FAVORITE FOR JESUS, RETWEET FOR BUDDHA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON TWITTER

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the

Jack J. Valenti School of Communication

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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By

Jordan Morehouse

December 2015

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examined the content published by two international religious leaders on the social networking site, Twitter. Word and phrase frequency analyses were used to examine all words and word pairings across the religious leaders’ Twitter accounts. Organization-public relationship was used to guide this study. The findings suggest that the religious leaders can cultivate organization-public relationships (OPR) on Twitter. The findings contribute to literature regarding two-way symmetrical communication, OPR, and religion in public relations.

*Keywords:* social media, Twitter, religion, organization-public relationship, covenantal model of public relations, devotional promotional communication.

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**Chapter 1**

On October 8, 2011, the Dalai Lama participated in a Google+ “hangout” with Archbishop Desmond Tutu to celebrate Tutu’s 80th birthday (Liu, 2012). The impetus for this “hangout” was that the Dalai Lama was denied a visa application to visit South Africa, Tutu’s home, for the second time (Macale, 2011). In order to visit with his longtime friend, the Dalai Lama turned to Google+ and participated in a live hangout, or Internet video conference, that was open to public viewing (Macale, 2011). Afterwards, a user published footage of the hangout on YouTube, which has since acquired over 85,500 views. Viewers and non-viewers alike lauded the two Nobel Peace Prize winners over their decision to virtually meet despite government restrictions (Choney, 2011).

On January 10, 2012, one million people viewed a video titled, “Why I Hate Religion But Love Jesus” posted on the social networking site, YouTube. The video continued to gain traction and accumulated a staggering 18 million views within two weeks of its release date (Karlinsky & Woo, 2012). By taking a critical stance on religious organizations and favoring a personal relationship with Jesus, the video’s creator sparked a firestorm of controversy that was carried far past the video’s YouTube origin into Twitter, Facebook, blogs, print newspapers, and television interviews (Llorens, 2012).

On January 23, 2014, Pope Francis described the Internet and its “immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity” as “a gift from God” (Fung & Boorstein, 2014). Given during his World Communications Day address, Pope Francis’ acceptance and embrace of technology came two months after he was ranked as the top name used on the Internet in 2013 (Burke, 2014). Pope Francis encouraged people “to grow in unity” during a time period where the most popular phrases on the Internet consisted of “404,” “fail,” and “toxic politics” (“Franciscus,” 2014; “Global Language Monitor,” 2013). The stark contrast between the negative phrases and the Pope’s positive comments highlight the potential beneficial and undesirable effects the Internet can have on its users and the greater population.

These headlining stories demonstrate important moments for mass communications, public relations, and religious adaptiveness (Campbell, 2007). Each story emphasizes the importance of social media and the relationship building capabilities of virtual communication platforms, which opens the door to connect three previously unrelated topics: organization-public relationships, social media, and religion.

**Purpose of study**

The purpose of this research is to apply the theory of organization-public relationships (OPR) to social media by studying religious leaders on Twitter. Specifically, this was done by analyzing content religious leaders have published on Twitter in order to describe how they are using the social networking site. The topic of religion has not been studied frequently in public relations, or within OPR scholarship, despite the increased importance religious organizations are placing on Internet communication as well as the cultural significance and relevance of religion within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Waters, Friedman, Mills, & Zeng, 2011).

This research will serve to connect and expand the body of knowledge on OPR as well as apply the theory to religion, a culturally significant context (Lichterman, 2008). This will help to demonstrate the potential for organizations to cultivate OPR on social networking sites. This research will also critique the traditional view of symmetrical communication and connect religious and non-religious approaches for obtaining OPR. This study was executed by conducting a quantitative content analysis of two Twitter accounts to examine how international religious leaders in Catholicism and Buddhism use the social networking site. Reasons for selecting international religious leaders in Catholicism and Buddhism and the social networking site Twitter will be discussed in Chapter 3.

In order to describe social media use by the religious leaders, profile information was collected from each user and a word frequency analysis and a phrase frequency analysis was performed to identify trends and describe frequency and variety of content. During the word and phrase frequency analyses, all words and word pairings across the religious leaders’ Twitter accounts were measured and compared to provide an accurate description of activity and published content. This will lay the groundwork in demonstrating the ability for religious organizations to practice OPR cultivation tactics on social networking sites.

**Implications**

Before 2010, no international religious leader had published content on Twitter. This changed, however, in 2010 after an individual impersonated the Dalai Lama on Twitter. Following this incident, the real Dalai Lama joined the social networking site in February of that year, and other international religious leaders followed suit (Parr, 2010). This research will be the first to describe and analyze the content of two international religious leaders who hold the highest earthly titles within their respective religions. The phrase “highest earthly titles” is used because both religions believe in a Supreme Being who is not physically living on this earth. This research will also be the first to connect patterns of content from international religious leaders on Twitter.

This research will serve to expand the theory of OPR and methodology of research by studying social media and religious organizations. This research will also use a different method of content analysis that is not commonly applied within public relations scholarship and examine messages communicated to the public, as opposed to themes of messages or website features. This research will contribute to public relations scholarship by demonstrating the ability for religious organizations to cultivate OPR on social networking sites. Additionally, this research will contribute to existing research on religion and social networking sites by studying both topics through the lens of a public relations theory.

**Religion**

Religion on social media needs to be studied because of the increasing dominance of religion in mainstream media. Between discussing religious affiliations of presidential candidates, guerilla warfare by Islamic extremists, civil unrest in Israel, and the topic of same-sex marriage in the United States, religion permeates through mainstream media and is a core component of human culture, identity, and relationships (Lichterman, 2008). Based on current trends in fertility, life expectancy, and geographical location, researchers predicted that the world’s major religions such as Christianity and Islam will increase in numbers worldwide by 2050 while the amount of people who do not claim a religion will decrease by 2050 (Hackett, Stonawski, Potančoková, Grim, & Skirbekk, 2015; Ritchey, 2015).

Researchers have previously predicted a growth of the religiously unaffiliated based on technology trends, economic development, and “mathematical models of social group competition” (Abrams et al., 2011; Hackett et al., 2015, p. 830). However, Hackett et al. (2015) noted a lack of population growth patterns in previous research and based predictions in a decline of the religiously unaffiliated on patterns of demographic information such as “fertility, mortality, migration, and religious switching” (p. 830). Hackett’s (2015) research is important to note because it provides data to counter the accepted view that religious influence is declining (Cheong, Halavais, & Kwon, 2008; Pew Research, 2014).

Historically, religious organizations are some of the oldest nonprofit, non-governmental organizations whose goal is to serve their “customers,” so to say. A core component of most of the world’s main religions is to nurture followers and convert nonbelievers, making communication a fundamental practice. Additionally, many religions require consumption of media materials through books, music, and more, as a form of worship. (Campbell, 2007; Tilson, 2006). Many of the world’s greatest leaps in education and mass communication, like the invention of the moveable metal type printing press, which inspired a global increase in literacy, stem from the fundamental religious purpose for believers to communicate with believers and nonbelievers alike (Xifra, 2008). Thus, in many ways, religious organizations are pioneers in terms of relationship management, communication, and public relations, making them a worthwhile subject to study (Cannon, 2015).

**Organization of Thesis**

 In Chapter 2, I will review and analyze scholarship on OPR. Additionally, I will discuss current trends in the theory and apply the concept to the study of social media and Web 2.0. I will also apply the theory to the study of religion and present my research questions. In Chapter 3, I will discuss methodology, variables to be tested, and provide details on the two religious leaders. It is in this section that I will review the design summary and a summary of research context. In Chapter 4, I will describe research findings and conclude the study in Chapter 5 by analyzing the research findings, limitations, and implications.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I will analyze previous literature to present an argument for and context to my research questions. This will begin with a synopsis of OPR including conception of theory, important findings that furthered theory development, and current trends in research and theory development. It is important to understand the evolution of OPR in terms of how it’s defined, measured, and practiced. This will create a foundation for my argument and research. In the first section, I will also discuss Web 2.0 and how it applies to the study.

In the second section of the literature review, I will analyze theory application of OPR on social media to provide evidence that cultivating and maintaining OPR on social media is achievable. Since research pairing OPR with social networking sites is relatively new, I will evaluate research and findings in order to describe how scholars previously defined and measured success of OPR on the Internet and on social networking sites. Information regarding how researchers define and measure OPR on social networking sites pertains to this study and the research questions. This will be elaborated on further in the literature review.

Since there is limited research on OPR management on social media, I will also review descriptive analyses and case studies in the second section of the literature review to provide a broad view of how organizations currently use social media to develop relationships with their publics. This will clarify what “standard” activity is like from an organization and provide a base for comparison. The first two sections will serve to provide background information needed to understand the research problem and provide structure for the purpose of the study.

Next, I will discuss the culturally significant context of religion and religious organizations. It is in this section that I will review research regarding OPR cultivation tactics of religious organizations. Included will be a description of religion on social media, which will provide context to the research questions.

In the fourth section of the literature review, I will provide a brief description of quantitative content analyses that describe Twitter usage in order to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the proposed research method for this study. Lastly, after reviewing theory, analyzing research, and giving context to the present research, I will discuss my research questions.

**Overview of Theories**

**Organization-public relationship overview.** The purpose of this section is to provide a brief overview of OPR from conception to current day. This will demonstrate the evolution of OPR and assist in understanding that more research needs to be done in order to study OPR on various media.

OPR is the practice and study of the development of relationships between organizations and their publics (Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998a). Founded from two paradigms in interpersonal relationship scholarship, OPR highlights the perceived economic benefit of relationships through costs and value amassed as well as the perceived emotional benefit of relationships through emotional attachment and loyalty cultivated (Kim, 2001).

From the relationship management perspective of public relations theory, the very purpose of public relations is to serve as a “management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994, p. 2). For the purpose of this research, OPR will be defined according to Ledingham and Bruning’s (1998a) definition as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics, in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural or political well being of the other” (p. 62).

Past literature concerning OPR examined relational outcomes of OPR, classification of relationships, how relationships develop, methods for cultivation and maintenance of relationships, the impact of quality and time on relationships, monetary results of OPR and dimensions and models of OPR (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Coombs, 2000; Esch, Langner, Schmitt, & Geus, 2006; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009; Kim, 2001; Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham, 2006; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Ledingham, Bruning, & Wilson, 1999; Thomlison, 2000). A core component of OPR is the (generally accepted) five dimensions that are central to interpersonal relationships: trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998a, 1998b, 2000). In addition to the five core dimensions that are central to OPR developed by Ledingham and Bruning (1998a), researchers suggest that OPR can be maintained through access, positivity, openness, assurance, networking, and sharing of tasks while the “quality of OPR can be measured through the dimensions of reciprocity, trust, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction, and mutual understanding” (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Ehling, 1992; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001; Kelleher, 2009; Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Ledingham, 2003, p. 185). Details on how this framework has been used will be described further in the literature review.

