface, if this particular post were standing alone it could appear to be simply an interesting reflection on hospital staff accomplishments by a proud executive leader, as Levy claimed it to be (para. 1). But when put into context with the cloud of criticism surrounding Levy over the disclosure of his personal actions earlier during the year, it becomes apparent that this was a strategic apologetic effort on Levy's part toward image repair; essentially, he was trying to save his job. According to Benoit (1995), "those accused of wrong-doing might relate positive attributes they possess or positive actions they have performed in the past" (p. 77, para. 2) as a bolstering strategy designed to identify with something that would be viewed favorably, "to reduce the degree of ill feeling experienced by the audience" (Benoit, 1995, p. 77, para. 1). Although "the amount of guilt or negative affect from the accusation remains the same" (para. 1), the effect of such an approach is that positive feelings toward the rhetor, or in this case Levy, will be increased by association. In the wake of fallout from the initial revelation of his misconduct, and Levy's subsequent lack of full disclosure and apparent regret for the wrongful

act, it appears he employed persuasive efforts in an attempt to rebuild ethos through a comprehensive review of hospital successes that had been accomplished under his leadership.

Comments posted to the blog: The blog received 11 comments; while there were a couple of side discussions, all comments that were specifically in response to this particular blog post were positive in nature.

Concurrent news stories: One of the most fascinating aspects about Levy's "Why am I here?" post isn't even in the blog itself, but rather it is found in the context of time and place in the atmosphere of the environment in which Levy wrote it. Through an analysis of media stories from both local and national news outlets during that September and October it is revealed that the hospital's chief executive was a man under siege. Earlier in September 2010, *The Boston Globe* published a news story about the ongoing campaign and call-to-action that had been issued by a group focused on the goal of getting Levy fired:

> The Massachusetts chapter of the National Organization for Women and the state's largest healthcare workers union have bought print, television, radio, and billboard advertisements urging trustees of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center to fire chief executive Paul Levy. Mass. Now and 1199SEIU also plan to demonstrate outside the board's annual meeting ... The groups are calling for the board "to stand against patterns of inequity within the medical center." The media campaign incorporates 19th century photographs of the women who helped found the hospital, and read in part "In 1896, the Deaconess hospital was founded by women. In 2010, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center needs a new CEO to ensure equality for women at work." (Kowalczyk, 2010d, para. 1-2)

Just prior to Levy's posting of this apologetic piece to his blog, the investigators for the attorney general's office, who had spent four months investigating the hiring of Levy's purported close personal friend to discover whether there had been a misappropriation of charitable funds, issued their findings in an 11-page report in which they "determined that while no laws had been broken, the reputation of the prestigious Harvard-affiliated teaching hospital had suffered a blow" (Commins, 2010a, para. 2). Although the office found no evidence that the nonprofit hospital had criminally used charitable funds, nonetheless the attorney general publically chastised the board, some of whom had known about the relationship for years:

> Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley said yesterday that the board of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center should do "some soul-searching" about chief executive Paul Levy's ability to continue leading the hospital, after her office concluded that his longtime personal relationship with a female employee "clearly endangered the reputation of the institution and its management." (Kowalczyk, 2010d)

Not only were several news articles published about the release of the attorney general's report and the office's condemnation of both Levy and the board during this period, but his name began appearing in articles lumped with other leaders who were suffering character-credibility issues.

> Ordinarily, the names of hospital CEOs grace the society pages of their local newspapers—not the police blotter. Seldom are these community titans the subject of investigations by state attorneys general into questionable workplace conduct ... it was off-putting if not curious to see this past week a spate of unusual behaviors from a handful of hospital executives and former executives, all of whom allegedly appeared to have exercised poor judgment—or worse. (Commins, 2010b).

