



SKOK01
VT 2012
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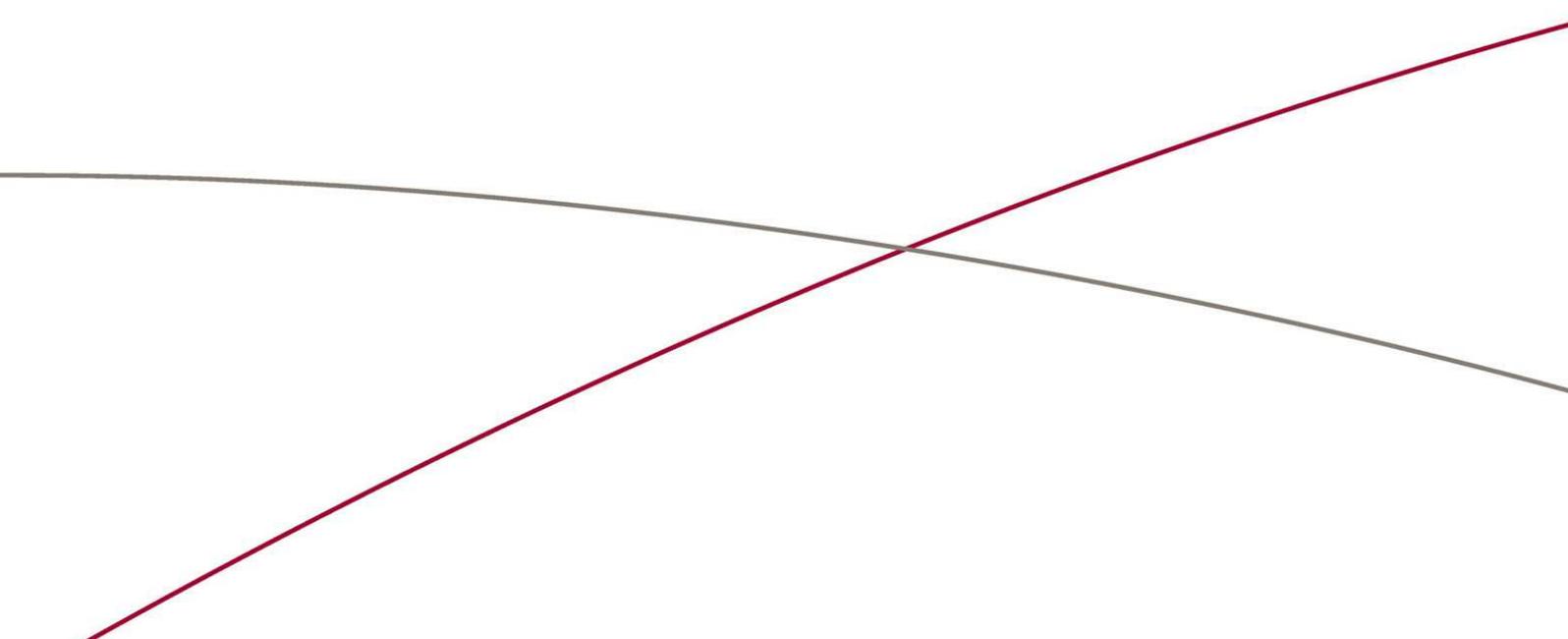
Bachelor Thesis – Strategic Communication

Have a break?

A study on the networked public sphere during the Green-peace *Give the orang-utan a break* campaign

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Abstract - Sammanfattning

Have a break? A study on the networked public sphere during the Greenpeace *Give the orang-utan a break* campaign

The rise of social media has brought with it new forms of civic engagement. This is a case study of the Greenpeace 2010 campaign *Give the Orang-Utan a Break* directed at Nestlé for its use of palm oil. The purpose of this case study is to analyse the discourse used in blogs during the Greenpeace campaign as well as to analyse the relationship between different types of online content. The study applies a mixed methods approach, using both qualitative document analysis and quantitative network analysis. Part of Greenpeace's strategy has been to single out Nestlé and a specific issue although this comes at the cost of not being able to discuss the greater picture. The study has shown that a majority of the analysed blogs were written by public relations and communication professionals, using their blog as an online sales pitch, seemingly to maximise their own self-interests. Another finding is that traditional online media, to a large extent, were used as a main source of information in blogs, rendering the network of blogs as a source of information complementary rather than as a substitute to traditional online news sources.

Have a break? En studie om den nätverkade offentliga sfären under Greenpeaces kampanj *Give the orang-utan a break*

Sociala mediers framväxt har fört med sig nya former av medborgardeltagande. Detta är en fallstudie av Greenpeaces kampanj *Give the Orang-Utan a Break* från 2010 som riktades mot Nestlé för dess användning av palmolja. Syftet med fallstudien är att analysera diskursen i bloggar under Greenpeacekampanjen och relationen mellan olika typer av texter som publicerats online. Studien använder sig av en flerfaldig forskningsstrategi genom att applicera både kvalitativ dokumentanalys och kvantitativ nätverksanalys på fallet. En del utav Greenpeaces strategi har varit att peka ut Nestlé samt ett specifikt problemområde trots att det innebär att relaterade frågor inte diskuteras. Majoriteten av de analyserade bloggarna har skrivits av yrkesverksamma inom fälten public relations och kommunikation och bloggarna har använts som ett slags försäljningspitch som uppdateras regelbundet, till synes för att maximera sina egenintressen. Ytterligare resultat har visat att traditionella medier till stor del användes som huvudkälla till information i bloggar, snarare än att utnyttja nätverksstrukturen bland bloggar för att använda dessa som alternativ informationskälla.

Keywords: networked public sphere, case study, Greenpeace, Nestlé, arena model, media logic.

Number of characters including spaces: 87 264

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Introduction

Since the rise of social media, it is possible for private people, from the comfort of their homes, to engage in public debates. Access to new technology has paved the way for new means of civic engagement. Strömbäck (2009) claims citizens to be consumers of politics; however the expanded media landscape with possibilities for interaction in real time across geographical borders has given rise to new forms of involvement.

Simply speaking, within the field of strategic communication there are two opposing views on the public. The Continental view, which is concerned with the distinction between the public and the private spheres and accredits the public with independent thought, usually draws on Habermas (e.g. Heide, 2011; L'Etang, 2008). The Anglo-American perspective views the public as a formative mass which can be divided into stakeholder groups depending on their relationship with an organisation (e.g. Bernays, 1928; Heide, 2011). Swedish academic literature on the relationship between organisations and the public tends to highlight the Anglo-American stakeholder view. While Dewey along with others represents the stakeholder perspective, Habermas must often alone represent the opposing view of publics within the public sphere (e.g. Falkheimer & Heide, 2007; Heide, 2011). The Anglo-American perspective may be useful in studies of marketing and public relations. However, strategic communication is not only concerned with stakeholder groups as target audiences but also with the general public. Therefore studies within strategic communication ought to take into account the notion of a general public and not limit itself to the stakeholder view. This bachelor thesis will offer an alternative to the dominating Anglo-American perspective.

The modern media landscape holds all the traditional channels such as the radio, television and newspapers as well as new and often social media such as blogs, online communities and online newspapers with interactive features (Fill, 2005). Print and online newspapers to some extent include the same news content and readers are therefore to some extent confronted with the same news content,

regardless of medium. However, depending on which news source is utilised, options for engagement differ.

Social media are, because of their interactive nature (Falkheimer & Heide, 2011), often associated with democratic ideals (e. g. Coleman, 2005, paraphrased in Papacharissi, 2010; Cornelissen, 2011; Larsson, 2011), however recent research has shown that this must not be the case (e.g. Gerhards & Schäfer, 2007; Schweiger & Weihermüller, 2008, paraphrased in Raupp, 2011). Social media and viral campaigns are recent phenomena which have quickly turned into an integral part of our lives, even fuelled a new media revolution (Buckley & Cooke, 2008). Some viral campaigns add to the traditional marketing landscape, whereas others penetrate every medium, analogue as well as digital (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2011), giving them an air of ubiquity. Viral marketing is “electronic word-of-mouth whereby some form of marketing message related to a company, brand or product is transmitted in an exponentially growing way – often through the use of social media applications” (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2011, p. 255). Contemporary marketing and communication textbooks often separate traditional from social media by dealing with them in different chapters or sections (e. g. Fill, 2005; Cornelissen, 2011). It appears that communication academics view traditional and social media as different spheres. While the new media landscape gives rise to new opportunities for organisations in terms of cost-effectiveness and a potential dialogue with consumers (Fill, 2005), it also poses new challenges to communication professionals (Cornelissen, 2011).

This bachelor thesis is a case study of a viral campaign initiated by the NGO Greenpeace against the multi-national food corporation Nestlé, concerning the effects that Nestlé’s use of palm oil has on the rainforest and orang-utans – the case will be referred to as the palm oil issue. The entire study relies on the assumption that viral campaigns do not reach their full potential until they have spread, been regurgitated and perhaps even altered in traditional media. This will allow any spill-over effects, from social media to traditional media, potentially even vice versa, to be studied. Using documents from online traditional and social media – primarily online newspaper articles and blog entries – the thesis will reconstruct the discourses during the palm oil issue.

It will also be necessary to account for any pre-understandings which are taken into the research process (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen & Karlsson,

2003). Because these inform the entire body of research and new revelations or understandings will be added to my pre-understanding throughout the research process, there will be a constant “merging of horizons” (my translation, Gadamer, 1960, quoted in Alvesson & Sköld, 1994, p. 58). At this point it is suitable to point out that I held an internship at Nestlé Sweden’s headquarters at the time of the palm oil issue. I followed the palm oil issue closely within the company as well as through the media. It is possible, and probably even likely, that the interpretations of documents produced during the palm oil issue would be attached with a different significance and meaning by another researcher who did not follow the issue from within the company in real time.