**Current trends in organization-public relationship scholarship.** Current trends in OPR research focus on Kent and Taylor’s (1998) call to use the Internet as a tool for cultivating and maintaining OPR. Huang and Zhang’s (2013) analysis in six peer-reviewed academic journals revealed two distinct trends in OPR literature since the year 2000. The first trend in research is the application of OPR as a dependent variable that serves to explain effects, or outcomes, of public relations activities (Huang & Zhang, 2013). Researchers following this trend applied Hon and Grunig’s (1999) relational outcomes central to OPR to their research “regardless of methodology” (Huang & Zhang, 2013, p. 86).

The second trend in research is the application of OPR as an independent variable used to measure and “explore effects on public’s attitudes, evaluations, and behaviors” (Huang & Zhang, 2013, p. 86). Researchers following this trend applied Ledingham and Bruning’s (1999) five relational outcomes central to OPR to study OPR from the public’s point of view and “attitude toward an organization” (Huang & Zhang, 2013, p. 86).

Current trends in OPR literature also include an emphasis on using quantitative research methods (75%) over qualitative approaches (15%) (Huang & Zhang, 2013). This means that three quarters of scholars researching OPR are using quantitative research methods in their research. Of quantitative research methods, studies utilizing a survey/questionnaire occurred most frequently at 85.7% since 2000 (Huang & Zhang, 2013). Additionally, there is a trend in relational outcomes central to OPR with satisfaction, trust, commitment, and control mutuality measuring as the top four variables (Huang & Zhang, 2013).

Current trends in research also include conducting studies from the public perspective, with 66% of studies examined from 2000-2011 conducted from the public perspective while 17.9% of the studies were conducted from the organization perspective (Huang & Zhang, 2013). Research conducted from the public perspective entails placing the public as the dependent variable, where researchers measure the public’s thoughts, feelings, reactions, and more. Research conducted from the organization’s perspective entails placing the organization as the dependent variable, where researchers measure the organization on their thoughts, feelings, actions, protocols, and more. There is a lack of literature detailing comprehensive research that includes both the public perspective and organization perspective.

In essence, the most applied method of studying OPR is surveying the public on the organization’s activity. This framework is important to note because the majority of literature measures the success of OPR based on the public’s perception of the organization. My study will take the opposite approach and evaluate the potential for OPR by comparing past research findings to messages communicated from the organization.

**Web 2.0.** The term “web 2.0” was first used by DiNucci (1999), but was not widely popularized until O’Reilly (2005) used the catchy phrase during a conference in San Francisco (Han, 2010). During the conference proceedings, web 2.0 was described as “a set of economic, social, and technological trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet- a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects” (Musser & O’Reilly, 2007, p. 5; Witteman & Zikmund-Fisher, 2012, p. 3735).

Web 2.0 demonstrates a shift from static one-way communication and information consumption to interactive two-way communication and information production (Han, 2010). In short, web 2.0 is widely characterized by user-generated content, interactivity, and dynamic website content. Web 2.0 encompasses the following characteristics: (a) massive connectedness; (b) decentralization of the web; (c) user focus; (d) openness (i.e. “greater transparency in corporate communications, shared intellectual property, and greater visibility on how products are developed” (p. 11) in addition to open data and APIs); (e) lightweight (i.e. simple software as opposed to complex, “heavy” software); (f) emergent (i.e. adaptive and flexible) (Musser & O’Reilly, 2007). Popular Internet technology and applications such as social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr, LinkedIn), blogs, wikis, podcasts, and live video streams illustrate and/or embody the characteristics of web 2.0 (Grabner-Krauter, 2009). The key difference between web 1.0 (the traditional web) and web 2.0 is mass collaboration and necessity of user-generated content (Grabner-Krauter, 2009).

***The rise of social media research.*** Research on social media and social networking sites has steadily increased, with the two most frequently researched topics across major communication disciplines being “social media usage and attitudes towards social media” (67.7%) and “social media as either mass or personal communication tools” (22.2%) (Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012, p. 286). While social networking sites were included in only 11.7% of studies, researchers noted that between 2008 and 2010, social media research increased by 10% in communication scholarship and increased by 50% in public relations scholarship (Khang et al., 2012). Of social media subjects, online communities (34.2%) and blogs (16.3%) are the two most frequently researched. Researchers observed a clear distinction in the preference of scholars among various disciplines. Public relations scholarship on social media focused on blogs (50%) while communication scholarship on social media focused on “computer-mediated group communication” (40%) (Khang et al., 2012, p. 287).

Relationship management theory was the third most applied theoretical framework for scholarship on social media across major communication disciplines with agenda setting theory following as the fourth most applied theory (Khang et al., 2012). Scholarship is continuing to slowly move from theory development on social media to theory application on social media based on the gradual increase of “research articles testing research questions or hypotheses” over time (Khang et al., 2012, p. 287). Most public relations scholarship on social media utilizes quantitative methods (82.4%), which complements the finding that quantitative methods are used more than other research methods (58.5% of the time) in social media research across major communications disciplines (Khang et al., 2012). Researchers also note that there is a clear trend in all communications disciplines progressing toward the study of effects of social media (Khang et al., 2012). Scholarship that studies the effects of social media use is the second most frequently researched topic (19.7%), following the “uses and users of social media” (66.3%) (Khang et al., 2012, p. 290). This information is relevant because this study will also utilize quantitative research methods with the goal of answering research questions to study content users publish on social networking sites (i.e. studying “uses and users” as mentioned above) (Khang et al., 2012, p. 290).

**Organization-public relationships on social media**

Social media changed the relationship between a company and its employees, customers, competitors, suppliers, investors, the media, and essentially anyone who has an impact on or who can be impacted by an organization. (DiStaso, McCorkindale, & Wright, 2011, p. 325)

Research shows that social media is an effective platform in cultivating and maintaining OPR and leads to positive relational outcomes (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012; Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013). Positive relational outcomes refer to publics who perceive satisfaction, trust, commitment, and control mutuality toward an organization (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Huang & Zhang, 2013). The adoption of social media is important for organizations and public relations practitioners because “it affects their relationship-building capabilities” and research shows that building OPR greatly increases the chance of a future purchase from consumers (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011, p. 38; Esch et al., 2006). Despite this, the limited research that exists shows neither organizations nor activists are fully utilizing the capabilities of social media to build and cultivate OPR (Taylor et al., 2001).

Often cited in OPR scholarship is Kent and Taylor’s (1998) research regarding dialogic communication and the ability for organizations to ethically communicate with their publics through two-way symmetrical communication. Kent and Taylor (1998) created a clear distinction between one-way communication, or information dissemination capabilities of the Internet, versus their theory of communication through dialogue and understanding the public’s needs through the Internet.

Today, researchers utilize the five principles that Kent and Taylor (1998) originally stated as measures for success in several studies of OPR on social media (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Esrock & Leichty, 1998, 1999, 2000; Jo & Kim, 2009; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001; Kim, Kim, & Nam, 2014; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). The guidelines include (a) opportunity for feedback (dialogic loop); (b) publishing useful and valuable information; (c) generation of return visits; (d) easy to navigate and access information; (e) conservation of visitors (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kim et al., 2014). Scholars agree that following Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five guidelines will foster dynamic, interactive, and well-rounded dialogic communication, which will build OPR (Esrock & Leichty, 2000; Taylor et al., 2001).

Taylor et al. (2001) furthered the development of OPR by separating the five guidelines into two categories: (a) *technical and design cluster* which includes publishing useful information, ease of navigation, and minimal external link referrals in order to keep publics on the website and (b) *dialogic cluster* which includes consistently updated information and opportunity for feedback. It appears that there are several parallels between standard web 2.0 characteristics and the five guidelines described by Taylor et al. (2001). For example, publishing useful information corresponds with a user-focused environment, having a lightweight and emergent design compliments the requirement for easy navigation, and remaining open is similar to the suggestion of publishing updated information.

**Recent research on OPR on the Internet***.* At the time of publication of Kent and Taylor’s (1998) article, social networking sites were not widely used or easily accessible. As a result of the popularity of social media within the past 10 years, the guidelines proposed by Kent and Taylor (1998) are an excellent starting point when researching how an organization uses social media. They are not, however, a comprehensive review of recommended practices when building OPR specifically on social networking sites. Within the last 10 years, researchers have begun to develop guidelines specific for social networking sites and argue that there are three common dimensions of organization social media engagement tactics including information dissemination, disclosure, and interactivity (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). These guidelines served as the inspiration for the research questions presented in this study.

 It is clear that Kent and Taylor’s (1998) declaration that the Internet is an acceptable tool to build and cultivate OPR through five practices sparked a flurry of studies that coincidentally grew scholarship on the potential effectiveness of building and maintaining OPR through social networking sites. Although literature on the effectiveness of social media as a relationship management tool is vast, results, evidence, and empirical data on the effectiveness of social media as a relationship management tool is limited (Kent & Taylor 2010; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). However, while limited, research concerning effects of relationship management on social media is nonetheless monumental in demonstrating the prodigious capabilities of organizations to build relationships with the public on social media.

***Interactivity in OPR on social media.*** While the degree of interactivity has surfaced as a key factor in relationship management on social media, researchers consistently stop short of fully evaluating the effects of dialogic and non-verbal communication on social media (Jo & Kim, 2003; Kelleher, 2009; Kim et al., 2014; Saffer et al., 2013; Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 2003). For example, by focusing on frequency of replies from organizations to the public, researchers concluded that high interactivity on Twitter results in a more positive view of relationship quality with an organization when compared to lower interactivity on Twitter (Saffer et al., 2013). Interactivity in social media is separated into three categories: (a) active control, which corresponds to each party’s choice to voluntarily participate in the conversation; (b) two-way communication; and (c) synchronicity, or speed of responsiveness of the interaction (Liu & Shrum, 2002).

By comparing varying interactivity levels on social media to relational outcomes perceived by the public, researchers produced empirical data that verified social media as an effective tool for relationship management (Saffer et al., 2013). However, the study stopped short of evaluating the content published and how that could’ve driven positive relational outcomes. Extending the research could have built towards a greater understanding of the necessity of symmetrical communication and effects of content when cultivating OPR. However, besides the surface results, this study demonstrated that organizations communicating and interacting with their publics through social media, specifically on Twitter, can build and maintain OPR that leads to positive relational outcomes (Saffer et al., 2013).