Sometimes the negative news articles were solely about Levy. True to their earlier threat to picket the annual board meeting, what was depicted as a "rowdy" group by the press showed up wearing anti-Levy shirts and carrying posters emblazoned with the common theme as "protesters called for the ouster of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center CEO Paul Levy as hospital board members met inside the swanky Four Seasons Hotel, while the board chairman issued a statement supporting him" (McConville, 2010). With his popularity in a nosedive, Levy's efforts to maintain credibility became particularly challenging and evidently less believable (emphasis is from the original article):

> After the attorney general's report criticized the Beth Israel board's failure to provide "diligent and independent management oversight" of Levy, and the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women called for his dismissal, he posted an out-of-left-field reminiscence about an award he received *five years ago* from the Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus and the speech he made that night hailing the women who had been "my mentors, advisers, and supporters during a multi-decade career…" (McNamara, 2010, para. 15)

Academic scholar Vartabedian (1985b) commented on this type of an approach in rhetorical discourse, observing that a rhetor's efforts in manipulating a situation that was rhetorical in nature would be conceivably be more successful with uninformed audience members who were not privy to details of charges surrounding the wrong-doing, but such a maneuver was not very likely to be effective on an aware audience. Levy's post titled "Thanks again, MWPC!" appeared to be an odd insertion into the blog at face value, and his explanation for writing the October 8, 2010 piece was even less feasible:

> I was recently reorganizing my shelves and had a chance to look over several [awards] that I have received over the last few years.
>
> My absolute favorite is the "Good Guy Award" from the Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus, both for what it means and for what it supports. I look forward each year to MWPC's selection of "Good Guys." Here is a summary from the website:
>
> *The Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus introduced the Good Guys Awards in 2002 to honor men who demonstrate an ongoing commitment and partnership in achieving equality for women.* (Levy, 2010d, para. 2-4)

Operating as an overt rhetorical device, this bolstering strategy used as an indirect counter-attack to discredit the charge that Levy, and BIDMC, lacked equality for women in the workplace, a charge that had been made during the protest by the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women (Kowalczyk, 2010e).

Applying apologia to social media in support of RQ1. Levy used fundamental bolstering strategies for identification through most of this blog post. In the first half of the blog post, Levy employed critical differentiation strategies that offer insight into the central focus of his message, and then he transitioned to transcendence strategies when he blogged about his evolution as a leader. Although differentiation and transcendental devices both appear prominently throughout his post, it is Levy's use of differentiation that is most distinctive (see Figure 10).

Extending the genre of apologia in support of RQ2.

The apologetic strategies of bolstering and differentiation work stylistically in Levy's blog posting as a reminiscence piece to create the rhetorical posture of explanation, while the competing combination of bolstering and transcendence strategies create a rhetorical posture of vindication, an apologia that functions as self-justification. Although transcendence strategies

were not the primary vehicle of apologia, Levy's final thoughts were certainly a capstone effort in that direction as he tried to identify with his audience through the use of pathos and ethos. If the tenets of Downey's (1993) original assumptions for both periods of contemporary apologia still hold true, the apologetic discourse identified in this social media artifact served as a dual function of both self-sacrifice and self-deception (Downey, 1993, pp. 53-57).