Purpose

The purpose of this bachelor thesis is to analyse the online discourse of the palm oil issue within blogs. The intention is to find out what topics blogs on the issue concern themselves with rather than the language itself. By doing this it will be possible to analyse any patterns which may appear. The study also aims to map the linkages between different texts concerning the palm oil issue in order to determine the relationship between them. Gathering quantitative data on the linkages will enable me to determine which blogs have been referred to the most and who wrote the blog entries, giving me an inkling on which blogs may be rich on information. By studying the content of the texts it will be possible to analyse them in relation to the classic dichotomy of the public and the private spheres.

Research Questions

- What motives have been dominating the coverage of the palm oil issue in blogs?
- Did social media constitute an alternative to traditional online news during the palm oil issue, and if so, how?

Literature Review

The palm oil issue has gained a significant amount of attention both in traditional print media and in the academic field of communication studies and it is already referred to as “classic” (Bendell, Doyle & Visser, 2010). There is an ongoing debate about the implications of the new public sphere in regards to the Internet as a new means of communication between individuals.

The literature review is divided into three sections: The first section provides a theoretic framework for the public and private spheres, starting with the ancient Greek distinction and moving on to Habermas and more recent theories within the field. The second section is related primarily to the notion of the public sphere but concerns itself with the organisation and relations within the public sphere of the past century – the networked public sphere. Technology driven developments influencing the distinction between public and private will also be covered here. Last, academic studies on the palm oil issue in relation to the public and private spheres will be accounted for.

The Public and Private Spheres

The concept of the public and private spheres can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. The public sphere was exclusive to the free men of the city state, separated from the sphere of the household, the private sphere (Habermas, 1998). With bourgeois society, as opposed to previous societies, came a transfer of responsibility for private household economy. In Modernity, the private sphere is centred on reproduction and domestic economy, turning the private sphere into something of public interest. As Arendt notes, modern society is concerned with the coexistence of people (Arendt, paraphrased in Habermas, 1998). Because of the interdependence of people, private matters are of public concern. The bourgeois public sphere is defined as private persons assembled into a public (Habermas, 1998). A key characteristic of the public sphere is its dialogical nature. In order for circumstances to qualify as being a part of the public sphere, citizens need to be empow-

ered enough to join a dialogue. The dialogue may be of discursive character but must be open for anyone to join.

In present day, public opinion is closely linked to the mass media. Ideas are often spread and dialogues are often carried out in the mass media. However, if the mass media are to be viewed as an integral part of the public sphere, the public sphere must allow that not everyone can join the dialogue (Gerhards & Neidhardt, 1990). Of course freedom of opinion as well as free press are prerequisites if the mass media are at all to be considered part of the public sphere (Habermas, 1998). In authoritarian regimes, where the media is under strict control, the news content is not necessarily a reflection on the public's interests but rather used as a tool for the regime. As noted earlier, Habermas' definition of the public sphere required anyone to be able to join dialogue carried out in the public sphere (Habermas, 1998). Where the dialogue is carried out in the mass media, however, it would be practically impossible to let every person contribute with their opinion, unless the mass media changed its appearance.

Public opinion must be contrasted with publicity. Publicity is often conflated with public opinion because opinions are aired in mass media. Nevertheless, public opinion may exist independently from publicity and public opinion must not necessarily be published. As noted earlier, if mass media are to be incorporated in the public sphere as a means of expressing public opinion, there must be freedom of opinion and free press (Habermas, 1998). This does not mean that public opinion cannot exist without free press, but the relationship is reversed.

Habermas differentiates between public opinion and non-public opinion. While public opinion is a reflection upon not the entire public but a substantial part of it, non-public opinion is driven by public relations practitioners who by means of planned communication activities wish to create public opinion (Habermas, 1998).

Non-publicness or secrecy is one of the two opposites of the public sphere. As noted by Bentele and Nothhaft, "the *concept of publicness* has two opposites: private on the one hand, secret on the other" (2010, p. 94). According to Bentele and Nothhaft, an individual striving for power or public office automatically steps into the public sphere. Once the individual carries responsibility for others, every aspect of the individual is relevant. It follows that nothing the individual does can be shrouded in secrecy anymore (Bentele & Nothhaft, 2010).

Habermas normative theory on a discursive public sphere is put to the test by Gerhards (1997). The much-quoted sociologist's application of both Habermas' and liberal public sphere theory to the discussion on abortion in Germany between 1970 and 1994 draws important conclusions about Habermas' public sphere. Where in the public sphere discourse on a given topic ought to demonstrate the rationality of the public, Gerhards' study proved otherwise. The debate in the mass media showed that first and foremost, persons engaging in the debate stated their own stance in the matter rather than developing arguments where previous contributions were further developed. No compromises were made where the two sides, for and against abortion, met. Gerhards used Döbert's model of rationality, containing four levels (Döbert, 1996, paraphrased in Gerhards, 1997).

On the first and most basic level, actors are able to use one element of a discussion to build an argument which does not consider any alternative values. Because such an argument does not even consider any counter arguments, let alone deflect them, this is the most basic level. Arguments on the second level do not consider counter arguments either; however they discuss different outcomes of a certain set of actions depending on the context. Third level arguments give an account of both sides of the discussion before arguing for a specific point. In the fourth and highest level of rationality, the argument presents a compromise which does not require either side to cut back. According to Gerhards' study, the majority of the discussion on abortion stayed on the first level. Although Gerhards' study is quantitative and the material is concerned with a different subject matter than the palm oil issue, the application of Habermas' theory to the discourse in the mass media is significant also to the case study subject to this bachelor thesis. As shall be seen later, Döbert's levels of rationality will be of use in the upcoming content analysis (pp. 28).

As noted earlier, Habermas defined the public sphere as dialogic and open for anyone to join. Gerhards and Neidhardt (1990) took the idea of openness and further developed it into an arena model of the public sphere. The arena model of the public sphere contains three arenas in which different roles are found. The arena which Gerhards and Neidhardt view as the most influential is that of traditional mass media where professionals such as journalists, scientists and politicians are heard. The readers or viewers of the mass media take in the messages but there is no direct path to feed back into the debate – the public is merely an audience. The

second level is that of the assembly. The distance between speakers and the public is not as great as that of the first level since the role allocation is more diffuse, however the organisation or group organising the assembly still has authority to allocate roles. Speakers are not necessarily professionals, but may well be. In authoritarian regimes, the first and second arenas may be controlled by the regime. The third arena is that of direct encounters between people in public places which form small publics. Encounters are brief, difficult to control and passing. Because encounters are inevitable, the arena of this public sphere can never be fully controlled by any regime (Gerhards & Neidhardt, 1990). The analysis, from page 31 onward, will pay close attention to arena models of the public sphere. As noted by Raupp (2011), online communications have enabled a more diverse role allocation.

The works of Habermas, Gerhards and Neidhardt recounted in this section were written before the breakthrough of the Internet as a means of communication within mainstream society. The arrival of the Internet has caused academics within the field of the public sphere to write about a *new* public sphere.

The Networked Public Sphere

The Internet itself does not constitute a public sphere. A necessary condition for the public sphere is that there is dialogue between agents (Habermas, 1998). According to Bohman (2004), however, it is the *software* which enables dialogue and it is in the software that communicative interaction takes place. Therefore it is software which constitutes a public sphere. The word *new* implies a different type of public sphere than the classic one, which traditionally is constituted by a physical public space such as a market square (Habermas, 1998). Although the classic public sphere is not bound locally (Habermas, 1998), where dialogue is enabled through online software applications, use is being made of a *new* public sphere.

According to Papacharissi (2010), the mass media itself has blurred the distinction between the public and private spheres. Since the television turned into a commodity in most (western) households, public matters entered the personal homes of people (Papacharissi, 2010). The public sphere thus entered the private sphere and the distinction became blurred. More recent developments in televi-

sion, where personal questions are highlighted in talkshows, the personal enters the public sphere.

The conditions of the new public sphere also change the private sphere. Van Dijk (1999) notes that the new communication practices, where private people use mass communication tools in order to communicate one-on-one, water down the distinction between private and public. New media practices leave the distinction between the private and the public spheres obsolete (Keane, 1995, paraphrased in van Dijk, 1999). However, van Dijk does not claim that the distinction will disappear altogether; it will simply become more difficult to define the spheres.

Contemporary scholars depict our society as a networked society (e.g. Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2008). As noted earlier by Habermas (1998), mass media make for a substantial part of the public sphere. Since the introduction of online newspapers with interactive features such as comments fields, it is indeed possible for a vast number of persons to contribute with their thoughts, opinions and comments on articles (Larsson, 2011) and, at least in theory, dialogue could be carried out in the comments fields. Whether these actually qualify as public opinion is highly questionable for several reasons. However, because the potential dialogue is accessible to anyone with Internet access does not mean that the potential dialogue is of *public* interest – it is merely publicly accessible and has the *potential* of being of public interest.

New technology gives rise to new possibilities within the public sphere. Since the industrialisation political debate has primarily taken place within mass media (Benkler, 2006). Gaining access to print media is, as noted by Gerhards and Schäfer (2007), not simply said and done, but an accomplishment in and of itself. The Internet, with its democratic potential in terms of spreading one's own ideas to a large number of people, enables private persons to place themselves at the centre rather than periphery of the arena, to use Gerhards and Neidhardt's (1990) model. Because of the democratic potential where most people can initiate an interactive conversation with others, it is possible for a vast number of people to enter the public sphere. Benkler (2006), focusing the economic implications of the new communication environment, emphasises the non-market production of information as a democratic tool. The mass media of the twentieth century controlled the public sphere through the distribution of information and communication through limited organisational forms, expressing cultural practices guided by

the consumption of media. More recently, the structure of the economy and society at large as a network depends on the new technology which allows people all over the globe to communicate effortlessly with one another without any physical constraints (Benkler, 2006), although the claim primarily applies to western societies and younger generations where preconditions such as know-how of the technology itself are fulfilled. Provided that people have access to the technology, engaging in political activity online does not incur any further financial obligations – not considering time and other aspects. According to Benkler (2006), the networked information economy has enabled a shift from the public sphere as we knew it – fully relying on the mass media – to a networked public sphere where individuals co-create information and knowledge. Consequently, the networked public sphere is a complement to the classic public sphere.