Building upon this concept, researchers have concluded that publics perceive greater relational dimensions to communication displaying “relational commitment and conversational human voice” (Kelleher, 2009, p. 177; Kelleher & Miller, 2006). To clarify, “conversational human voice” is a far cry from a structured and formal tone. Instead, it represents an unpretentious and personable method of communication. “Conversational human voice describes an engaging and natural style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization’s publics based on interactions between individuals in the organization and individuals in public” (Kelleher, 2009, p. 177).

Regarding specific effects of social media communication, Kelleher (2009) concluded that participants who visited organization blogs the most frequently perceived the organization as “communicating with a conversational voice, and those perceiving [the organization] to communicate with higher levels of this conversational voice were more likely to report higher levels of trust, satisfaction, and control mutuality in their relationship with the organization” (p. 184). This supports and furthers earlier research that concluded that 36% of consumers “think more positively about companies that have blogs” (*Universal McCann*, 2008, p. 5). Refreshingly, instead of describing steps to achieve a conversational human voice or the potential effectiveness of conversational human voice, Kelleher focused on the effects of various types of communication online and provided evidence for the ability for organizations to build and maintain organization-public relationships through published content on social media (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

As mentioned above, voice, tone, interactivity, and volume of responses from organizations influence OPR. Researchers also emphasize *repetitive* interactions on the Internet as the foundation “for any successful/ongoing relationship” (Taylor et al., 2001, p. 279). Researchers argue that it is through continued interactions and sustentation of visitors that the relational dimensions of trust and commitment are maintained on social platforms (Taylor et al., 2001). Kelleher’s (2009) research supports this by showing that activity on behalf of an organization on the Internet can influence the public’s perception of the organization. Stimulating dialogue was perceived through continued interactions, which lead to the relational dimension of satisfaction among publics (Briones et al., 2011; Kelleher, 2009; Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

Yang and Kang (2009) advanced these findings by focusing on the effects of organization communication and discovered that when an organization dedicates itself to an interactive blog, publics perceive a personal connection (trust), a positive attitude with the organization (satisfaction), and an increased likelihood of word-of-mouth intentions (control mutuality). In addition to the relational outcome of trust, researchers concluded that there is a direct correlation between trust in an organization and a positive website or social networking site experience, along with a direct correlation between low levels of trust in an organization and an “unsuccessful” website experience (Hong, 2013, p. 352). Lastly, “frequent and extended use” of social networking sites resulted in behavioral outcomes, such as volunteerism, in a study focused on effects of social media activity from a nonprofit organization (Paek, Hove, Jung, & Cole, 2013, p. 532).

This information is critical to note because it provides a general foundation for organizations on how to cultivate OPR on social media. This research will be mentioned again in Chapter 5 as a way to analyze results. There is a lack of research that analyzes the frequency and textual content of organization’s social networking sites. To clarify, many studies analyze “content” to determine if there’s an email address available or if the name of the site operator is visible; however analyzing textual content through the use of word and phrase frequency analyses will assist in furthering scholarship and understanding regarding organization activity on social networking sites.

**Effects of OPR.**Few researchers have focused on the effects of cultivating OPR on social media by way of researching how publics perceive varying degrees of interactivity, tone, voice, and continued interactions. Despite this, a clear trend has occurred that places the public’s perception of relational outcomes as the dependent variable in order to measure quality of OPR. Based on this trend in research, scholars have observed a trend in organizations not utilizing dialogic cluster guidelines on social media (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Eyrich et al., 2008). This means that organizations are utilizing advanced website features and graphics, but they are not interacting with the public by way of publishing updated information, providing an opportunity for feedback, or responding to the public through the Internet.

Despite the limited scholarship on the effects of cultivating OPR on social media and social networking sites, research shows that it is possible for organizations to cultivate meaningful relationships with their publics on social networking sites that lead to relational and behavioral outcomes (Waters et al., 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011). New research on how organizations use social networking sites and the content they publish will provide updated information on use and content, which will either support earlier research or document a change in organizational online communication activity. It is important to note this because this research uses a combination of Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five guidelines, Waters et al. (2009) engagement tactics, and Tilson’s (2000, 2006) and Baker’s (2002) covenantal public relations model to evaluate OPR.

***Twitter as a micro-blog.*** Next, I will clarify the difference between blogs and a micro-blogging social networking site, such as Twitter. There is a clear distinction between the terms “social media” and “social networking sites” in academic scholarship, despite the fact that social networking sites are included within the term “social media.” Blogs are considered a “social media” in the academic community and provide similar opportunities for relationship management and relational outcomes as social networking sites such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook (Curtis et al., 2010; Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008). Scholarship on blogs is relevant to this research because Twitter is widely considered a “micro-blog” due to the 140-character limit per published post (Jansen et al., 2009).

A standard micro-blog is approximately the length of a typical newspaper headline and subhead, which makes it easy to both produce and consume. The message is also asynchronous noninvasive, since one can choose who to receive updates from. They are also archival in the sense that these micro-blogs permanently exist and are searchable via Web search engines and other services. Since they are online, they are also typically accessible by anyone with an Internet connection. In short, these micro-branding comments are immediate, ubiquitous, and scalable. (Jansen et al., 2009, p. 2170)

Despite the relevant research concerning blogs and social media, social networking sites provide more opportunity for relational outcomes when compared to blogs due to the fundamental one-way communication nature of blogs. While receiving feedback through comments, polls, and surveys may be available within organizational blogs, they lack the ease and fluidity of continued interactions when compared to social networking sites.

Social networking sites such as Twitter provide more robust relationship cultivation opportunities based on the foundational interactive nature of social networking sites. It is possible to only practice one-way communication on social networking sites (as we’ll see below shortly). There is much greater opportunity, however, for symmetrical communication on social networking sites based on non-verbal communication features available such as likes, favorites, hashtags, comments, shares, and retweets (Park & Reber, 2008; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

**Organization-public relationship application on social media.** Researchers studying OPR on social media have used the research method of content analysis to describe use of social networking sites or to describe the effects of communicating on social networking sites by measuring relational outcomes. Previous research shows organizations are aware of the importance of social media as well as the potential benefits and dangers it can produce for an organization (Briones et al., 2011). The large majority of public relations practitioners, however, are not using social media to its full potential in order to build organization-public relationships (Waters et al., 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Waters & Lo, 2012). Common reasons for not fully utilizing social networking sites include time, resources, and knowledge (Campbell, 2007; Smith, 2007; Waters et al., 2011).

While several scholars have hailed two-way symmetrical communication as the most effective and ethical model of communication, research shows that practitioners who use one-way communication to interact with publics on social networking sites generally fail to capitalize on interactive features available on social networking sites, and neglect relationship development through engagement (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Eyrich et al., 2008; Hong, 2013; Waters et al., 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Waters & Lo, 2012; Xifra & Grau, 2010­)­­. Nonprofit organizations are more likely to use one-way communication on Twitter, specifically public information, and often promote their own initiatives through website links (24%), blog links (20%), and newsletter links (13%) aimed at recruiting volunteers, fundraising, and disseminating information (Paek et al., 2013; Waters & Jamal, 2011). Disclosure of who is manning the social networking sites on behalf of the organization is the top used social media engagement component by organizations, with over 94% of nonprofit organizations in the United States, Turkey, and China providing the names of individuals who maintain the social networking accounts (Waters & Lo, 2012).

When compared to nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and public affairs organizations, for-profit organizations such as corporate communicators and agencies are more advanced regarding “their rate of adoption and communication practices” on social media (Eyrich et al., 2008; Waters & Jamal, 2011, p. 323). As mentioned earlier, non-profit organizations categorically do not use interactive features available on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, thus resulting in the failure to “take advantage of other public relations opportunities” (Lovejoy et al., 2012; Waters et al., 2009, p. 105; Waters & Lo, 2012). Included in these results is a lack of utilizing hashtags, sharing content (retweets), and consistency of published content in general (Lovejoy et al., 2012). For instance, research found that “there was a considerable range for monthly tweet totals from a low of 0 to a high of 289” (Lovejoy et al., 2012, p. 315). As a result of not utilizing interactive features on social networking sites, organizations are simply using social networking sites as a means to publish one-way messages.

Of organizations that utilize a two-way communication approach on Twitter, content analyses show that published content includes “customer testimony, complaints, and product/service inquiries” (Jansen et al., 2009, p. 2183; Lovejoy et al., 2012, p. 314). Moreover, half of the content that organizations published consisted of responses to individuals while the remaining published content contained general information that was not directed at a specific individual (Kim et al., 2014).

Conservation of visitors is a key guideline among organizations practicing two-way communication on Twitter, followed by the dialogic loop, or opportunity for feedback (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Interestingly, researchers noted that organizations practicing the dialogic loop principle on Twitter responded to comments and asked questions in an attempt to stimulate discussion, that is, they were engaging the public as opposed to the public engaging them (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

In a separate study, researchers noted that organizations are utilizing Facebook for dialogic loop opportunities much more than Twitter, which complements scholarship that suggested an organization will utilize multiple social networking sites as opposed to a single one (Kim et al., 2014). Researchers concluded that there is a direct correlation between trust in an organization and a positive website or social networking site experience, along with a direct correlation between low levels of trust in an organization and an “unsuccessful” website experience (Hong, 2013, p. 352). Additionally, there is a direct correlation between the number of interactions an organization has on its social networking sites and the number of Facebook fans and Twitter followers of an organization (higher fan count equals higher interactions) (Kim et al., 2014).

**Social media adoption rates in public relations.** As far as social media practiced within the organization, researchers discovered that developing OPR on social media is more likely to happen if an organization has a “defined public relations department” (Curtis et al., 2010, p. 92). Of organizational executives, many feel social networking sites and social media is important for their organization, however they do not know how to implement successful practices nor connect social networking site activity with behavioral outcomes (DiStaso et al., 2011). These findings complement the growth in adoption of social networking sites among public relations practitioners. Stelzner (2014) determined that 97% of marketers use social media to market their business, which is a 43% increase of use in four years compared to Curtis et al. (2010) findings that 54.5% of public relations practitioners use social networking sites, which is a 30% increase of use in two years compared to Eyrich et al. (2008) findings that 24% of public relations practitioners use social networking sites.