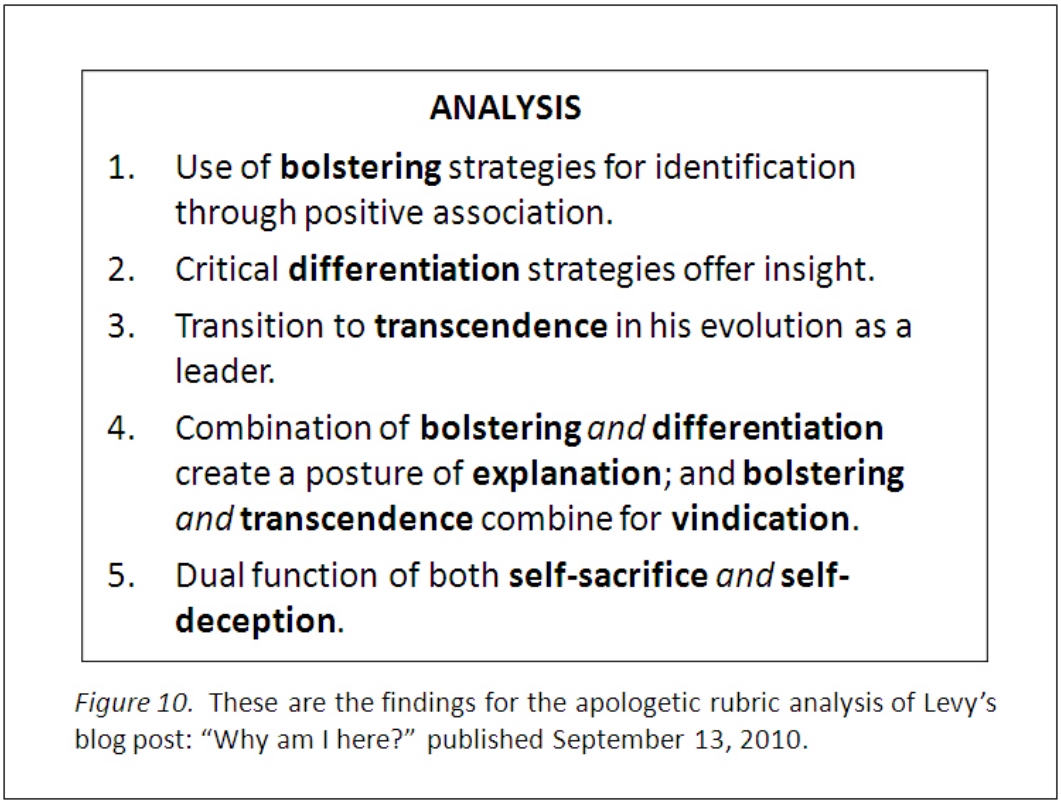

Figure 10. These are the findings for the apologetic rubric analysis of Levy's blog post: "Why am I here?" published September 13, 2010.

Situation 5D: "Transitions." Levy's last blog post as the chief executive of BIDMC is a response that serves as the final chapter in the rhetorical situation created by his lapse of judgment and misconduct involving an inappropriate relationship with a subordinate. On January 7, 2011, Levy posted the following passages to his blog:

> But, while the management team deserves much credit for this, it is the dedication and commitment of our front-line staff that has made the difference. You truly believe in

> taking care of each patient as though that person were a member of your own family. You engage in stunning and creative research that is changing our ability to diagnose and treat disease. You teach medical students, residents, nurses, and others to be compassionate and expert members of the medical team. You devote time, energy, and care to neighborhoods and members of our immediate community. (Levy, 2011a, para. 11)
>
> Over the last nine years, I have certainly made mistakes of degree, emphasis, and judgment. I have apologized to you directly for some of those, but I do so again, in the hope that such errors will not overshadow the many accomplishments and contributions of our hospital to the community and the health care industry. On the personal level, if I have slighted any one of you in any way or given you any cause for concern about my warm regard and respect for you, I doubly apologize. (Levy, 2011a, para. 12)

Applying apologia to social media in support of RQ1. A thorough explication of this blog post relative to traditional apologia standards proved to be particularly challenging in light of the multiple apologia strategies Levy employed. To reform the thoughts of his audience Levy used both bolstering and denial devices within the text, and he attempted to transform perceptions through elements of both differentiation and transcendental strategies in an effort that was "the 'odd case,' the text that breaks the pattern" (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 2003, p. 31, para.5). In doing so, Levy put his apologetic stratagem at risk of being ineffective. First, Levy applied transformative strategies to his blog as he yet again highlighted accomplishments of the hospital team and improvements over clinical processes during his tenure at BIDMC. In this portion of the text he was clearly attempting to transcend the situation by moving his audience away from the particular details of the charges. Even though the majority of the blog

post included several elements intended to bolster his position by association with accomplishments of the staff, Levy's predominant reformative strategy is denial (see Figure 11).