The Internet has been attributed with democratic potential for a long time. Benkler (2006) claims that the networked public sphere to a much larger extent than previous public sphere platforms enable private persons to participate in public debate. The network part of the networked public sphere refers to the organisation of the Internet where sites link to other sites and some sites are more often linked to, or pointed out as sources, than others. The structure of the network makes for a less centralised public sphere than the mass media and is therefore more democratic. Of course there are several objections to this. Benkler (2006) refutes two of them: The Babel objection and the objection of decentralisation. The reasoning of the Babel objection is that once everyone uses his or her potential to speak, no one can be heard. Because of this inefficiency, there will be a regression to the mass mediated and market driven buzz of information. The objection of decentralisation is a more direct critique of the democratic attributes of the Internet. It is based on the observation that a vast number of web sites are not accessed by any significant amount of people whereas comparatively few web sites have all the more viewers.

Certainly, there are studies which prove that indeed the Internet is no more democratic than previous public sphere platforms, such as Gerhards and Schäfer (2007). The Gerhards and Schäfer study was concerned with the public debate on human genome research and it is possible that the topic itself to a greater or lesser extent affected the result. It appears that a majority of the people engaging in the debate were professionals, many with a background within medicine or science. If

the debate was on a scientific level, perhaps the private people – who ought to be represented to a larger extent in online media if indeed online media are more democratic than print media – are less inclined to join in, regardless of where the debate takes place. However, the results of the study are unambiguous and they should be taken seriously regardless of which topic was studied. Raupp (2011) refers to two other studies examining the representation of different groups in public debate. One of the studies (Schweiger & Weiermüller, 2008, paraphrased in Raupp, 2011) was based on the discourse surrounding the smoking ban in restaurants, where the debate could be expected not to be overly scientific. Although private persons engaged in the debate, elite actors were overrepresented even in this discourse.

Castells puts forward a similar but competing definition of networks to Benkler's. The definition focuses on the technology-driven information and communication processes shaping the social structures which define society at large (Castells, 2004). The network consists of nodes intersecting each other, rendering the network without centre; every node is necessary for the make-up of the network and contributes to its structure. According to Juris (2004, paraphrased in Castells & Sey, 2004), the Internet empowers autonomous political groups to join in collective action through the use of networks, augmenting their influence on the formal political system. Implications of the networked society allow grassroots movements to generate an enhanced effect on political life. Despite global uniformity in terms of how social spaces are created by architects, the disconnectedness from communities bound by geographical spaces makes for a fragmented social life. However, social networks can substitute for communities and the Internet provides a platform for maintaining social networks (Castells, 2000). According to Castells (2000), a sense of identity provides meaning to people when society is constantly restructured, as it is today.

Scholarly Accounts of the Palm Oil Issue

Just as in the Greek city state, the public sphere today is closely linked with political life. The public sphere therefore depends on citizens and the state and the relationship between the two (Stewart, 2001, paraphrased in Castells, 2008). According to Raupp (2011), Greenpeace speaks on behalf of civil society. The new pub-

lic sphere includes organisations and not only governments as socially responsible actors. It is because of the inclusion of corporations as socially responsible actors that Greenpeace can pressure Nestlé as though Greenpeace was a representative of civil society.

Bürker (2011) argues that the Greenpeace report, *Caught Red Handed* (Greenpeace International, 2010 a), and viral follow-up would previously have been termed a public debate. Because of the ever-evolving communication techniques, more and more public debates resemble campaigns, and the palm oil issue is one of them. Röttger (2006, paraphrased in Bürker, 2011), states that campaigns apply a “communicative double strategy”. Campaigns strive to mobilise the public through direct contact as well as attempt to reinforce themselves indirectly through the greatest possible media exposure. The heading Spill-Over Effect in the Analysis chapter will get back to this point.

Raupp (2011) goes back to Gerhards and Neidhardt’s arena model of the public sphere. In the more up-to-date version by Raupp, constructed after the Internet’s breakthrough in mainstream (western) society, online communications have a more diverse role allocation. Raupp (2011) divides networks into three levels of the public sphere. The third arena, or the individual level, relates to the sphere of encounters between people face-to-face but also online in public forums. In the second arena, the level based on the assembly, organisations communicate with stakeholder groups which can be organisations themselves. The first level, then, claimed to be the most influential by Gerhards and Neidhardt (1990), consists of connections between social systems (Raupp, 2011). Mass media are interconnected with the political, cultural, economic systems and so on. Print media going online has brought with it an extension of content where articles converge with digital and audiovisual media. The analysis will use the Gerhards and Neidhardt arena model expanded by Raupp in order to determine within which public spheres the blogs on the palm oil issue move.

Method

The bachelor thesis is based on a singular case and a mixed methods approach. Commencing the research, the thesis focused on the discourse of the blogs covering the case as well as the relationship between blogs and online news media. However, while going through the material, it appeared as though there were certain blogs which were at the centre of the case. By simply analysing the content of the blog entries, the relationship between them would be difficult to determine. Therefore a sequential exploratory design including quantitative methods (Daymon & Holloway, 2011) has been selected instead of a purely qualitative one.

Analysing the discourse in blogs is primarily done through qualitative document analysis. The primary concern of the relationship between blogs and online news media lies with how they are connected to each other in terms of a network. In order to map the connections between blogs and online news articles a quantitative approach has been used.

Case Study

The purpose of a singular case study is to attain in-depth knowledge about a certain phenomenon in a given setting during a specific time period (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Working with a singular case means that the conclusions are specific to the case and the surrounding context (Bryman, 2002). Therefore the thesis will not attempt to generate general knowledge about the nature of the relationship between blogs and online news.

In order to gain in-depth knowledge about the case and the circumstances surrounding it, a hermeneutical approach will be employed. This means that the meaning of a part of the object of study can only be understood in relation to its entirety (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 1994) – in this case the context surrounding the palm oil issue must be accounted for as well as the issue itself. It also means that the thesis does not make any attempts at being objective, however, of course, the

study has been conducted in as transparent a way as possible in order to heighten intersubjectivity.

Data Gathering

There is no doubt that the palm oil issue has incited many people to contribute with their thoughts, opinions, analyses, advice et cetera. A Google search with the keywords “Greenpeace Nestlé” returns 2 830 000 hits two years after the actual Greenpeace campaign has been discontinued. Because of the vast quantity of available material, strict limitations have been applied. The material is limited to containing blogs and articles from online newspaper or other news media sites. A few exceptions have been made for press releases, a statement and a feature story in order to provide context. Microblogs, Facebook entries, online forums and other types of texts will not be analysed. Considering that the case is based on a campaign with a specific start and end date, only data from the time period 17th of March to 17th of May 2010 will be covered. Although insightful analyses have been made since the 17th of May, they are not part of the particular case itself and are therefore not included as empirical material. In order to come up with a comprehensive result, I have applied an explorative yet systematic approach.

Data has been limited to include material in English and German. Starting the data collection at the source of the campaign, greenpeace.org, using the keywords Nestlé and Greenpeace, it has been possible to cover all blogs published on this site for Greenpeace International. Although Greenpeace branches in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and other countries publish material in English; these sites have not been covered in the initial search.

Data has been gathered through searches on greenpeace.org and Google. For every blog and online news article that has been analysed, all links within that blog entry or article to another blog entry or article has been followed up. These blog and articles, in turn, have also been followed up. In other words, the study covers a specific set of blog entries and online news articles and every blog entry and online news article two clicks away, under the condition that they also qualify in terms of time, language and type of content. The search results which qualify according to the previously set out limitations have been collected in appendices one, two and three.

Quantitative Network Analysis

The quantitative network analysis is concerned with how blogs relate to online news articles and how the network of blogs itself is interconnected. Software (<https://github.com/linkfollower/linkstat>) has been used in order to visualise all links between blogs and online news articles. The software is based on lists of websites which I have collected manually in a systematic manner. Based on the gathered data, the software has also enabled me to determine which blogs have been referred to the most.

My search for material started on greenpeace.org, the site where the campaign which is at the centre of the palm oil issue, was first launched. Searches on greenpeace.org, however, did not return a lot of blogs to analyse. Consequently, other search methods were employed. In order to get a more full body of data to analyse, a search was made on google.se using a specific set of key words central to the case. Much like the Gerhards and Schäfer (2007) study, the search method is based on a typical Internet user's behaviour. Google was utilised because it is one of the most frequently used search engines. Internet users utilising search engines use the hierarchy presented by the search engine as a means of deciding which links are the most relevant to their search, Gerhards and Schäfer (2007) claim. For this study, a cut-out of the available material, consisting of the top fifty results which qualified as blog entries within the given time frame were analysed. Of course, using a search engine which relies on algorithms, which use words from the content of the material in order to rank results, does return a biased result. Search engine optimisation (SEO), a form of manipulation where words are hidden in the code in order to move a site further up in the results list, is commonly applied. However, because search engines rely on algorithms, it is not possible to discriminate against websites which have used search engine optimisation in a systematic manner.

Using the top fifty results on Google which matched the search criteria was a conscious decision. While browsing, reading one blog and following links to another and another and so on, it appears as though there is a never ending stream of people who shared their opinions on the palm oil issue and that no one could have missed watching the spoof advertisement. However, when systematically going through the material in a structured manner and looking more closely at the material at hand, the illusion of ubiquity fades. There are few blogs at the heart of the

issue – hubs – which others refer to. As will be analysed and illustrated later on, many of the blogs which link to hubs are not being linked to themselves. In other words, it is the hubs which create the illusion that the issue is everywhere.

The Internet is known to change constantly, and according to Bryman (2002) it is therefore difficult to determine how representative a website is concerning a specific topic. The sample used for this study has not been selected because it is representative of all blogs covering the palm oil issue. Although Bryman is right in that a specific website or blog may be very influential at a certain point in time, but is much less so two years later, mapping out how that blog related to other blogs during a specific time period eliminates the importance of the current influence that blog enjoys. Case studies are only concerned with a specific time period and therefore whatever changes may have occurred in the blogosphere since the palm oil issue are not relevant to this study.