While this study will not discuss the public relations department of the religious leaders included in the study, it is important to note that most studies conclude that organizations do not follow the recommended approach to cultivating OPR on social media and do not utilize basic social networking site features. Information on adoption rates provides insight that many organizations struggle with similar social media issues, including lack of time, knowledge, and resources (Campbell, 2007; Smith, 2007; Waters et al., 2011).

**Religion and OPR theory**

Researchers have discussed the importance of the Internet and social media to religious organizations since Kinney’s (1995) initial analysis of the state of religious institutions on the Internet (Rupp & Smith, 2002). Many of the world’s main religions have clearly defined brand representatives and a primary goal of communication on the local, national, and global scale (Campbell, 2007). While this study will focus specifically on religious leaders, research concerning religious organizations is relevant since religious leaders are accepted as personified representations of religious organizations.

Concerning religious OPR scholarship, researchers developed the covenantal model of public relations practiced through symmetrical communication and a promise to dedicate the practice to “a particular human good or need” (Baker, 2002, p. 204). Through symmetrical communication, researchers suggest that religious organizations can “foster” meaningful OPR that result in the relational outcomes of trust, commitment, and control mutuality (Baker, 2002, p. 200; Tilson & Venkateswaran, 2006; Waters et al., 2011). The covenantal model of public relations was founded on organization-public trust, commitment to OPR, public-centered service, and established ethics (Baker, 2002). The covenantal model of public relations is described as “an ethically based understanding of fostering organizational relationships with significant publics (i.e. religious congregations and nonbelievers)” where the organization can represent the church, the religion, or the Supreme Being (i.e. God) (Tilson & Venkateswaran, 2006, p. 130; Tilson, 2006).

Within the covenantal model, researchers also describe the practice of devotional-promotional communication used by religious organizations with the goal of attracting “loyal and faithful followers” to pledge allegiance “to an individual, political entity, or religion” (Tilson, 2006, p. 167; Tilson & Chao, 2002; Xifra, 2008, p. 194). In essence, “a devotional-promotional campaign that is religious in nature, may seek to instill great love or loyalty, enthusiasm, or zeal for a particular religious individual, living or deceased, or for a specific religion or faith” (Tilson, 2000, p. 1; Tilson, 2006, p. 167). While devotional-promotional communication was originally applied to understand how a religiously charged publicity campaign can “foster support for a particular faith group, promote devotion to a religious figure, or motivate observable religious behavior,” the model is also relevant when studying religious organizations in the media because devotional-promotional communication methods include traditional and new media, such as social media, websites, blogs, and newsletters (Cannon, 2014, p. 136; Tilson & Chao, 2002; Tilson & Venkateswaran, 2006).

It should be noted that religious organizations traditionally do not view their efforts as “public relations” for fear that it would be considered propaganda, a practice that is negatively viewed within faith groups (Cannon, 2015). Instead, religious organizations refer to typical public relations roles and responsibilities as “strategic communications” in order to distance themselves from potentially negative associations (Cannon, 2015).

These two approaches, covenantal model of public relations and devotional-promotional communication, place a heavy emphasis on the relationship between a religious organization or a representative of the religious organization and an individual, however they do not place a heavy emphasis on the communication model needed to achieve this relationship and instead elaborate on trust, commitment, service, and established ethics (Baker, 2002; Tilson, 2006; Waters et al., 2011). This is mirrored by the Religion Communicators Council (RCC), which states that relationships between religious organizations and followers are “based on trust, authenticity, and commitment” (Cannon, 2015, p. 280).

**Religion on social media: Leaders and followers.** Nonprofit organizations, such as religious organizations, fall behind in adoption rates of online communications including developing an online presence, creating websites, and creating social networking sites when compared to for-profit and government organizations (Smith, 2007; Rupp & Smith, 2002; Waters et al., 2011). Researchers also found that religious organizations are “among the last types of nonprofits to create web sites” despite ownership of traditional mass media materials, such as publishing houses and radio networks, by international religious organizations (McCombs, 2005; Norris, 2003; Waters et al., 2011, p. 89). Despite the amplified potential, reasons for slowed adoption are universally identical across all organizations and include time, resources, and knowledge (Campbell, 2007; Smith, 2007; Waters et al., 2011).

***Similarities and differences in social media use.*** Use of the Internet by religious organizations is surprisingly similar to how other nonprofit organizations use the Internet, including information dissemination, disclosure, and interactivity (Campbell, 2007; Smith, 2007; Waters et al., 2009). However, researchers determined an additional reason why religious organizations adopt Internet communication: culture preservation (Barzilai-Nahon & Barsilai, 2005). By studying fundamentalist communities, researchers determined that religious organizations strategically use the Internet to preserve their culture rather than erode it by adapting their use of the medium to satisfy their specific needs (Barzilai-Nahon & Barsilai, 2005; Campbell, 2007). This finding compliments research suggesting online communities promote, or further “traditional views of religious structure and discourse” as opposed to diminishing the authority or structure of offline religious organizations (Campbell, 2007, p. 1056).

Another notable difference between OPR cultivation techniques used by nonprofit organizations compared to religious organizations is dialogic loop proficiencies. Researchers found that roughly 25% of religious organizations offered feedback forms on their websites and 48% of religious organizations did not provide a “dedicated link to email the organization with comments or questions” (Smith, 2007; Waters et al., 2011, p. 95). This is a stark contrast when compared to activist websites, where 94% offer opportunities for user-response, as well as other nonprofit websites where 44.8% offered feedback forms and 57% offered an additional form to join the organization (Kang & Norton, 2004; Taylor et al., 2001; Waters et al., 2011). Researchers suggest that the lack of dialogic loop opportunities available on religious organization websites result from developing relational outcomes with their public despite practicing one-way communication (Smith, 2007). The proposed necessity of symmetrical communication will be examined in the discussion.

***Individual use for religious reasons.*** By surveying religious leaders, Larsen (2000) discovered that spiritual leaders use the Internet as an educational resource for religion with the majority of spiritual leaders going online to “further congregational worship,” including researching religious texts (70%) and devotional resources (65%) (p. 5). This compliments later research that found that 25% of all Internet users have received religious information from the Internet (Larsen, 2001). Of that 25%, 67% of religious followers used the Internet to access information on their own faith while 50% used the Internet to access information about other faiths (Larsen, 2001). It is interesting to note that at the time of the study, more people had received religious information from the internet than those who had “gambled online, used Web auction sites, traded stocks online, placed phone calls on the Internet, done online banking, or used Internet-based dating services” (Larsen, 2001, p. 1).

In regards to the relationship between religion and social media, 20% of Americans published content about their religion on a social networking site while 46% of Americans witnessed another person publish content online regarding their religious faith (Pew Research, 2014). This research is important to note because it demonstrates that the public is seeking religious information and communication on the Internet. The religious leaders’ tweets aren’t lost in cyberspace, however research shows that it’s considered a norm to see religious content on social networking sites.

 While past research describes the digital adoption rates, website features, and hypothesized use of the Internet for religious organizations, this research will analyze the actual messages that religious leaders are communicating to their followers. This study advances prior digital communication research of religious organizations by focusing on the social networking sites of religious leaders and the content they publish, two previously missing pieces to the puzzle. With this research, scholars will have a clearer understanding of how religious organizations use the Internet, cultivate OPR on the Internet, and communicate with their followers on the Internet.

**Quantitative content analysis on Twitter**

The social networking site and micro-blogging tool Twitter was specifically chosen for this research because it is a convenient sampling tool and method for measuring public opinion (Greer & Ferguson, 2011). All tweets, or published content, are public unless otherwise specified by the account holder. Aiello et al. (2013) explained that Twitter is an accurate and reliable snapshot of global sentiment.

Interactions and communication in social media often reflect real-world events and dynamics; as the user base of social networks gets wider and more active in producing content about real-world events almost in real-time, social media streams become accurate sensors of real-world events. (Aiello et al., 2013, p. 1268)

Twitter is a web-based social networking site that publically launched in 2006. The social networking site allows users to publish photos, text, audio, video, and information through the Internet. Twitter also allows users to include website URLs, hashtags (#), other accounts (@), photos, and videos in published content. Twitter is unique compared to other social networking sites because of its 140-character limit per tweet, or published content. Because of this limitation, Twitter is widely considered a micro-blogging website or tool.

Twitter is a free resource that encourages users to produce and consume information. Twitter is available anywhere in the world with Internet access or a mobile phone data plan. Additionally, Twitter is available in 33 languages with 288 million monthly active users (“Twitter,” 2015a). Each time a user tweets, or publishes content, the tweet can be accessed by the public or only by approved “followers,” people the account holder granted access, the latter indicating a private account. Users publish an average of 500 million tweets per day and 77% of the accounts are located outside of the United States. While Twitter launched in the United States, the company has approximately 19 offices outside the United States (“Twitter,” 2015a).

The growth of active users on Twitter is exponential. The number of users increased by 28% from 2013-2014 and researchers suggest 19% of the entire U.S. adult population use Twitter and 23% of all Internet users above the age of 18 use Twitter (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015). A large part of the consistent growth is attributed to the ease of use of the social networking site, which enables users in all walks of life to seamlessly learn the lingo, regardless of social status, educational level, or geographical location (Duggan et al., 2015; Hagan, 2011). The largest group of U.S. users is 18-29 year olds, with 37% of the sample using Twitter (Duggan et al., 2015). The majority of U.S. Twitter users have graduated college (30%) make over $50,000 per year (27%), and live in urban environments (25%) (Duggan et al., 2015).

As noted above, Twitter is an excellent tool for scholarly research. Researchers can measure opinion, salience, and attribution with ease through content analyses of public tweets (Greer & Ferguson, 2011; O’Connor, Balasubramanyan, Routledge, & Smith, 2010; Vargo, 2011). For users who make their tweets “public” as opposed to private, researchers are able to access tweets that match specific search queries and keywords through Twitter’s application program interface, or API, at little to no cost (Kim et al., 2013). By comparing traditional quantitative survey responses on public opinion to content published on Twitter, researchers found an 80% correlation in “sentiment word frequencies” between the two datasets several cases (O’Connor et al., 2010, p. 1). Collecting data from public Twitter accounts does not interfere with the users life or cause harm to the user, which makes the social networking site an excellent research tool for measuring opinions (Vargo, 2011).