Extending the genre of apologia in support of RQ2. Through his use apologetic strategies that were predominantly a disavowal by the speaker, Levy combined denial with an effort to move the audience away from the charges to a more abstract perspective that might transform the audience to a more abstract, and thus more favorable, perspective. The analysis revealed that this social media artifact stylistically embodies a rhetorical posture of vindication, which functions in classical apologia as an effort toward self-exoneration.

ANALYSIS

1. Both **bolstering** *and* **denial** devices were used to reform.
2. Elements of **differentiation** *and* **transcendence** break the transformative pattern.
3. The "odd case" put the apologetic stratagem at risk of becoming ineffective.
4. Stylistically embodies rhetorical posture of **vindication**.
5. Classically, these strategies combine in the apologia sub-set to function as **self-exoneration**.

Figure 11. These are the findings for the apologetic rubric analysis of Levy's final blog post: "Transitions," was published on January 7, 2011.

While Levy ultimately acknowledged wrong-doing and even offered apologies, he avoided the responsibility of his actions by lumping them together under the label of "mistakes" in an effort to minimize them. Vartabedian and Vartabedian (2003) give a nod to Hart (1997) in

their paper on apologetic goals, for the assumption that "the critic should be imaginative and search for 'the story behind the taxonomies' and recognize that what is 'not there' may hold more interesting revelations than what is present" (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 2003, p. 31). Levy's resignation blog post on transitions is a salient illustration of this phenomenon as classic apologetic appeals were missing: he did not defend his actions, and in fact avoided detailing any charges. Although Levy offered general apologies within the blog text, there was not an acknowledgement of wrong-doing, no rhetorical mention of character, and Levy couldn't attack his accusers because the board members were his collective boss. Similar to Vartabedian and Vartabedian (2003) in their observations surrounding apologia regarding the Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky scandal, Levy's public would have expected to find within this blog post character-oriented "rhetoric designed to affirm virtue, nobility of character, and integrity" (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 2003, p. 28, para.1). Similarly to Clinton, at the end of Levy's career at BIDMC he too "appeared to be beyond the point of rhetorical avoidance or reliance on surrogate apologists" (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 2003, p. 29). However, when Levy blogged about his decision to step down as the chief executive he avoided the central issue; his rhetorical "mortification or confession stops short of accepting responsibility on the pivotal issue" (Vartabedian & Vartabedian, 2003, p. 36, para. 3). Levy's apologetic complications were not met with the required apologetic responses; ultimately his attempts at apologia failed, and Levy was asked to resign.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The new media stage of social interaction has created an environment where barriers to entry are extremely low. Virtually anyone can gain access, and everyone has a platform from which to express personal opinion. Social media has simultaneously become the arena of accusation and defense in the twenty-first century. This study appears to be the first of its kind to examine the digital context of social media to identify evidence of apologia. Through a traditional rhetorical approach, online discourse was examined to identify specific apologia artifacts in blog posts and explicate the implications of apologetic elements. This study was designed to examine social media artifacts of written content selected from discreet instances that took place on separate occasions. The artifacts studied for this thesis were comprised of portions of texts extracted from specific postings within the context of Levy's personal blog titled *Running a hospital,* written over a two-year period. As a result of the analysis of the blogs posted by Levy it was determined that elements of classic apologia can be and are used within the context of new technology.

Central Research Findings

Social media extends the genre of apologia. According to information discovered during the literature review, rhetors historically have had limited opportunity to respond to accusations and charge. The social media phenomenon provides universal access where low barriers to entry allow for individual voices to be heard. Not only does the social media phenomenon extend the genre of apologia, but it effectively expands its reach in ways that heretofore were not possible.

The apologia genre applies to social media apologies. The research process identified distinct instances of apologia within the discourse of blog artifacts examined for this study.