Qualitative Document Analysis

The qualitative document analysis attempts to reconstruct the discourse in blogs covering the palm oil issue. As noted above, the sample subject to analysis has not been selected because it is representative of the material. The blogs that have been analysed on a deeper level have been selected because they are rich on information.

The blogs have been categorised to reflect on the type of sender. This has been done in order to attain a better understanding of what possible motives there may be for writing and publishing one's opinions on a current event, such as the palm oil issue. Four categories emerged:

- Greenpeace blogs, published on a Greenpeace website
- Personal blogs, primarily read by friends and family with no or few comments, used as a type of online journal
- Journalist blogs, written by professionals who introduce themselves as journalists
- Public relations and communication professionals who introduce themselves either as experts on the basis of their profession or simply as a kind of guru in the field of communication or social media.

It is important to note that although the number of comments can provide some kind of inkling of the blog entry's popularity, comments are not used as a comprehensive account of the number of readers an entry has had. Data on the number of readers or visitors per page is not taken into account.

The headline *Networked Public Sphere* discusses meta communication within the blogosphere. By meta communication I mean communication on the communication surrounding the palm oil issue, primarily that of how Nestlé handled the issue in social media. First and foremost, the analysis is concerned with the writings of the people which I have termed public relations and communication experts. In order to determine who is a public relations and communication expert and who is a private person, I have made a quick assessment using the name of the blog or host website and the information under the "about" tab which is found on most blogs. If the person presents him- or herself as an expert or professional within the area, or the site is a public relations or communication consultancy homepage, then the blog is labelled as having been written by a public relations or communication expert.

The blogs which have been analysed in this study have all been published publicly on the Internet. Because they have been publicised in this manner, using them as a source of material does not require the bloggers' consent. Content which may be of personal interest to the bloggers but does not relate to the subject of this study has not been taken into account. In as far as possible, without compromising the analysis, the bloggers have been characterised according to how they present themselves in their blogs.

Relying on blogs as a source of material carries with it certain problems. As noted above, I have categorised all bloggers presenting themselves as public relations and communication practitioners as such. As noted by Bryman (2002), anyone could claim themselves to be experts and publish their opinions. Publishing a blog does not require any identity check or quality control.

Analysis

The analysis has been divided into sections reflecting the findings of the research on the palm oil issue. In order to get an understanding of how the public and private spheres were negotiated during the case, a short synopsis of the course of events will be recounted in the first section. In order to get a thorough understanding of the case, the main actors will be accounted for. Greenpeace and their general tactics as well as the tactics specific to the palm oil issue will make for part of this section, as will the publication *Caught Red Handed* and the spoof advertisement *Have a break?* which played a major part in the Greenpeace campaign. Nestlé will be briefly accounted for in general terms to give some background as to why the campaign was aimed at that particular corporation. The second section reconstructs the discourse in blogs written during the palm oil issue. An analysis of the argumentation used in the blogs will be made. As mentioned in the Methods chapter, during the data gathering process the material indicated that the blogs dealing with the palm oil issue were not connected in a foreseeable manner along the lines of a networked public sphere as described by Benkler (2006) and Castells (2004). Quantitative methods followed and the results are presented and analysed in the third section of the analysis. The communication on the palm oil as a specific discourse which I have termed meta communication will also be dealt with in this section. The last section is concerned with the relationship between traditional and social media. A deductive attempt will be made in order to determine what triggered traditional media to report on the issue.

The Palm Oil Case

On March 17th 2010, Greenpeace released the report *Caught Red Handed: How Nestlé's Use of Palm Oil is Having a Devastating Impact on Rainforest, The Climate and Orang-Utans* (Greenpeace International, 2010 a). The report describes how Indonesian rainforests are cleared in order to make room for oil palm plantations. Since revelations on the negative impact trans fats have on our health, palm

oil has turned into one of the most popular vegetable fats within the food industry, primarily because of its low cost and low trans fat content (Holland, 2005). According to Greenpeace's report, deforestation in Indonesia accounts for 4 percent of the yearly greenhouse gas emissions (Greenpeace International, 2010 a). The natural habitat of endangered species, primarily that of the orang-utan, is highlighted by Greenpeace as disappearing as a direct result of the use of palm oil deriving from Indonesia. According to Greenpeace, Sinar Mas group is Indonesia's largest producer of palm oil and admittedly Nestlé purchases its palm oil from Sinar Mas group which goes into the chocolate bar KitKat. Allegations made by Greenpeace also claim that companies within Sinar Mas group are clearing forests without permission and are breaking local laws on forestry. Greenpeace demands that Nestlé discontinues contracts with companies within Sinar Mas group and work on a solution with the Indonesian government.

The Greenpeace campaign was also introduced through a press release. It summarises the content of the report, singling Nestlé out (Greenpeace International, 2010 b). Later that day Greenpeace's spoof advertisement *Have a break?* was launched on YouTube (for a detailed review and analysis of the video, please see the headline "*Caught Red Handed and Have a Break?*"). Significantly, the video (GreenpeaceUK, 2010) features the KitKat logotype, which Nestlé opposed. The appeal was granted by YouTube and the video was withdrawn from the website. Greenpeace then uploaded the video to vimeo.com and its own campaign website as well as publishing a press release accusing Nestlé of attempting to push the campaign under the table (Greenpeace International, 2010 c). Nestlé itself did not publicly motivate the removal from YouTube with a press release or statement. Nestlé's way of handling the spoof only manifested itself in the removed video due to copyright infringement.

Accounts from various bloggers claim that the video was viewed by several hundred thousand people within hours of its release (e.g. Greenpeace International, A., 2010 a). People started blogging about the video and Nestlé's reaction, tweeting about the campaign and leaving comments on Nestlé's Facebook wall. After a Nestlé employee, using the corporate Facebook account, replied to several people in a manner which was perceived as rude (e.g. McCarthy, 2010), the Facebook wall gained a significant amount of attention both in social media accounts of the campaign and in online newspaper articles (e.g. Blanchard, 2010 a; Steel,

2010). According to Indonesian media, Nestlé's reaction to discontinue contracts with Indonesian suppliers until the allegations made by Greenpeace were cleared, were not taken lightly on by neither the Indonesian authorities nor Indonesian palm oil suppliers (see for example Ekawati, A., Prameshwari, P. & Tisnabudi, I., 2010; Unknown journalist, 2010 b). During the remainder of March 2010, various online newspapers picked up the story (e.g. McCarthy, 2010; Armstrong, 2010; Steel, 2010). On the 15th of April, Nestlé held its annual shareholder meeting, where Greenpeace made its campaign noticeable through creating a fake wi-fi network accessible to shareholders at the meeting, taking them to the campaign website as well as activists dropping on to stage. Throughout the campaign there were protests across Europe (Greenpeace International, L., 2010).

Two months after the initial launch of the Greenpeace campaign, on 17th of May 2010, Nestlé published a statement on deforestation and palm oil (Nestlé, 2010). Nestlé became a member of The Forest Trust (TFT) which intended to assist Nestlé in building sustainable supply chains. Nestlé's commitment from its previous policy on palm oil to solely use palm oil from sustainable sources by 2015 was reiterated. After Nestlé had published the statement, Greenpeace claimed success for their campaign (Greenpeace International, 2010 d).

Greenpeace

Greenpeace is a well-known environmentalist non-governmental organisation which is regularly consulted by the UN's Economic and Social Council (e.g. Economic and Social Council, 2011), giving it authority in its subject area. Throughout the years, Greenpeace has launched many campaigns, some of which have lead to boycotts. Although Greenpeace pressures governments, it focuses on pressuring large companies and corporations. Greenpeace has become known as an organisation manipulating the mass media in order to gain publicity through spectacular protests (Jansson, 2004). Probably most known for its activities relating to the oil platform Brent Spar, Greenpeace has entered numerous textbooks not only on public relations and publicity, but on politics, international relations et cetera.

Although Greenpeace activists are sometimes put on trial in court for their activities, the activities themselves do not usually put them in a bad light as they often appear pacifist and not criminal. This is another tactic which Greenpeace uses in order to stay on good terms with the public. Financially, Greenpeace solely re-

lies on donations from private people. The organisation neither accepts donations from governments nor companies, priding itself with being the only global environmental charity which does so. According to the organisation this is in order to ensure impartiality (www.greenpeace.org). The tactic of singling out issues through target corporations is put out there by the organisation quite bluntly. Once one issue has been dealt with, the NGO moves on to another (Greenpeace International, J., 2010).

Singling out one issue at a time has side effects. A Danish documentary on child smuggling and child labour on cocoa plantations in Ivory Coast was released in Denmark on the 16th of March 2010 (imdb, 2010). Nestlé is one of the companies pointed out in the documentary as using cocoa from plantations where the named activities occur. Despite the documentary being aired on national television (SVT, 2010) and the attention it gained in mainstream media (Edblom, 2010), Greenpeace's KitKat campaign spread in an entirely different fashion. It appears that chocolate is a product which has proven to be problematic for Nestlé. The documentary could have provided Greenpeace or any public actor with the opportunity to broaden the scope of the palm oil issue yet Greenpeace did not. Greenpeace's tactic of singling out one issue at a time comes at the cost of not being able to discuss the greater picture.

Greenpeace engineered the process of private people spreading the campaign in order to turn private action into public pressure. Messages in social media are accessible through the Internet to anyone (unless password or network protected) which very much puts any text produced within social media in the public sphere. At the same time, social media are often used by private persons in order to communicate with friends and family or people with similar interests, thus challenging the notions of what is public and what is private (Raupp, 2011). The people who spread the campaign are by no means victims of manipulation; however their behaviour appears to have been part of a planned strategy. As noted by van Dijk (1999), the very fact that private people use online mass communication channels such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs in order to communicate with one another waters down the distinction between public and private. Still, a point is made as to separate matters. By engaging private persons to participate in activism from the comfort of their homes, directed toward Nestlé, the private realm within the click of a mouse is turned into an activist action in the public sphere. During the palm

oil issue, private people engaged in social media. These activities, in turn, were reported on by journalists.

