Stakeholder engagement: An ongoing conversation

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For years, organisations have spent time, efforts and resources working to identify how to successfully engage with stakeholders. Research into stakeholder engagement is especially needed since the topic of engagement is lacking a clear theoretical definition and sound operationalisation. Yet, stakeholder engagement underlies much of the public relations or organisation–public communication profession and research. This special issue includes seven articles, each with a specific focus on different aspects of stakeholder engagement.

Corporate social advocacy was the focus of the *Examining the impact of advertising vs. public relations in consumer engagement with social responsibility* article by Dustin W. Supa and Melissa D. Dodd. In examining the differences in public perception of messages from organisations about controversial topics, they found that the message vehicle is less important than the message itself. They also found that ethical perceptions of organisations were influenced by their involvement in the controversial messages.

In their article, *Identifying the values that guide stakeholder expectations*, John Brummette and Lynn M. Zoch based their article on Rokeach's (1973) procedures for developing **values** based on what participants feel are most important for organisations. Their multi-stage mix methods approach identified that the general population believes the three most important values when evaluating organisations with which they engage with are: Fundamental values (e.g. accountability, caring, competence, efficiency and fairness), ethical values (e.g., honesty, quality, respect and responsibility), and adaptability values (e.g., accreditation, innovation, longevity and personalisation).

Strategic philanthropy was the focus of Heidi Hatfield Edwards' article *Social responsibility and the evolution of corporate philanthropy: An analysis of successful corporate-cause partnerships in an era of the global corporate citizen*. In her analysis of CECP award winning programmes, she looked at corporate-cause partnerships found that a variety of stakeholders were engaged in two-way communication including employees, customers, clients, and communities.

In their article, *Online representations of employee resource groups inhibit employee engagement: A critical/cultural analysis of corporate websites*, Cheryl Ann Lambert and Catalina Quintana explored how companies convey their commitment to workforce **diversity** in their employee resource groups. They found a stronger emphasis on corporate image than on employee needs. They suggest that this approach could actually impede employee engagement, retention and recruitment.

Alisa P. Lertpratchya and Serena Carpenter explored social media communicator **motivations** for professional engagement in their article *Social media communicators' motivations for professional engagement: A study of altruism, reciprocity, and reputation*. They found that altruism, reciprocity, and reputation were the strongest. With the important roles social media communicators play in organisations, it is nice to have insight into why individuals select these roles.

In their article, *Considering ethics in visual storytelling: A study of nonprofit organisations on Instagram*, Marcus Messner and Jeanine Guidry used content analysis of Instagram posts of leading health nonprofit organisations as well as in-depth interviews with social media managers at these organisations to evaluate the **strategy** for engagement on Instagram. While their use was found to be developing, the ethical challenges were a big concern.

In their article *Ethical stakeholder engagement: Exploring the relationship between corporations and NGOs in Thailand, Romania and UK*, Georgiana Grigore, Anastasios Theofilou, Tom Watson, and

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Parichart Sthapitanonda used interviews to explore corporate social responsibility through the **relationships** between corporations and NGOs in three countries: Thailand, Romania, and UK. They found that the UK is at a more developed, mature level of CSR practice while it is a much newer practice in Thailand and Romania. There was found to be a higher level of respect for NGOs in the UK and implicit and explicit corruption in Romania undermined its progress in ethical stakeholder engagement.

Through the variety of theoretical foundations and methodologies, each of these articles contributes to the scholarly literature and provides implications for the profession.

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