Through the analysis process it was determined that characteristics of social media apologia share many similarities with traditional apologia. Apologia was found to exist among a particular set of social media artifacts. Blog posts that were written over a period of time for separate situations comprised the data set and exhibited various combinations of reformative and transformative strategies, which encompass the scope of all four rhetorical postures: explanation, justification, absolution, and vindication.

Characteristic similarities of the genre. During the course of this study, it became evident that this particular set of social media artifacts did indeed contain evidence of apologia which exhibited characteristics similar to traditional apologia. Research revealed that specific characteristics discovered in the set of social media artifacts embody elements of the original apologetic system as defined by Ware and Linkugel (1973). The traditional characteristics that the apologia genre share with the set of social media artifacts examined in this study encompass the rhetorical strategies found in two classifications: (1) reformative strategies include bolstering and denial; and (2) transformative strategies include transcendence and differentiation.

Levy's successful attempts to create the impression of organizational transparency through his blog posts stand as an example of the affect that social media can have through readily available broad access. Social media, therefore, is in some respects not a new form of communication, and many of the approaches Levy adopted have classic antecedents from the early philosophers. But contrary to their attempts to discover truth and speak in defense of their ideas which could only influence those within the sound of their voice, social media has extended that reach to a global population. The task we as the audience have is to sort and filter those voices in the online conversation and discern those which are genuine and truthful.

Understanding of rhetoric and rhetorical devices in apologetic discourse contributes to our ability to critically analyze messages, which continually clamor for our attention.

Levy was skillful in presenting messages that he could defend. When he had the option to choose the issue he would discuss, he was able to portray himself and his organization in a favorable light. He was successful in garnering respect and praise, admiration and emulation of a wide audience. More in-depth research revealed that rather than winning over his admirers with the skill of his prose and the logic of his presentation, he was prone to use more mundane approaches and glad-handing tactics. It became apparent that Levy's tactics were frequently deliberate and manipulative, and several of his posts were self-aggrandizing in nature. Situations at the hospital that did not have positive outcomes were not chosen for a public relations spin as models of transparency. His reflections on positive outcomes were somewhat over the top, often attributing the virtue of the situation to himself simply because he was the leader at the time.

Levy's use of social media illustrates both the power and the danger that this form of communication represents. It proves to be powerful in the sense that Levy creates a reality for both the public and the culture of the hospital. When he creates it successfully, people are empowered; they feel part of the organization; they lend themselves to something higher than their own personal needs. In his blog postings about the financial difficulties of the hospital, and his enlisting of employees in efforts to successfully save jobs, Levy illustrates what is best about the use of social media. His use was masterful, swift, and effective, and the outcome was as he had orchestrated. The immediacy of the blog and other techniques he employed created the allusion of a culture more closely resembling an extended family of a personable hospital where each employee felt committed to the others. It brings into question, then, his motivation. Was he actually being transparent or was he merely attempting to appear transparent? The reality was

apparently far from the façade as Levy proved himself to be, according some critics, very skilled at manipulating public opinion (McGrory, 2010; McNamara, 2010), and he used social media as the vehicle.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations. As a natural and expected outcome of the delimitations that established parameters for the scope of the study, the research process was limited to five specific situations represented by artifacts of individual posts published in the social media of a blog. The analysis was limited by text itself, to the level that it provided an accurate and truthful portrayal of each situation. The constraint of working within one blog limited access to information and presented a strong potential bias, as the content only represented those thoughts and ideas deliberately posted to the blogosphere. Over a period of several months while completing the research for this study, some of the original blog content had been edited and a few key items were deleted, altering what was available for analysis. Finally, virtually all news stories surrounding the five situations were from local media outlets, introducing unknown potential bias.