Private people rarely make up their own mind on a certain issue but base their opinions on publicised discussions between different actors played out in the media (Bentele & Nothhaft, 2010; Bürker, 2011). Because journalists report on the actors' viewpoints and private people base their opinions on these accounts, journalists play a significant part in the creation of public opinion.

Caught Red Handed and Have a Break?

The discourse of the report *Caught Red Handed. How Nestlé's Use of Palm Oil is Having a Devastating Impact on Rainforest, the Climate and Orang-Utans* is meant to appear factual. Facts presented in the report, both on the environmental impacts of rainforest destruction and Nestlé's and their competitors' use of palm oil and their dealings with suppliers are extensively backed up with references and footnotes. The focus thereafter switches to endangered species living in the rainforest, primarily the orang-utans. Greenpeace's own investigators are not the only source of information on the proceedings of rainforest clearance that is used in the report. Unilever engaged consultants to investigate Sinar Mas and quotes from the consultants' report are used as evidence supporting the Greenpeace claim. Using external sources in this manner adds to the sense of impartiality which Greenpeace is trying to maintain.

The topic of the campaign, focusing on orang-utans, has been pointed out to misrepresent the issue at hand, shifting the focus from one of the worst environmental bads to simply boycott Nestlé (Pattberg, 2010). One possibility for this focus is the actual spoof advertisement. If the palm oil issue had only dealt with the environmental impact rainforest clearance has in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, social injustices for the people living in the affected areas, monocultures et cetera, it might not have been as easy to come up with a video with the same kind of mainstream feel which surprises the viewer, a video with such a broad appeal. Fearing that the lack of a striking video might undermine the spread of the campaign, this could have been the reason why orang-utans came to play such a big part of the campaign.

PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), the world's largest animal rights organisation (www.peta.org/about), regularly posts videos on YouTube of animals being abused, some of which are very graphic. Greenpeace's choice of type of video to go with the report *Caught Red Handed* is strategic. Greenpeace could have chosen to post a video resonating with PETA, of orang-utans being killed when getting in the way of workers in the rain forests of Indonesia. In *Caught Red Handed*, Greenpeace reports on this type of event but chooses not to focus on the animal rights part of the issue in its video. Instead, at the end of the video, an orang-utan parent is pictured with its baby while chainsaws are heard in the background. The imagery in the video is not as graphic as it could have been – the office worker chewing on an orang-utan finger while blood is dripping from his mouth may be distasteful and off-putting, but it is not graphic to the extent that viewers are compelled to look away. Greenpeace also had the option of posting a video which did not attempt to reconstruct the typical setting of a KitKat advertisement (e.g. Thenowcorporation, 2009), instead focusing on the information which the report is based on. Another option would be to post a spoof advertisement but making it even more light-weight, theatrical and a little less distasteful. However, *Have a break?* is what it went for. The video is light-weight enough to appeal to a broad audience but also includes graphic elements (images of orang-utans in their natural environment and the sound of human abuse) which are more in line with animal rights movements. At the same time, the video is satirical, mocking the original KitKat advertisements using the same aesthetics. Through audiovisual content, within a matter of

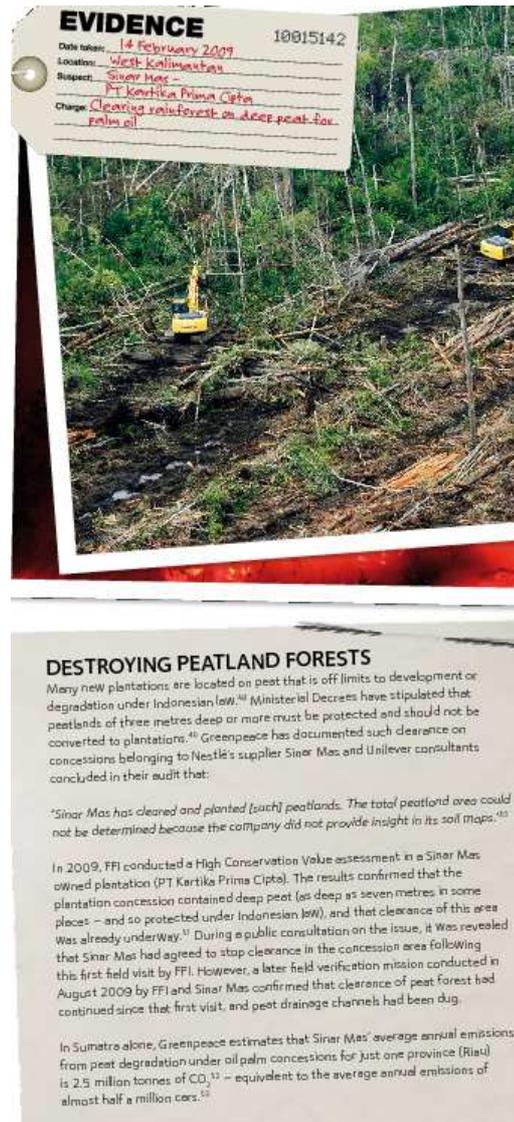


Image 1. From *Caught Red Handed* (Greenpeace, 2010 a).

one minute, the message of the report is brought across. Because of its broad appeal the video proved to be very successful.

Nestlé

Nestlé is the world's largest food corporation. It has been subject to critique on several previous occasions, most notably for its marketing of infant formula in third-world countries in the 1970s which led to boycott (Boyd, 2011).

As noted in the literature review, Bentele and Nothhaft (2010) point out that one of publicness' opposites is secret or secrecy as opposed to private or privacy. Nestlé's use of palm oil had, previous to the palm oil issue, been a matter of its own concern and of the partners the corporation was dealing with. Because Nestlé is not a political body voted into office, the company is not accountable to any nation's citizens in the same sense as governments can be held responsible for practices and decisions made while in political office. This does not mean that political institutions are indifferent to Nestlé's dealings or vice versa. Greenpeace, by calling Nestlé up on its practice concerning palm oil, in a sense attempts to hold Nestlé accountable for its actions. While previously Nestlé's palm oil practices had been something of its own concern, Greenpeace's campaign brought the supply chain, as well as its implications for the rainforest, the environment, affected people and endangered species, into the harsh light of the public, to use Bentele and Nothhaft's phrasing (2010). As such, it appeared as though Nestlé's use of palm oil and its suppliers until then had been a secret. Because Nestlé holds a position in society(ies) of power and influence (by virtue of being an important buyer of goods, employer, in short it plays a significant part in the economy of countries), it can be said to hold a type of public office. Although Nestlé's palm oil practices had not been secret before the campaign, the palm oil issue proved that the dealings of Nestlé cannot be secret.

Quite notably, Nestlé did not publish any press releases until the palm oil issue was resolved. Few online news sources used quotations from Nestlé representatives in accounts of the issue. The rather unfortunate way of engaging with the public on Facebook was one of very few instances where Nestlé at all made its voice heard. It was not until the very end of the palm oil issue that Nestlé published a statement on the improvements on its palm oil policy. The strategy not to say anything until it was possible to publish a definitive and positive statement

(Nestlé, 2010), which appeared to have the purpose of being able to satisfy the entire public – including Greenpeace – resulted in news reporting on the palm oil issue being dominated by Greenpeace’s accounts of events.

Reconstructing the Discourse

The discourse of blogs on the palm oil issue, by virtue of its constructivist capacity, plays a crucial part in the case. The blogs which have been subject to analysis are a very heterogeneous body of texts. As a collective, blogs written by public relations and communication professionals deliver a dark picture for Nestlé concerning the implications of the palm oil issue.

Although many professional blogs focus on the disastrous effects the palm oil issue will have for Nestlé, some propose that this is not necessarily the case. Scott Douglas (2010), director of a public relations bureau, says that the debacle does not have as much an effect on the public as many bloggers make it out to be. To illustrate the point, Douglas recounts an anecdote where he held a lecture at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh to communication students on the 23rd of March 2010. Although all students engaged in social media, albeit to a greater or lesser extent, none of them had heard about the palm oil issue (Douglas, 2010). Creating a discourse which handles the issue in this manner helps minimise the damage for Nestlé as the importance which the issue is attributed with is limited.

However, Douglas’ blog entry is only one of few which downplays the impact of social media. The result from my study shows that there are a few blogs which function as hubs, that is to say that there are a few blogs which a lot of other blogs refer to. The blogs referring to the hubs are not necessarily being referred to by any other blogs but support the hubs and give them a kind of authority. While browsing the Internet on the palm oil issue, it is these types of blogs that have given the palm oil issue an air of ubiquity. Within the public relations and communication practitioners’ community of practice, the palm oil issue has shown that blogs within the community of practice refer to one another. An example is the Brandbuilder blog (Blanchard, 2010 a) and the Web-Strategist blog (Owyang, 2010), both written by public relations and communication professionals who present themselves as social media experts. Both of them make a living from writing books and lecturing on related topics and it is clear that their blogs are used as a

presentation where they position themselves as being among the first to know about a topic and being able to offer professional advice on the issues that are being discussed within the social media sphere. It is because they “share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and... deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (McDermott, Snyder & Wenger, 2002, p. 4) that Blanchard and Owyang are part of the same community of practice. Whether the said bloggers in particular indeed deepen their knowledge and expertise on social media by interacting with one another has not been answered by this study. However, regardless of whether these particular bloggers interact with each other specifically, they are part of the same community of practice. By supporting one another through references within their blog entries, a kind of circularity arises. One claims that the palm oil issue is a major event for Nestlé with great impacts for its brand, referring to the other’s blog, and the other blog writes the exact same thing, referring to the first blog.

Döbert’s Levels of Rationality

Using Döbert’s levels of rationality which determine the depth which public discourse reaches (please see page 6), bears great significance for the case. The two blogs which have been referred to the most (Owyang, 2010 and Blanchard, 2010 a) both cover the same things. Apart from containing a summary of the palm oil issue (which most of the blogs covering the issue do), they also offer advice to other companies which could become subject of a similar attack. Both bloggers claim that they are not taking sides on the issue but from a neutral standpoint want to offer their advice. The advice given is to a large extent the same:

Hire seasoned community managers –don’t relegate to PR intern. I know many companies that are throwing the Facebook fan page to the junior intern as they ‘get social media’ because they are Gen Y. Change your mindset: think of your Facebook fan page as your physical store. Would you anoint a freshly minted student to run that physical store? Instead, hire an experienced community manager that knows how to deal with angry members, foster relationships with advocates, and handle crises without breaking a sweat.