Aside from the convenience and ease of use, Twitter is the third most used social media application in official public relations, advertising, and marketing campaigns, trailing Facebook and LinkedIn (Stelzner, 2014). Stelzner (2014) noted that 67% of professionals plan to “increase their activities on Twitter” within the next year (p. 30). To further emphasize how important Twitter is to academia and practitioners, researchers analyzed 14,200 published posts on Twitter and discovered that 19% included the name of a brand or an organization in the tweet (Jansen et al., 2009). Of the tweets that included the name of an organization or brand, 80% were coded as seeking information, asking questions, or answering questions about the brand or organization (Jansen et al., 2009, p. 2184). This demonstrates the relevance and importance of Twitter for studying OPR.

**Implications**

With the transformation of society, technology, and communication trends, the study of OPR has expanded. Much of the research examining OPR capabilities of organizations do not consider the influence of an organization’s content, or textual messages, on the public’s perception. This research serves to further public relations scholarship by demonstrating the potential for religious organizations to cultivate OPR on social networking sites and expand the methodology of studying OPR by conducting word and phrase frequency analyses. This research will also provide a clearer understanding of how religious organizations use the Internet, cultivate OPR on the Internet, and communicate with their followers on the Internet.

 My suggestion is that religious organizations can foster OPR on social networking sites by utilizing a combination of OPR cultivation tactics listed by Kent and Taylor (1998), Waters et al. (2009), Tilson (2000, 2006), and Baker (2002). As opposed to measuring concepts within the religious leaders tweets through a traditional quantitative content analysis, I will measure the frequency of use of words and phrases within the religious leaders’ tweets as well as profile information in order to evaluate if the religious leaders are cultivating OPR on Twitter. The following research questions will be investigated:

RQ1: What are religious leaders tweeting?

RQ2: To what extent are religious leaders utilizing opportunities for interactive communication on Twitter (e.g. replies, retweets, photos, videos, etc.)?

RQ3: What words and phrases do the religious leaders use most often?

**Chapter 3: Methods**

The purpose of this research is to apply the theory of OPR on social media by studying religious organizational leaders on Twitter. Two Twitter accounts were analyzed to describe how international religious leaders in Catholicism and Buddhism use the social networking site. Tweets from the religious leaders were analyzed to describe frequency and variety of content. The primary goal of this research is to describe how religious leaders use Twitter in order to determine if they are utilizing OPR cultivation tactics.

Research focused on OPR on social media often employs quantitative content analyses using Kent and Taylor’s (1998) dialogic communication methods and/or Hon and Grunig’s (1999) relational outcomes as the independent/dependent variables, respectively (Huang & Zhang, 2013; Khang et al., 2012; O’Connor et al., 2010). However, due to the scarcity of research examining religious organizations on social networking sites, a descriptive focus is the most appropriate for this exploratory study. Descriptive approaches give researchers the opportunity to acquire a more thorough understanding of the research problem and topic in context (Hon, 1997). Researchers have used similar methods proposed for this study in order to describe activity from organizations on social networking sites (Kim et al., 2014; Waters et al., 2009).

This stage of the study does not specifically measure relational outcomes in cultivating OPR. By examining content using quantitative content analysis, this research describes the frequency of words and phrases as well as profile information of the account holders. This study will describe how religious leaders use the social networking site Twitter. In the discussion section, I will analyze the research data to evaluate if the religious leaders are utilizing OPR cultivation tactics.

**Religious Leaders**

While social networking accounts exist for temples, synagogues, churches, and monasteries, they are few and far between. Thus, the Twitter accounts of religious leaders were analyzed. Religious leaders are accepted as personified representations of religious organizations. The sample includes two religious leaders who hold the highest earthly titles in their respective religions. Catholicism and Buddhism were specifically chosen for a number of reasons, including both religions (a) are actively practiced internationally; (b) have living religious leaders; (c) have living religious leaders who are active on social media; (d) have a rich history outside of the Internet and mass media;[[1]](#footnote-1) and (e) have one high ranking religious leader.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Religious leaders who hold the highest earthly titles in their respective religions were specifically selected for this study in order to assess a knowledgeable representative of that religious organization and to assess activity on the international level. For the purpose of this study, the term “religious leader” is defined by a person who works within a religious organization and their main function is to educate others, or a person who possesses in-depth knowledge of the religion and serves to educate others outside of the traditional house of worship such as through books, retreats, conferences, etc. Each religious leader had to appeal to an international audience. The religious leaders did not have to reside in the United States.

The religious leader representing Buddhism is the Dalai Lama (@DalaiLama). The religious leader representing Catholicism is Pope Francis (@Pontifex). Thus, the two units of census consist of the religious leader’s Twitter profiles (n=2) and the tweets on each profile (n=1,787) as of August 28, 2015.

**Religious leaders to be coded.**

***Buddhism.*** His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, a Buddhist monk and the spiritual leader of Tibet, was recognized at age two as the reincarnated[[3]](#footnote-3) Dalai Lama (“Dalai Lama,” 2015). The Dalai Lama assumed full political and spiritual power of Tibet at age 15 and is known for his non-violent approach and life long struggle for the liberation of Tibet from under Chinese rule. The Dalai Lama is now 80 years old and has travelled the world encouraging peace initiatives. The Dalai Lama’s Twitter username is @DalaiLama and his first tweet occurred on February 22, 2010 stating “His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Los Angeles- 21 February 2010.”

***Catholicism.*** Pope Francis is the first Pope from the Americas and was elected as Pope at age 76 on March 13, 2013 (“Vatican,” n.d). Pope Francis is known for his humble approach to the papacy, modern style to the papacy, and compassion for the poor. Pope Francis was deemed the “Pope of the People” and is the second Pope to have a Twitter account. Pope Francis’ Twitter username is @Pontifex, which is Latin for “bridge builder.” Pope Francis has nine Twitter accounts: one in English and eight in various languages. His English-language account was the only account in this study. His first tweet occurred on March 17, 2013, five days after being elected Supreme Pontiff, and stated, “Dear friends, I thank you from my heart and I ask you to continue to pray for me. Pope Francis.”

**Data collection**

A quantitative content analysis was conducted to determine how religious leaders are using Twitter. One coder evaluated the religious leaders’ Twitter accounts to describe profile features[[4]](#footnote-4) of the accounts as well as analyze results from the word and phrase frequency analyses. As noted earlier, quantitative content analyses are regularly used in OPR research and research on social networking sites in order to determine the objective frequency and words, phrases, and themes of published content (Huang & Zhang, 2013; Khang et al., 2012; O’Connor et al., 2010).

A website service called TwimeMachine was used to download published content from Twitter. TwimeMachine was founded in 2012 and uses a combination of three JavaScript[[5]](#footnote-5) websites to systematically capture content published on Twitter. The software was only used to systematically download published content including URLs, photos, videos, hashtags, and plain text. Public relations practitioners use TwimeMachine to capture published content and export the information into Excel spreadsheets in order to analyze the activity of competitors or potential new clients. It is a free website that does not require a user to download software.

Additionally, two data researchers at the University of Houston Library assisted in creating a custom code to complete the word and phrase frequency analyses. The custom code systematically calculated the frequency of individual words as well as the frequency of word sequences (or phrases) and then uploaded the data into Excel spreadsheets. The code was written to analyze the frequency of up to seven words, however after five word sequences were analyzed, the findings became redundant. The custom code automatically removed punctuation and capitalization, and the coder manually removed dates and extra values that could potentially skew the data (e.g. words or numbers in a URL).

**Measured Variables*.*** In order to describe account activity by the identified religious leaders, the following interactive profile information was collected for each user from the creation of each Twitter account until the date of collection, August 28, 2015. This information is necessary in answering RQ2.

***Number of tweets.***The total number of tweets the user has published since joining Twitter was measured.

***Number of followers.***For each individual, the total number of followers was measured. “Followers” are individuals who subscribe to another individual’s account in order to automatically view their published tweets.

***Number of accounts the religious leader is following****.* For each individual, the total number of accounts the user is “following” was measured. This will describe the total number of accounts the individual subscribes to.

***Number of photos published.***The total number of photos the user has published since joining Twitter was measured.

***Number of videos published.***The total number of videos the user has published since joining Twitter was measured.

***Number of hashtags published.***The number of hashtags the user has published was measured. Hashtags are identified by the use of the pound sign (#) and used to categorize and identify messages. A hashtag consists of the pound symbol (#) preceding a word or phrase.

***Frequency of other accounts tagged using “@”.***The number of times a different user is mentioned using “@” preceding another account holder’s username was measured. Using the “@” symbol directly followed by a username labels the identity of another user. This combination is frequently used in Twitter to engage in conversation and can occur anywhere within a tweet.

***Frequency of replies.*** For each individual, the number of times the account holder directly responds, or replies, to another user was measured. This is identified when the first word of a new tweet consists of a different user that is mentioned using “@” preceding another account holder’s username.

***Frequency of URL inclusion in published content.***For each individual, the number of URLs, or external websites, included within the published tweet was measured. This will not include photos and videos directly uploaded through Twitter, however it will include links to photos and videos uploaded through third-party applications, such as YouTube.

***Overall frequency of published content.*** For each individual, the frequency of published content per day was measured.

**Word and phrase frequency analyses.** In order to fully describe Twitter use by the identified religious leaders, a word frequency analysis was performed followed by a phrase analysis. This information is necessary in answering RQ1 and RQ3.

The word frequency analysis measured the use of every word to identify trends in word choice represented in the published tweets. In this unigram model, each word was measured for frequency with no weight on context or word sequence assigned to it. In this type of analysis, capitalization is disregarded and the number of occurrences of each word is calculated. For example, in the sentence “the bird ate the worm,” the sequence of words and context is disregarded and only the four distinct words are noted: the (2), bird (1), ate (1), worm (1). During this analysis, English was the only language included. To be clear, the above sentence serves as an example. In word frequency analysis, common articles (e.g., “the” from the earlier sentence) were excluded from reporting due to the lack of information it provides. Vague words such as “the,” “at,” and “from” were excluded and significant articles were reported.

Following the word frequency analysis, researchers performed a phrase frequency analysis to identify patterns in words in order to measure frequency of specific phrases. In this analysis, the most frequently used word sequences containing two or more words were measured with no weight on context. For example, in the sentence “the bird ate the worm while the snake ate the mouse,” the sequence of words is the focal point while context is disregarded. Therefore, the phrase “ate the” is noted as occurring twice, thus establishing a pattern of use. Capitalization and punctuation were disregarded and the number of occurrences of the pairing of words was calculated. The word sequences included two words up to seven words.

After gathering profile data and performing the word and phrase frequency analyses, results were analyzed to describe individual activity from each religious leader and to compare activity across religions.