Delimitations. The delimitations of this study include those characteristics that limit the scope of inquiry and define the boundaries of research. Such characteristics are identified during the development of the proposal, as part of the decision process about what criteria should ultimately be included in the study and what are excluded due to relevance, interest, and feasibility. This study has been delimited to an examination of information about Levy that is specifically defined as content that was: (a) published by him in social media, looking only at post that were specifically made to his blog, even though Levy regularly posted to additional social networking channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and occasional wrote follow-up comments to healthcare related blogs by others; and, (b) news reports published in newspapers,

primarily from local news outlets; (c) regarding five separate and distinct situations that presented challenges; with, (d) potential and apparent similarities; (e) which took place over a period of time; (f) in an effort to determine whether there is evidence of apologia. Among these delimitations are the deliberate choices regarding which five situational problems that were finally selected for inclusion in the study: (1) Levy posted his salary and asked the question, "Do I get paid too much?" on January 28, 2007; (2) next Levy went very public with a report that is typically just filed with appropriate government agencies when he posted the hospital's central line infection rates on April 11, 2007, and challenged BIDMC's colleagues (i.e., competitors) to do the same; (3) the July 5, 2008, blog post was dedicated to addressing issues surrounding the "never event" in which a medical team at BIDMC operated on a patient's wrong body part; (4) Levy posted a blog on March 6, 2009, in which he both provided an update on impacts of the economic downturn on BIDMC and an invitation that solicited solutions; and finally, (5) beginning with a cryptic blog post titled, "I was wrong. I am sorry," first published on May 3, 2010, through its culmination in his resignation from BIDMC in January 2011, the fifth and final situation was a personal and professional crisis that is the result of what the board said was "a serious lapse in judgment" (Levy, 2010a, para. 4).

Suggestions for Further Research

The current study examined social media artifacts in the form of separate posts to the blogosphere to identify apologia in distinct rhetorical situations that occurred at different times over a two year period. While research analysis determined that social media extends the genre of apologia, further research into apologetic discourse in social interaction online is needed to expand understanding of these findings. In particular, more research is needed to explore the implications of apologetic strategies and social media impacts on the discipline of rhetorical

criticism. Future research could include a broader study that encompasses other modes of social media beyond the blogosphere, including but not limited to the following tools: social networks, microblogging, text messaging, videoconferencing, instant messages, chat, podcasts, photo sharing, video sharing, social event calendars, and social bookmarking. Another research design might be devised that compares and contrasts similar situations from different social media sources to determine whether the findings from this study of the blogosphere hold true for other social interactive tools. In addition, different types of situations then those explicated for this study could be examined to expand the research scope. Future research projects could potentially focus on other fields such as sports, politics, and technology business, and a divergent path that might prove viable is the mommy blogger phenomenon. Possibly dual research streams could be explored in expanded research efforts, one analyzing social media artifacts identified within a specific group, and another potential study that includes a cross comparison between divergent groups to identify shared commonalities. Another consideration for further research would be a study to determine whether there is a difference between the genders in what they say and how they say through apologetic devices in social media.

The research showed that the original tenets of traditional apologia not only continue to exist but now have an environment in which the language of persuasion and self-defense can thrive in the open platform of social media. With lowered barriers to entry through social media, the rhetoric of which becomes "the means by which we create and sustain the social reality necessary to form relatively enduring governments and social institutions. Language is a primary force calculated to reinforce or bolster such relationships and maintain a stable social reality," (German, 1985, p. 94, para. 1), and through its persuasive use, traditional apologia of

the classical Greek assembly steps into the 21st century and onto a world stage as apologists access the online platform of social media.

Throughout the study process, similar characteristics of traditional apologia were discovered within the social media context time and again, as repeating elements within the blog discourse exhibited the four apologetic strategies of: (1) denial; (2) bolstering; (3) differentiation; and (4) transcendence. By applying the rhetorical system of the apologia rubric by combining one reformative strategy with one of the transformative strategies, the analysis of stylistic form created the central rhetorical postures: (1) absolution; (2) vindication; (3) explanation; and (4) justification. Thus, the study provides conclusive evidence that the apologia genre applies to social media apologies, and social media does indeed extend the genre of apologia into the new era of promising possibilities through online interaction in cyberspace.

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