Owyang, 2010

This isn’t amateur hour. Social Media management requires rigorous training and razor-sharp focus: Having a Social Media presence for your company and brand(s) is serious business. It isn’t an afterthought. It isn’t something you can afford to assign to interns. It isn’t

something you can afford to completely hire out to a digital shop, a “social media” firm or an ad agency. You have to take the space seriously. This requires planning, preparation, training and focus.

Blanchard, 2010 a

Both blogs contain numerous links to other blogs and news articles covering the palm oil issue. One blog entry which both refer to, published on zdnet (Howlett, 2010), concerns the impact of the palm oil issue on Nestlé’s share price. Owyang simply states that the issue did not affect share prices, whereas Blanchard (2010 a) paraphrases the zdnet blog as a “questionable report[s] on stockwoes for the company” (Blanchard, 2010 a). Notably, Blanchard does not expand on this notion, nor does the subsequent blog entry (Blanchard, 2010 b), which also covers the palm oil issue. Using Döbert’s model of rationality (1996, paraphrased in Gerhards, 1997), the argument concerning the Nestlé stock price is very basic. However, because Blanchard does not simply state that the Nestlé stock price ought to have been affected by the palm oil issue but also mentions that there are accounts which (however questionable) refute this, the argument reaches the second level of Döbert’s model of rationality.

Although the blogs are less popular than the Web-Strategist and the Brand-builder blogs, Howlett’s (2010) blog entry on zdnet and Raftery’s (2010) blog entry on greenmonk.net to a much greater extent develop a thorough argument. Raftery describes how the Nestlé stock price fell during the palm oil issue. Howlett used Raftery’s account of the course of events and additional information on the Nestlé stock price during the palm oil issue as well as before it in order to develop an argument of his own. Howlett’s argument thus instantly reaches Döbert’s third level, where both sides of an issue are accounted for before arguing for a specific point. The fourth and highest level of rationality, according to Döbert (1996, paraphrased in Gerhards, 1997), requires that a compromise is made between the opposing parties where neither party has to cut back from its original point. In other words, this level requires there to be a proper dialogue where both bloggers acknowledge the other and they engage in a dialogue where some form of negotiation takes place.

Applying Döbert’s model of rationality to some of the analysed blogs has shown that there are arguments on varying levels of rationality. However, as

shown above, the blogs which reach a higher level of rationality are rare and appear not as popular as the ones which apply a more basic argumentation.

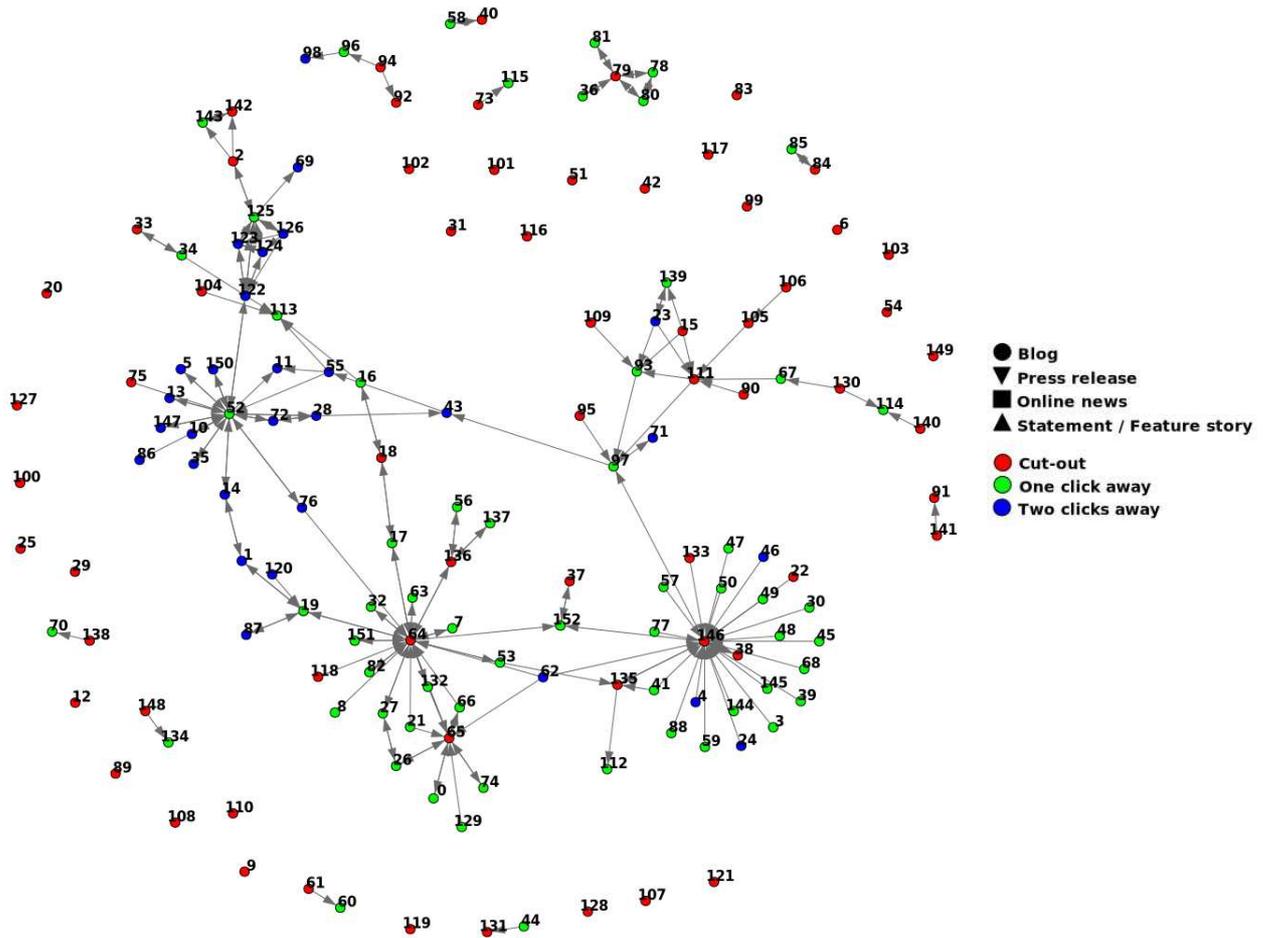


Figure 1. Blogs from greenpeace.org and Google linking to other blogs.

The above figure has been created using software (<https://github.com/linkfollower/linkstat>). It is based on the lists of blogs which I compiled manually by going through all greenpeace.org blogs (see Methods for more specifications) and the top fifty Google results qualifying in terms of language, time and type of content. Each unique entry has been categorised in terms of medium (blog, online news, press release, feature story/statement). The entries have also been categorised in order to reflect whether they have been obtained through a cut-out from the Internet (i.e. from greenpeace.org or from the top fifty Google results), or if they are one click away from any of these sites, or if, in turn, they are one click away from any of those sites. As an example, using a blog entry obtained via the top fifty Google results, the entry is searched for links to other entries covering the palm oil issue. If such are found and correspond to all the other requirements in order to qualify as empirical material for this study, then those entries, one click

away from the cut-out, are documented as such. In turn, these entries are searched for further links to other relevant entries. If found, these are categorised as two clicks away from the cut-out. The software, then, has used this data in order to determine the specific linkages between the entries, resulting in graphs visualising the connections. Colour coding the entries visualises how many “original” entries there are from the cut-out from Google or greenpeace.org, and how many entries are just one click away, and how many are two clicks away.

There are some entries which have been part of the top fifty Google results, which have then linked to other entries, which again have linked back to one of the top fifty Google results. In order to keep the figures as simple and clear as possible, entries have only been attributed with one level (cut-out from Google or greenpeace.org, one click away or two clicks away). Therefore, because one entry cannot reflect several levels, and there are no duplicates of entries, any entries which occur on more than one level, the level closest to a cut-out from Google or greenpeace.org is used. In the figure, the cut-out is reflected as red geometrical figures, one click away is reflected in green and two clicks away are reflected in blue. As an example, blog entry number 64 is the Brandbuilder blog (Blanchard, 2010 a) which derives from the cut-out from Google, and is therefore marked red. This blog entry refers to blog entry number 7, bendler-blog.de (Stoltenow, 2010), which is why bendler-blog.de is marked as green. Bendler-blog.de also links back to the Brandbuilder. This would mean that the Brandbuilder blog not only qualifies for the colour red but also for green. However, because the Brandbuilder blog qualifies for red, red takes precedence over green. Please see Appendix 1 for a key to the above figure.

Cross-Referencing of Blogs – a Networked Public Sphere

In the Methods chapter I mentioned that the research commenced with blogs published on greenpeace.org. This is because I anticipated that the blogs would link to other blogs, which in turn would link to other blogs – in other words, that the number of related links deriving from the greenpeace.org blogs would grow exponentially. However, as figure 2 illustrates, this was not the case. There are examples of greenpeace.org blog entries which do link to other blogs, which link on to other blogs, however these are a definitive minority. From the analysed 22 greenpeace.org blog entries, these only generated 37 links to other texts (which quali-

fied in terms of language, timing, type of content, please see the below figure). Blogs are one of several different types of online user generated content which can be freely published on the Internet. The analysed greenpeace.org blogs cover an issue which reached significant penetration within social media. However, they still did not make out the centre of the online discourse on the palm oil issue.