**Chapter 4: Findings**

As described earlier in Chapter 3, two Twitter accounts were analyzed to describe how international religious leaders in Catholicism and Buddhism use the social networking site. Tweets from the religious leaders were analyzed to describe frequency and variety of content. The goal of this research is to describe the activity of religious leaders on Twitter in order to determine if they are utilizing OPR cultivation tactics. In this chapter I will describe findings regarding the interactive profile features and the word and phrase frequency analyses for each religious leader.

**Utilizing interactive profile features on Twitter**

**Pope Francis*.*** As of August 28, 2015, the Pope has published 650 tweets and included one photo, one video, included a hashtag 77 times, and published three URLs. The Pope has 6,925,702 Twitter followers, is following eight other Twitter accounts, has mentioned one other Twitter account in his tweets, and has never replied to a user (Table 1). The eight accounts the Pope is following are his other official accounts in the following languages: Latin, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Italian, French, and Arabic. The Pope tweets an average of .5 tweets per day, or in other words, one tweet every other day. The Pope has used a total of 18 hashtags 77 times with the most popular being #LaudatoSi[[6]](#footnote-6) (26 uses), #Rio2013 (17 uses), #JMJ[[7]](#footnote-7) (17 uses), #prayforpeace (15 uses), and #prayforsynod[[8]](#footnote-8) (3 uses). On March 19, 2014, the Pope included another Twitter account in his tweet, @InfoScholas[[9]](#footnote-9) (in 2014).

**Dalai Lama.** As of August 28, 2015, the Dalai Lama has published 1,137 tweets and included 69 photos, 31 videos, included a hashtag 6 times, and published 331 URLs. The Dalai Lama has 11,772,367 Twitter followers, is not following another Twitter account, has mentioned 3 other Twitter accounts in his tweets, and has never replied to a user (Table 1). The Dalai Lama publishes a new tweet an average of .5 times per day, or in other words, one tweet every other day. The Dalai Lama has used a total of five hashtags six times with the most popular being #tempprize[[10]](#footnote-10) (2 uses). The other four hashtags that the Dalai Lama published are #forgivenesschallenge, #MandelaTribute, #DreamDay, and #askDalaiLama. The Dalai Lama has mentioned 3 other Twitter accounts in his tweets: @EbooPatel[[11]](#footnote-11) (in 2011), @LegatumInst[[12]](#footnote-12) (in 2012), and @Instagram (in 2014).

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**Word and phrase frequency analyses**

**Pope Francis.** After removing common articles, the most frequently used words from the Pope are (in order) “us,” “we,” “our,” “God,” and “all” (Table 2). The most frequently used 2-word phrases are (in order) “let us,” “of the,” “in the,” “of God,” and “it is.” The most frequently used 3-word phrases are (in order) “dear young people,” “let us pray,” “the love of,” “us pray for,” and “the joy of.” The most frequently used 4-word phrases are (in order) “let us pray for,” “the love of God,” “join me in praying,” “do not be afraid,” and “let us ask the.” Lastly, the most frequently used 5-word phrases are (in order) “join me in praying for,” “let us ask the Lord,” “for the victims of the,” “dear young people do not,” and “from their homes in Iraq.”

 When looking specifically at the word frequency analysis, many of the words are synonyms with the same meaning (example: (a) poverty, poor, poorest, needy and (b) forgive, forgiveness, forgiven, forgives, forgiving). I grouped these words together and calculated the most used synonyms for each religious leader (Table 4). The group of synonyms used most frequently at 6.12% are “us,” “we,” “our,” “ourselves,” and “ours.” The group of synonyms used second most frequently at 2.92% are “God,” “Jesus,” “Christ,” “Lord,” Lords,” “Christs,” “Gods,” and “Saviour.” The group of synonyms used third most frequently at 1.22% are “life,” “living,” “alive,” “live,” and “lives.” The group of synonyms used fourth most frequently at 1.16% are “men,” “man,” “he,” “him,” and “his.” The group of synonyms used fifth most frequently at 0.97% are “I,” “me,” and “my.” The remaining synonyms used range from an average of 0.93% to 0.02%.

5.42% of the words Pope Francis published on Twitter were used 20 times or more, and 52.82% of the words Pope Francis published on Twitter were used only once. 79.66% of the 2-word phrases Pope Francis published on Twitter were used only once and 0.38% of the 2-word phrases Pope Francis published on Twitter were used 20 times or more. Over 90% of the 3-word phrases, 4-word phrases, and 5-word phrases were used only once. This information is important to note because it demonstrates that there are few words and phrases that are consistently used within his tweets.

 In regards to interesting findings, the Pope referred to the Catholic Supreme Being most often as “God” (0.98%), “Jesus” (0.66%), “Lord” (0.65%), “Christ” (0.57%), and “Saviour” (0.01%). There is no mention of “bible,” “anger/angry,” “laugh/laughter,” “parent/parenting,” nor “hell.” The Pope referred to himself (by use of “I,” “me,” or “my”) in 0.97% of his published tweets and referred to his followers (by use of “you,” “yourselves,” and “your”) in 0.83% of his tweets. The Pope referred to “love” (or a synonym)[[13]](#footnote-13) in 0.93% of his tweets and referred to “hate” (or a synonym)[[14]](#footnote-14) in 0.02% of his tweets. The Pope referred to “peace” (or a synonym)[[15]](#footnote-15) in 0.34% of his tweets and referred to “violence” (or a synonym)[[16]](#footnote-16) in 0.13% of his tweets.



**Dalai Lama.** After removing common articles, the most frequently used words from the Dalai Lama are (in order) “we,” “our,” “others,” “compassion,” and “live” (Table 3). The most frequently used 2-word phrases are (in order) “of the,” “India on,” “it is,” “sense of,” and “is the.” The most frequently used 3-word phrases are (in order) “a sense of,” “the Dalai Lama,” “we need to,” “his holiness the,” and “holiness the Dalai.” The most frequently used 4-word phrases are (in order) “his holiness the Dalai,” “holiness the Dalai Lama,” “in Dharamsala India on,” “from Dharamsala India on,” and “of HHDLs[[17]](#footnote-17) visit to.” The most frequently used 5-word phrases are (in order) “his holiness the Dalai lama,” “photos of HHDLs visit to,” “sense of concern for others,” “here are some photos of,” and “a sense of concern for.”

 When looking specifically at the word frequency analysis, many of the words are synonyms of the same word, as mentioned above (Table 4). The group of synonyms used most frequently at 3.87% are “us,” “we,” “our,” “ourselves,” and “ours.” The group of synonyms used second most frequently at 0.99% are “compassion” and “compassionate.” The group of synonyms used third most frequently at 0.90% are “humanity,” “human,” “flesh,” “fleshly,” “people,” “person,” “humans,” and “persons.” The group of synonyms used fourth most frequently at 0.87% are “happiness,” “joy,” “happy,” “joyful,” “happier,” “contentment,” “joyfulness.” The group of synonyms used fifth most frequently at 0.84% are “you,” “yourselves,” “your,” and “yourself.” The remaining synonyms used range from an average of 0.81% to 0.01%.

5.83% of the words the Dalai Lama published on Twitter were used 20 times or more, and 50.07% of the words the Dalai Lama published on Twitter were used only once. 74.62% of the 2-word phrases the Dalai Lama published on Twitter were used only once and 0.62% of the 2-word phrases the Dalai Lama published on Twitter were used 20 times or more. Over 85% of the 3-word phrases, 4-word phrases, and 5-word phrases were used only once. Again, this information is important to note because it demonstrates that there are few words and phrases that are consistently used within his tweets.

 In regards to interesting findings, the Dalai Lama referred to the Buddhist Supreme Being only 6 times (0.03%). There is no mention of “sick,” “evil,” or “bad.” The Dalai Lama referred to himself (by use of “I,” me,” or “my”) in 0.56% of his published tweets and referred to his followers (by use of “you,” “yourselves,” “yourself,” and “your”) in 0.84% of his tweets. The Dalai Lama referred to “love” (or a similar synonym)[[18]](#footnote-18) in 0.46% of his tweets and referred to “hate” (or a similar synonym)[[19]](#footnote-19) in 0.09% of his tweets. The Dalai Lama referred to “nonviolence” in 0.11% of his tweets and “peace” and “peaceful” in 0.65% of his tweets. The Dalai Lama referred to “violence,” “war,” (and similar synonym)[[20]](#footnote-20) in 0.21% of his tweets.



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**International Comparison**

The Pope and Dalai Lama used many of the same words. By calculating the average of the most used synonyms, I was able to analyze international commonalities in word usage by the religious leaders (Table 5). The most used synonyms by both the Dalai Lama (0.84%) and Pope Francis (0.83%) include “you,” “your,” and “yourselves.” The second most used synonyms by both the Dalai Lama (0.23%) and Pope Francis (0.19%) include “strength,” “strengthen,” “strong,” “stronger,” “strongest,” and “strengthens.” There are two groups of synonyms that were used the third most by both the Dalai Lama (0.21%, 0.19%) and Pope Francis (0.19%, 0.21%) and include “holy,” “holiest,” “holiness,” and “friend,” “friends,” “friendship.” The fourth most used synonyms by both the Dalai Lama (0.16%) and Pope Francis (0.18%) include “culture” and “society.” Lastly, the fifth most used synonyms by the Dalai Lama (0.09%) and Pope Francis (0.11%) include “work,” “working,” and “workplace.” I also grouped together references to geographical location and human settlement, however I did not include the terms in the synonym comparison because they are not synonyms. The terms were used by both the Dalai Lama (0.63%) and Pope Francis (0.64%) and include “community,” “country,” “world,” “city,” “communities,” “planet,” “universe,” “earth,” “environment,” “environmental,” “global,” “globalization,” and “international.”



**Chapter 5: Discussion**

The purpose of this research is to apply the theory of OPR on social media by studying religious organizational leaders on Twitter. Two Twitter accounts were analyzed to describe how international religious leaders in Catholicism and Buddhism use the social networking site, to describe the frequency and variety of content, and to review patterns within content. The results suggest that the religious leaders tweet about themselves, their followers, and their religions. Based on the findings, we can infer that the Dalai Lama and Pope Francis utilize OPR cultivation tactics on Twitter, as discussed below.