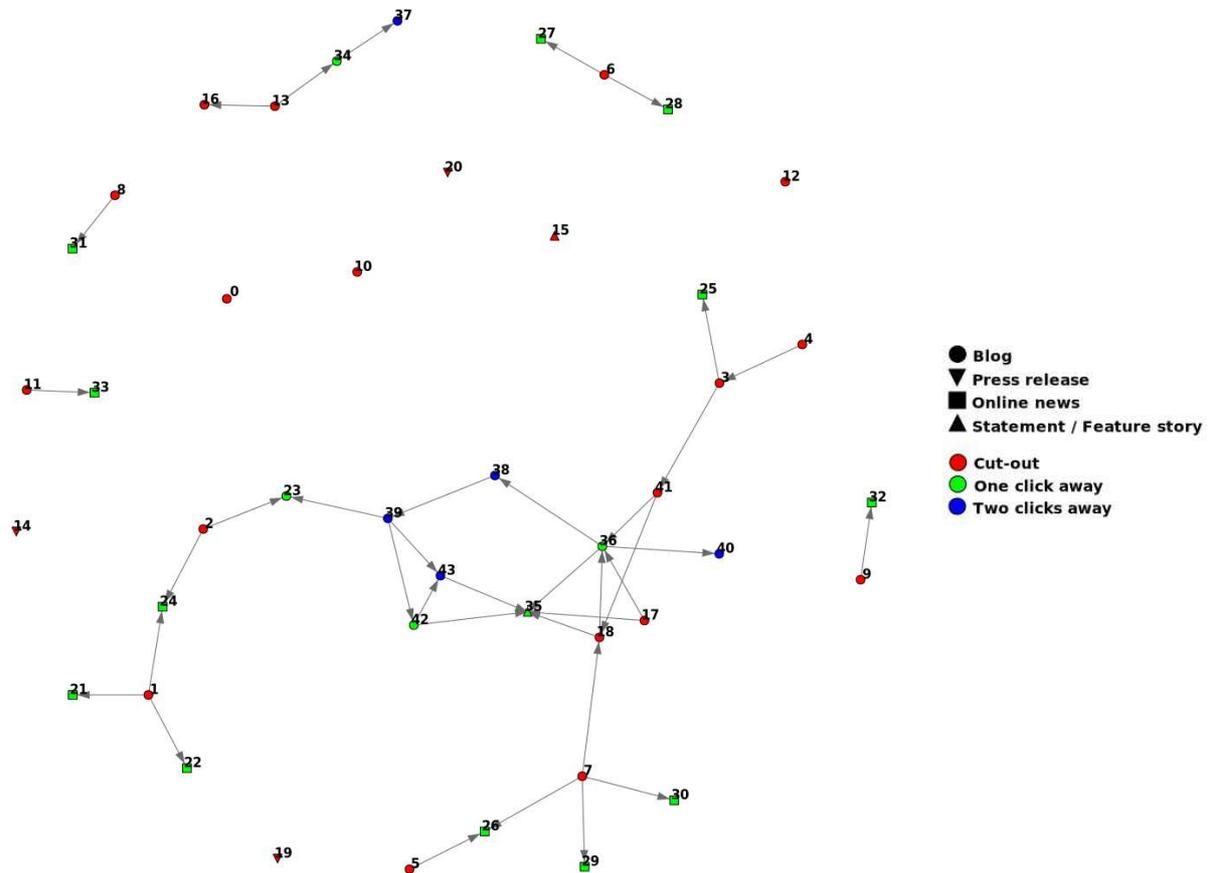


Figure 2. Entries deriving from greenpeace.org linking to other material.

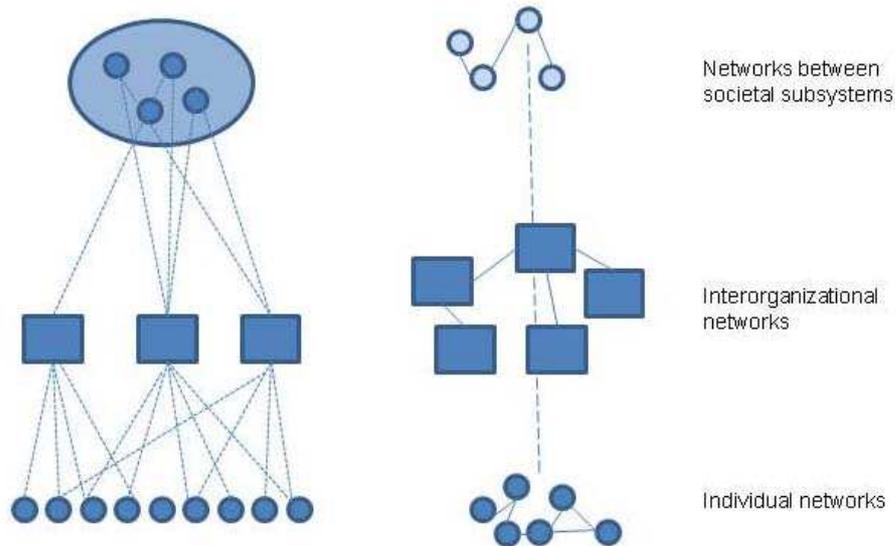
The issue quickly spread out of the environmentalist activist community of practice and on to Nestlé’s own Facebook page which was crowded with activists who normally would not claim themselves to be a “Nestlé fan”, and thus different communities of practice partook of the same content.

As the Methods chapter demonstrated, the data was collected in a systematic manner. Since Greenpeace initiated the campaign and used blogs to promote the campaign, I expected Greenpeace to exploit the networked structure of the Internet. Surprisingly, most blogs did not link back or refer to Greenpeace’s own blog entries. This means that Greenpeace did not manage or orchestrate the proceedings of the palm oil issue. The organisation had an agenda which was dominated by an appeal to the public to contact Nestlé and tell the corporation about their

disparagement with the way the corporation dealt with palm oil. By contrast, the cut-out of the blogosphere, represented by the empirical material, is dominated by public relations practitioners offering their self-proclaimed expert opinions and advice on Nestlé’s dealings in the case. The campaign lead by Greenpeace span off into something quite different.

Arena Models of the Public Sphere

According to Gerhards and Neidhardt (1990), the arena of the mass media is the most influential. According to their arena model, there is an audience listening but not participating in the dialogue within the arena, thus the audience (or *publikum*) is susceptible to influence. However, the palm oil issue was not only played out in the arena of mass media. Gerhards and Neidhardt’s arena model does not include social media as means for public or civic engagement.



— Ties on the same level
 - - - Ties on two levels
 - - - Vertical ties over all levels

Figure 3a/3b. A networked public sphere (Raupp, 2011, p. 82).

Raupp’s (2011) above adaptation of Gerhards and Neidhardt’s arena model, then, would suggest that the palm oil issue took place in all three arenas. In the more up to date version, the third arena relates to the individual level where people have online face-to-face encounters. During the palm oil issue this would be in the online community Facebook, on Twitter and in the online news comments sec-

Meta Communication

Bloggers who are part of a community of practice function to a large extent as a means for the blogger to create an identity. The palm oil issue created an opportunity for bloggers to differentiate themselves from others by assessing the situation, providing an analysis of the course of events and (in some cases) offering advice to Nestlé.

The document analysis has shown that certain blogs are more frequently referred to than others. According to Castells (2004), networks do not have a centre. However, looking at figure 4, which includes all the analysed material, there clearly are certain nodes within network which are central whereas others are peripheral. The blogs at the centre of the network are often written by PR or communication professionals, people working at a communication bureau, helping their clients to avoid getting into the kind of trouble Nestlé found itself in. Thus the main interest of these bloggers is not to analyse the actual case and what happened, but to create an image of social media as a platform which must be managed professionally, or else disaster will strike. The bloggers promote themselves and their services in order to generate an image in the minds of (communication) managers at companies – potential clients – in order to generate revenue for the bloggers' consultancy bureaus. According to Papacharissi, "quantitative analysis of blogs find them to be largely self-referential (Papacharissi, 2007) and motivated by personal fulfilment (Kaye, 2007)" (Papacharissi, 2010 p. 146). Papacharissi (2010) points out that blogs are not selfish but expressions of narcissist culture as part of society which does not make a clear distinction between private and public (Lasch, 1979, paraphrased in Papacharissi, 2010). Although Papacharissi's study from 2007 included blogs covering current events, it appears as though the majority of analysed blogs resembled diaries. Because the result of this study primarily contains blogs written by professionals, rather than private people, it may be doubtful to what extent Papacharissi's results apply to this study. However, Lasch's analysis of society does not concern itself with blogs but still claims it to be lacking a clear distinction between public and private (Lasch, 1979, paraphrased in Papacharissi, 2010).

Public relations and communication practitioners in this manner write about their private businesses in their blogs, trying to push issues into the public sphere and turn these issues into matters of public interest. While the public sphere

makes room for matters of public interest, the blogosphere as part of the public sphere has created the possibility for anyone to publish any material. However, as noted by Schmidt (2008), senior researcher within political communication and digital interactive media, publicity within the blogosphere does not necessarily correspond to society's interests, or, to sharpen the argument, the public interest. Habermas (1998) also distinguished publicity and public opinion from one another – public opinion does not necessarily correspond to anything that is published. Although no one asked for the public relations and communication practitioners' opinion, they published them in order to profit from the issues by commoditising their own opinions. The palm oil issue started off as a campaign driven in order to pressure Nestlé into running their business in a more sustainable fashion. Even still, public relations and communication practitioners attempted to profit from the fact that the issue was handled badly by Nestlé.

When looking at how the people behind the blogs which are linked to the most, it becomes clear that the blog is a way of selling their services. The Brand-builder blog (Blanchard, 2010 a; 2010 b) and the Web-Strategist blog (Owyang, 2010) are both run by public relations practitioners who have written several books each, lecture at conferences on social and online media et cetera. The blogs are used as constantly up to date sales pitches, showing how the practitioners are on top of what is going on in the social media sphere. Putting advice to both the parties involved in the palm oil issue as well as other companies on their blog is an attempt at showing that the practitioners know what is going on, how social media work and, if worse comes to worst, how best to handle the situation.

Spill-Over Effect or Traditional Media Logic?

The palm oil issue features two inherently different actors, both with different kinds of power. Greenpeace and Nestlé have also been described as David and Goliath (e.g. Raupp, 2011), referring to the Biblical battle between a small human being and a big and strong giant, adding to the dramaturgy of the issue. The media, of course, are interested in their dealings as long as they are considered to be part of the public interest.