**Research Question 1**

After analyzing content from the word and phrase frequency analyses, the data shows that the religious leaders are tweeting about themselves, about their followers, and about their religions. While they are not tweeting directly *to* their followers by using the “@” sign, they are tweeting about their followers, with each religious leader mentioning “you,” “yourself,” “your,” and “yourselves” or mentioning “us,” “we,” “our,” and “ourselves” in a considerable number of their tweets (Pope Francis mentioned “you” or a synonym of “you” in 0.83% of his tweets and “us” or a synonym of “us” in 6.12% of his tweets while the Dalai Lama mentioned “you” or a synonym of “you” in 0.84% of his tweets and “us” or a synonym of “us” in 3.87% of his tweets). Data also shows that each religious leader is tweeting about themselves through the use of “I,” “me,” or “my” (0.97% for Pope Francis and 0.56% for the Dalai Lama). Lastly, data shows the religious leaders are tweeting about their respective religions, with the Pope tweeting about “Christ,” “Lord, “ Jesus,” “love,” and “God,” in 3.66% of his tweets (each term is individually mentioned from 0.57-0.98% of his tweets) and the Dalai Lama tweeting about “compassion,” “peace,” “mind,” “happiness,” and “love” in 2.85% of his tweets[[21]](#footnote-21) (each term is individually mentioned from 0.44-0.83% of his tweets).

**Research Question 2**

The data shows that the Pope and Dalai Lama are not consistently using certain interactive profile features available on Twitter, such as tagging another account using “@,” replying to tweets, or following other accounts. To clarify, the religious leaders have either zero participation in the activities listed above or have had some participation at a very low frequency. However, the religious leaders utilize most interactive profile features, such as publishing URLs, hashtags, photos, and videos. The Dalai Lama has published a URL in 29.11% of his tweets, published a photo in 6.07% of his tweets, and published a video in 2.73% of his tweets. Additionally, the Pope has published a hashtag in 11.85% of his tweets. These findings support previous research showing that nonprofit organizations are more likely to use one-way communication on Twitter and promote their own initiatives through website links (Paek et al., 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011). However, these findings contradict previous research, which indicated that nonprofit organizations do not use interactive features available on social networking sites (Lovejoy et al., 2012; Waters et al., 2009; Waters & Lo, 2012). Additionally, my findings contrast previous research on consistent and repetitive interactions by nonprofit organizations. Previous research found that nonprofit organizations are inconsistent in publishing content on social networking sites, specifically on Twitter (Lovejoy et al., 2012). My research shows that the Pope and Dalai Lama use interactive features available on Twitter and publish content on a consistent basis, an average of once every other day, or 3-6 times per week, since 2013.[[22]](#footnote-22)

**Research Question 3**

The 10 words used most often by the Pope and Dalai Lama are listed in Table 2 and Table 3. Additionally, Table 4 lists the most used synonyms published by each religious leader. Each religious leader used the words “we” in over 1.95% of their tweets (one of the top two most used words), and used either “us” or “our” in over 1.40% of their tweets (one of the top two most used words).[[23]](#footnote-23) This shows a high rate of use of first person plural pronouns. As mentioned earlier, data shows that the religious leaders are tweeting about themselves and about their followers. Thus, first person pronouns and second person pronouns are published frequently.

The data shows that both religious leaders frequently publish phrases that include religious content. Four of the top ten most used four-word phrases by the Dalai Lama refer to Buddhism, or an aspect of his religion, including “his holiness the Dalai,” “holiness the Dalai Lama,” “of concern for others,” and “peace of mind and.” Seven of the top ten most used four-word phrases by the Pope refer to Catholicism, or an aspect of his religion, including “let us pray for,” “the love of God,” “join me in praying,” “do not be afraid,” “me in praying for,” “we are all sinners,” and “us ask the Lord.”

**Analysis**

The data suggests that the Pope and Dalai Lama follow most, if not all, of the recommended guidelines for cultivating OPR on Twitter, except for two-way symmetrical communication. From this, we can infer that the religious leaders cultivate and build OPR through the social networking site. This is demonstrated in a number of ways.

**Covenantal Model of Public Relations.** First, Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama both practice the covenantal model for public relations, “an ethically based understanding of fostering organizational relationships with significant publics” (Tilson & Venkateswaran, 2006, p. 130). This conclusion is based on meeting the guidelines for practicing the covenantal model of public relations outlined by Baker (2002) and Tilson and Venkateswaran (2006) including establishing “(a) professional-client trust; (b) dedication to a particular human good or need; and (c) a public pledge to serve this need” (p. 114).

The covenantal model for public relations is centered on the “professional-client trust,” leading scholars to suggest that the model requires two-way communication in order to establish the trust required of the covenantal model of public relations (Tilson & Venkateswaran, 2006). While neither religious leader actively responded to their followers in the traditional sense (back-and-forth conversation through symmetrical communication), the professional-client trust in the covenantal model of public relations is cultivated by having both religious leaders refer to their followers as “you” and “your” in hundreds of their tweets. Because of this, it can be argued that the religious leaders are perceived as building trust and a relationship with their followers by speaking to them “personally,” so to say, without having a conversation with them through the traditional symmetrical communication model. It is through communication on Twitter and personal references on Twitter (through the use of “you” and “your”) that the Pope and Dalai Lama are “perceived as offering the promise of fulfilling client needs considered mutually and inherently good,” which assists in maintaining a positive relationship between the religious leader and their followers, thus inspiring and encouraging commitment to the religion (Tilson & Chao, 2002, p. 90).

 The data also shows that the Pope and Dalai Lama practice devotional-promotional communication, a method housed within the covenantal model of pubic relations. As mentioned earlier, devotional-promotional communication “may be used with the intention of inspiring allegiance for an individual, political entity, or religion. A devotional-promotional public relations campaign that is religious in nature may seek to instill great love or loyalty, enthusiasm, or zeal for a particular religious individual… or a specific religion or faith” (Tilson & Chao, 2002, p. 89). Next, I will discuss how the religious leaders practiced devotional-promotional communication.

The word frequency analysis shows that Pope Francis mentions the Catholic Supreme Being in 2.92% of his tweets (331 times) and mentions himself, the highest earthly leader of Catholicism, in 0.97% of his tweets (110 times). The Pope also mentions the gospels/scriptures in 0.30% of his tweets, prayer in 0.77% of his tweets, faith in 0.39% of his tweets, and Christians in 0.67% of his tweets. The word frequency analysis shows that the Dalai Lama mentions the inner being in 0.42% of his tweets, the mind in 0.65% of his tweets, compassion in 0.99% of his tweets, peace in 0.65% of his tweets, and joy in 0.87% of his tweets. Because of the high frequency of religion-specific words mentioned within the religious leaders’ tweets, we can infer that the religious leaders’ communication goals include instilling a love for an individual and/or for their respective religions. This is further implemented by the use of phrases encouraging, and almost assuming, participation, such as “let us pray,” “help us to,” “let us ask,” “we need to,” and “we have to.”

Highlighting the practice of devotional-promotional communication is important because it grounds the argument that the two religious leaders practice the covenantal model of public relations, a model created to study OPR for religious organizations (Tilson & Chao, 2002). Next, I will discuss the Pope and Dalai Lama cultivating OPR through Kent & Taylor’s (1998) five guidelines and Waters et al. (2009) engagement guidelines.

**Kent and Taylor’s Guidelines for OPR.** Based on the word and phrase frequency analyses, we can infer that the Dalai Lama and Pope follow Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five guidelines for OPR. First, data shows that the religious leaders publish useful religious information on their respective religions by publishing key words and phrases such as “pray,” “love of God,” “peace,” and “love and compassion.” The Pope and Dalai Lama also publish useful information regarding their travel plans and speaking engagements through the use of “from Dharamsala India” and “join me in.”

Kent and Taylor (1998) recommend minimal external link referrals in order to keep the viewer on the organizations website. This doesn’t directly translate into Twitter because external links encourage engagement. On Twitter, external links do not remove viewers from the organizations website as Kent and Taylor (1998) described in their guidelines; instead, external links redirect viewers *to* the organizations website or redirect viewers to campaigns the organization is promoting on Twitter. For example, the Dalai Lama has included a URL in 29.11% of his tweets; however, it is a URL that leads to photos or videos of his travels, which encourages more interaction and engagement with his followers. On the other hand, the Pope has included a URL in only 0.46% of his tweets; however, he has included a hashtag in 11.85% of his tweets. A hashtag is similar to an external link referral in that it redirects the viewer from the tweet. However in this case, the Pope uses hashtags that further promote his religion, such as #LaudatoSi and #PrayForPeace.

The religious leaders meet Kent and Taylor’s (1998) guideline for publishing consistently updated information by publishing new content at a rate of one tweet every other day. Moreover, the religious leaders are providing an opportunity for feedback by operating on the social networking site Twitter, which automatically gives viewers the option to reply, share, or “favorite” the religious leaders’ tweets. Additionally, religious leaders often encourage feedback and action by publishing phrases such as “dear young people,” “pray for,” “we need to,” and “we have to.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Lastly, the remaining guideline, ease of navigation, is traditionally defined by having a website with clear and concise information that is easy to locate (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Because the Pope and Dalai Lama are operating on Twitter, it is determined that the religious leaders meet this guideline by excluding Twitter-specific lingo, language nuances, and cultural abbreviations in their tweets.[[25]](#footnote-25) By excluding these specific terms and phrases, the religious leaders published content that was easy to read and digest for all readers of the English language.

**Recent guidelines for OPR.** After analyzing the word and phrase frequency analyses, it’s clear that the religious leaders also communicate in a conversational human voice as described by Kelleher (2009). This is demonstrated through the fluidity and approachability of the frequently used 5-word phrases, including “sense of concern for others,” “close warmhearted feeling for others,” “praying for the victims of,” and “let us ask the Lord.” Additionally, the Pope and Dalai Lama meet the two of the three common dimensions of organization social media engagement tactics of information dissemination and disclosure (Waters et al., 2009).

The third dimension of organization social media engagement is interactivity, which is traditionally described in three categories (a) active control; (b) two-way communication; and (c) synchronicity (Liu & Shrum, 2002; Waters et al., 2009). The religious leaders are able to cultivate OPR on Twitter without engaging in the traditional tactics of interactivity. This is done through the use of first person singular pronouns, second person singular pronouns, and first person plural pronouns (the use of “I,” “you,” “us,” etc.). Previous research supports that most religious organizations view themselves as “a ministry, and that often involves encouraging and supporting” believers and nonbelievers, not necessarily personally engaging with them (Smith, 2007, p. 287). For example, four of the top ten most used phrases by the Dalai Lama include information about his whereabouts or interactive materials his teachings or travels. Five of the top ten most used 4-word phrases by the Pope include either “us,” “we,” or “join me.” While these two examples are very different in the delivery of invitation, the religious leaders are nonetheless inviting their followers to interact with them without individually responding to each follower.

It is also through consistent updates that the religious leaders cultivate OPR on Twitter. Scholars have noted that repetitive interactions on the Internet serve as a foundation for OPR and stimulating dialogue is perceived by the public through consistent interactions with the organization (Taylor et al., 2001; Briones et al., 2011; Kelleher, 2009; Kelleher & Miller, 2006). While scholars do not define the frequency of interactions needed in order to be considered “repetitive interactions,” the Pope and Dalai Lama consistently tweet 3-6 times per week, or every other day. It can be argued that consistent interactions with the organization can involve consistent updates using personal terms, such as “you,” “us,” “our,” “me,” and “we.” While neither the Pope nor Dalai Lama directly interacted with their Twitter followers, they continued to reference them in their tweets, as discussed earlier.

**Implications**

This research demonstrates a need for an updated model of OPR on social media. Each model or approach to OPR suggests the necessity of symmetrical communication. It would benefit researchers to explore the requirement of symmetrical communication on social networking sites between religious organizations and their public. For example, if symmetrical communication is practiced at an individual’s local church, temple, or monastery, then is it still possible to maintain OPR on Twitter without symmetrical communication? Scholars seem to overlook the aspect that practitioners (especially practitioners at religious organizations) use many methods of communication with the public simultaneously, including websites, blogs, social networking sites, newsletters, and face-to-face interaction, to name a few. Is symmetrical communication required across all communication fronts in order to effectively build OPR? Or is it possible that OPR can be cultivated with weekly sermons and maintained with daily tweets that use key pronouns?

While symmetrical communication is vital to the prosperity of nonprofit, for profit, and government organizations, I have to question if it’s necessary in cultivating OPR for religious organizations. Further research on relational outcomes from the public’s perspective would assist in clarifying this question. Research from the public’s perspective would also clarify if the public expects to have direct communication with high-ranking international religious leaders on Twitter. Research measuring the public’s expectations on direct interaction with religious leaders in their local communities and high-ranking international religious leaders would assist in clarifying the necessity of two-way symmetrical communication for international religious leaders, such as the Pope and Dalai Lama.

On the same note, the two-way symmetrical model of communication emphasizes dialogue between an organization and the public; however, more research is needed to determine if two-way symmetrical communication is necessary when cultivating OPR on social networking sites. While religious organizations are a unique type of nonprofit because they deal with an individual’s afterlife, the results of this study suggest that it is possible to cultivate OPR on Twitter through personal references such as “you,” “yours,” and “yourselves.” Additional content analyses are needed to see how many other organizations use first person singular pronouns, second person singular pronouns, and first person plural pronouns and how the use of those words affects relational outcomes perceived by the public.

Furthermore, additional research is needed to determine if the use of first person pronouns, second person pronouns, and first person plural pronouns can replace two-way symmetrical communication on social media. If so, this would have serious implications for public relations practitioners. Resources and time are often cited as reasons to why practitioners do not follow recommended practices for cultivating OPR on social media; however, strategically using key words like “you,” “us,” and “we” in organizational tweets would take much less time and effort than responding to individual tweets when trying to build OPR.

Lastly, this research highlights the need for additional research on religious organizations within public relations scholarship. There are few published articles that include religious organizations in their research, and there are even fewer articles that focus on religious organizations. Adding to the growing body of OPR scholarship would contribute to a more well rounded approach to studying and practicing relationship management. Lastly, there’s also a need for additional research using word and phrase frequency analyses in public relations and social media scholarship. Removing subjective themes and only analyzing words and phrases provides refreshing data and analysis. Adding word and phrase frequency analysis to research on OPR and social media would add a detailed layer of understanding to studies on the effects of communication.

**Limitations**

While there are several limitations to the current study, these limitations provide opportunities for future research. First, this study does not include numbers or dates included in the religious leaders’ tweets. The coder manually removed all numbers, dates, and extra characters (such as :/().) in order to have a clear representation of content that was published. The dates and times of published content were skewing the data, along with URL extensions, so all numbers, dates, and extra characters were removed before conducting the word and phrase frequency analyses.

The most obvious limitation is that I only reviewed religious leaders from Catholicism and Buddhism. I wanted to include a third religion, Islam, in the study as well, however there were no consistently active Muslim religious leaders on the international scale on Twitter at the time of this study. In addition to only having two religions included in the study, only two people were included in the research. Analyzing the Twitter content of additional international religious leaders would provide further evidence of international commonalities in word usage.

The fourth limitation is that this study only included international religious leaders. Expanding the number of Twitter profiles to include national and local religious leaders would provide an opportunity to explore similarities and differences in word usage across religions and across national and local religious leaders. Analyzing content from national and local religious leaders would also provide more data to assess the necessity of two-way symmetrical communication on Twitter.

In regards to Methods, I did not survey the public to measure perceived relational outcomes of the religious leaders’ tweets, nor did I survey the religious organizations to assess their public relations strategy. Future investigations into Twitter should assess the organization, the content, and the public.

Furthermore, I only analyzed text within the tweets and interactive features present on the religious leaders’ profiles. While this provides descriptive information about the content published and available on Twitter, it does not provide empirical data on if exposure to the content had any effect on the viewers. Any assumptions made about religious leaders cultivating OPR on Twitter are conclusions inferred from dialogic communication recommendations from previous research. This is a relatively common limitation of studies that analyze dialogic features of online communication (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

**Conclusion**

Using an international sample, this study investigated the potential for two religious leaders to cultivate OPR on Twitter by describing the content that Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama published through word and phrase frequency analyses. This study found that the Pope and Dalai Lama have the potential to facilitate OPR on Twitter through the use of key words and phrases, personal pronouns, and interactive profile features.

Additionally, as mentioned in the literature review, this research studied OPR under the scope of Ledingham and Bruning’s (1998a) definition as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics, in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural or political well being of the other” (p. 62). Based on this definition, Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama are cultivating OPR on Twitter because their actions can impact the economic, social, cultural, or political well being of the viewers of their tweets in the same way that the viewers can impact the economic, social, cultural, or political well being of the religious leaders.

This study also revealed that the religious leaders are more advanced than other nonprofit and religious organizations on social networking sites. For example, the Pope utilizes hashtags, the Dalai Lama publishes URLs, and both religious leaders consistently publish new content. While neither the Pope nor the Dalai Lama are taking advantage of all of the public relations opportunities available by operating on Twitter, they are still more advanced than their counterparts. In addition to providing a descriptive analysis of content published on Twitter, this study introduced a new way to analyze content on social networking sites that provides rich data that would otherwise be missed in a traditional content analysis.

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1. This stage of the study seeks to research “religion online” as defined by Hoover & Park (2005) as “the online resource to which an audience member turns to embrace his/her beliefs in traditional, established, institutional, religious systems” (p. 122). This is a significant difference from “online religion,” which can be described as an individual using the Internet to search, or further, their *subjective* religious principles. The difference is that participants in “religion online” seek information from traditional, established, and institutional religious systems while participants in “online religion” seek information for their subjective, even created, religious principles (the difference between choosing to worship a widely known and historical supreme being (e.g. God) versus choosing to worship anything of your choice (e.g. a cactus)). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Meaning there is one appointed leader who does not share as high of a position with another person. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Buddhists in Tibet believe that Dalai Lamas postpone their own nirvana and choose to be rebirthed in order to serve humanity. The Dalai Lama has since enacted rules and regulations for a committee to either choose the next Dalai Lama or for the Dalai Lama to no longer exist (thus reach nirvana and no longer rebirth) (Dalai Lama, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The profile features that will be studied will be listed further in the Methods. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. JavaScript is “an object-oriented computer programming language commonly used to create interactive effects within web browsers” (Oxford Dictionary, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Laudato Si” translates to “praise be to you” in Italian. It is the name of Pope Francis’ encyclical, or the letter written for followers of the Catholic faith (Rice, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “JMJ” is an acronym for “Jornada Mundial da Juventude,” also known as “World Youth Day” (Twitter, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A synod is a large meeting, or assembly, of high-ranking church officials. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. @InfoScholas is an organization launched by Pope Francis to connect educators, schools, and students, and provide virtual classrooms (Scholas, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Temp prize” is referring to the Templeton Prize, an award the Dalai Lama won in 2012, and serves to “honor a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life’s spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works” (*Templeton Prize*, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Eboo Patel is the founder of Interfaith Youth Core, an organization seeking to build religious pluralism (*Interfaith Youth Core*, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. @Legatuminst stands for “Legatum Institute” and is an “independent non-partisan public policy group whose research, publications, and programmes advance ideas and policies in support of free and prosperous societies around the world” (*Legatum Institute*, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Synonyms for “love” include “loves” and “loved.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Synonyms for “hate” include “hatred.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Synonyms for “peace” include “peacefully” and “peaceful.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Synonyms for “violence” include “war,” “conflict,” “wars,” “conflicts,” “destroys,” “destructive,” and “destroy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. HHLD is an abbreviation for “His Holiness the Dalai Lama” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Synonyms for “love” include “loves” and “loved.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Synonyms for “hate” include “hatred.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Synonyms for “violence” and “war” include “conflict” and “wars.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Key aspects of Catholicism are centered on love and the Supreme Being who is known as God, Jesus, Christ, and Lord. Key aspects of Buddhism are centered on compassion for others, inner peace, mindfulness, happiness, and love. Buddhists do not worship a Supreme Being the same way that Catholics do, despite having a Supreme Being. Buddhists place more of an emphasis on self whereas Catholics place more of an emphasis on God. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. There is only one time period that the Dalai Lama was inconsistent in his tweeting: from July 18, 2014 – August 24, 2014, no tweets were published on the Dalai Lama’s Twitter account. Since that time period (and before that time period), the Dalai Lama published an average of 3-8 tweets per week. Consequently, there is only one period where Pope Francis was unusually active. On June 18, 2015, the Pope published 57 tweets in one day. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The Dalai Lama’s second most used word was “our” at 1.40%. The Pope’s most used word was “us” at 2.36%. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The Pope published the phrase “dear young people” in 0.17% of his tweets (the most used 3-word phrase by the Pope). The Pope published the phrase “pray for” in 0.25% of his tweets (one of the top 20 most used 2-word phrases by the Pope). The Dalai Lama used the phrase “we need to” in 0.20% of his tweets (the third most used 3-word phrase by the Dalai Lama). The Dalai Lama used the phrase “we have to” in 0.10% of his tweets (one of the top 15 most used 3-word phrases by the Dalai Lama). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. An example of Twitter-specific lingo includes “ICYMI,” which means, “in case you missed it.” The abbreviation is often used on Twitter to overcome the 140-character limit. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)