The first online news site, which is not aimed at communication professionals, to pick up the story was the BBC (Unknown journalist, 2010 a), on Wednesday 17th of March 2010. Greenpeace released no less than three press releases on the

day of the launch of the KitKat campaign, covering a campaign introduction (Greenpeace International, 2010 b), a reaction to YouTube pulling the spoof advertisement off of the site (Greenpeace International, 2010 c) and a response to a Nestlé statement on its cancelled contracts with the palm oil supplier Sinar Mas accused of clearing rain forests (Greenpeace International, 2010 e). Publishing three press releases in one day in addition to protests shows that the matter was of great urgency to Greenpeace. However, the concerns of the press releases are not necessarily a matter of the public sphere.

Simultaneously, the topic spread like a fire in social media. Activists started posting comments on the campaign to Nestlé's Facebook wall, some using altered Nestlé logotypes as their profile picture and blogs started to pick up the issue, spreading the spoof advertisement. According to one blog, the number of total posts on Nestlé and KitKat rose from approximately 500 on the 16th of March 2010 to approximately 3 500 on the 19th of March 2010 (Infegy, 2010). Media logic can be described as the norms and routines which direct the production of media regarding specific content (Håkansson, 2004). Because the social media activity took place simultaneously with the press releases, it is not possible to deduce whether newspapers picked up the topic as a result of traditional media logic or if there was a spill-over effect directly from social media into traditional media.

However, according to Bürker (2011), traditional media did not pick up the story until Nestlé had angered Facebook users. At this point Greenpeace's campaign message was no longer the only story line, but also the way Nestlé handled the issue in social media. According to Röttger (2006, quoted in Bürker, 2011) campaigns apply a "communicative double strategy" (*kommunikative Doppelstrategie*). The double strategy consists of mobilising audiences or publics (*Publikum*) as well as intentionally reinforcing the issue in order to create publicity, which indeed Greenpeace did.

As Bürker notes, the palm oil issue took up more space within traditional media once Nestlé was no longer criticised for the campaign's subject matter, but for its communication. Bürker claims that there has to be a difference in time in order for communication on communication to come about and that it is this dynamic process which drives public opinion. However, for the palm oil issue the first few hours subsequent to the release of *Caught Red Handed* and *Have a break?* included moves and counter-moves (Nestlé stopping the spoof advertisement on

YouTube, Greenpeace's press release on the matter, Greenpeace publishing the spoof on vimeo.com and so on) by both main actors which quickly spurred the debate on Nestlé's communication within social media. Although time has been important during the palm oil issue, it appears as though the first few hours were the most dramatic and it was not until they had passed that traditional media picked up the story. At that point, there was already an ongoing debate about Nestlé's way of handling the issue in social media. Therefore it has not been possible to determine what triggered traditional online media to pick up the story. Greenpeace achieved its sought-after goal – to stop Nestlé from buying palm oil from Sinar Mas. However, it was not the factual issue of Nestlé's palm oil supplier destroying the rainforest which caused bloggers to write about the issue, but indeed the result of this study shows that it was the communication on communication which engaged most bloggers.

Bypassing Traditional Media

Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Linchuan Qui and Sey (2007) attribute wireless communication with the potential to bypass traditional mass media as a source of news material. Although the technology gives rise to the possibility of sharing information between users rather than relying on traditional news sources, the palm oil issue does not support the claim. Many blogs link to news websites such as the Guardian (www.guardian.co.uk), the Wall Street Journal (<http://online.wsj.com>), and CNN (<http://edition.cnn.com>), as figure 4 illustrates. Although online news are not traditional in the sense of print, broadcast on television or the radio, the news websites which are referred to are part of the traditional mass media landscape. The fact that the news is available online is simply an adaptation from the news corporations to an audience which demands online accessibility. Because the news websites are owned and operated by the same corporations as the strictly traditional media, they are also part of traditional media in the sense that they are not the result of citizen journalism or any other grassroots driven initiatives.

Certainly, the fact that blogs refer to mainstream news media does not in and of itself mean that blogs do not constitute an alternative way of spreading news. It would be possible that blogs use online news articles as a means of discussing the implications of the viral strategy used by Greenpeace. Indeed, there are examples of blogs which simply refer to online news in order to make a point about how the

Greenpeace campaign, spread through private people, has even made its way to mainstream media (e.g. Ridings, 2010; Blanchard, 2010 a). However, there are examples of blogs which treat online news articles as a source of unbiased facts (e.g. Ray, 2010).

As noted earlier, Greenpeace published three press releases within the first twenty-four hours of the campaign and Nestlé released none. Without questioning the journalists' professionalism or willingness to produce as objective an account as possible, the mere fact that Greenpeace published material which it was possible to base a news story on, rather than solely relying on the online goings-on on the issue, might have given Greenpeace the upper hand with mainstream media.

Feedback Loops

As noted above, CNN covered the palm oil issue in an online news article. According to Papacharissi (2010), CNN is only one of several major news outlets which regularly use blogs as a source of news material. Blogs are, according to Papacharissi, used "as 'a finger on the pulse of the people'" (2010, p. 146). What this means is that bloggers write about issues, such as the palm oil issue. The online conversation is being listened in to by major news outlets which, if the issue is deemed sufficiently newsworthy, report on it. In the case of the palm oil issue this is what happened. Because creating media attention is one of the most overt intentions for Greenpeace, boasting about how this goal has been reached comes as no surprise (e.g. Greenpeace International, K., 2010; Greenpeace International, A., 2010 b; Greenpeace International, D., 2010). However, the kind of feedback effect on the remaining blogosphere is not as easily explained. There are examples of blogs which do not link to any other blogs covering the palm oil issue, but only refer to established news media (e.g. Igloo, 2010; Reed, 2010). From these blog entries, it is not possible to tell whether the writers picked up on the issue through online news articles or if they indeed were aware of the issue through the online buzz. Both of the aforementioned blogs are written by professionals working at digital marketing agencies. Judging by the background of these bloggers, they ought to have picked up on the issue through other outlets than mainstream media.

Why the public relations and communication practitioners, solely relying on online news articles as sources do so is puzzling. One possibility is that the public

relations and communication practitioners which refer to online news in this fashion are not as street smart within the blogosphere as they make it out to be. If this is the case, the online pitch which the blog represents has failed in portraying the public relations and communication practitioners as experts within their field of practice. Another possibility would be that the established news media are intended to represent a more authoritative source of “information” on which to elaborate with one’s own thoughts and opinions. This would suggest that traditional media outlets still enjoy a higher standing as a source of information than blogs and other social media accounts, rendering Castells et al.’s (2007) claim on wireless communications’ potential to bypass traditional media unacknowledged.

Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this bachelor thesis has been to analyse the discourse in blogs covering the palm oil issue and to analyse the relationship between different texts in terms of linkages. This chapter will summarise the major findings, discuss them and give directions for further research.

The analysed blogs have shown that the majority of the blogs has contained a summary of the palm oil issue in versions differing in length and depth and that most of these have been written by public relations and communication professionals. It has also shown that although there are blogs containing fairly sophisticated arguments, it is not the most insightful blogs which are referred to the most by other blogs. Self-proclaimed experts have, by depicting the palm oil issue as having disastrous effects for Nestlé, contributed to constructing the discourse of and idea of the palm oil issue as a major event. Had the discourse been more nuanced, the outcome of the palm oil issue might have been different.

The private concern of the public relations and communication professionals is to create business for themselves. Publishing thoughts, opinions and analyses of the palm oil issue in this manner is a private matter which is pushed into the public sphere through the blog. The palm oil issue is an example of a situation which was turned into an opportunity by a significant amount of public relations and communication professionals in order to profit from it.

The study has also shown that the meta communication, communication on how Nestlé handled communication with the public on Facebook, led to a spill-over effect onto online traditional media during the palm oil issue. The spill-over, in turn, created a kind of feedback effect where blogs picked up on the articles themselves, rather than the online activity on the issue. Some of the blogs which have been referred to the most out of the analysed material use online news as a complementary source of information. Online traditional media have, in other words, played an important part in the palm oil issue. As noted before, Castells et al. (2007) attribute wireless communications with the ability to work as its own news source, rendering the traditional news media obsolete. This case study has

shown that during the palm oil issue traditional, albeit online, news media were invoked as sources of information – blogs did not solely rely on other blogs. Therefore the palm oil issue has not illustrated the potential of bypassing traditional news outlets, although other studies may prove Castells et al.’s point. As stated in the introduction (p. 2), the study has relied on the assumption that viral campaigns reach their full potential only when they have spread to the traditional media landscape. Although the study has not focused on this assumption, the results concerning the spill-over and feedback effects to some extent support that assumption.

Bürker (2011) argues that traditional media picked up on the palm oil issue specifically because there was communication on communication. Had this not been the case, the Greenpeace campaign might have stayed viral and not spread to traditional online media, thus leaving bloggers to refer to each other rather than relying on established news sources. The question whether the campaign would have had the same effect on Nestlé and its palm oil supply chain will go unanswered, however a future study may analyse the general mechanisms behind traditional online news picking up on issues which initiate from social media.

While conclusions have been drawn concerning the palm oil issue, it must be reiterated that these are specific to the palm oil issue and its surrounding context and they are therefore not necessarily applicable on other cases. It is also important to note that only 213 texts have been analysed in this study and they have been limited to primarily contain blogs and online news articles. However the online discourse has been carried out through other mediums as well and it therefore carries the potential of showing a different result. This study does not exhaust the palm oil issue and there may be room for further analysis and insight concerning the palm oil issue, even given the same theoretical framework as used in this bachelor thesis. One way of moving forward with the result from this study would be to apply the same theoretical framework using the same research questions while studying another case. Once a significant amount of such studies have been conducted, generalisations on patterns such as meta communication and spill-over effects between different types of media could be made.

One of the topics adjacent to that of the private and the public spheres is that of public opinion. To what extent the analysed blogs are an expression of public opinion or indeed *create* public opinion would be one way to take the results of

this study one step forward. I would be interested in how blogs on the one hand and traditional online news on the other play a part in the creation of public opinion and would read such a study with great interest.

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