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Projecting a Preferred Identity: How Five Government Contractors Frame their Corporate Brands Online

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Nicole A. Merrifield entitled "Projecting a Preferred Identity: How Five Government Contractors Frame their Corporate Brands Online." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communication and Information.

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Projecting a Preferred Identity: How Five Government Contractors

Frame their Corporate Brands Online

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development.

Abstract

This study expands framing research as a competitive intelligence tool for discerning the message strategies of a company's competition. A content analysis of five Oak Ridge Associated Universities' competitor websites was conducted to determine key subject areas and how each competitor positioned their business to a variety of publics. Using Entman (1991, 1993) and Hallahan's (1999) framing research as the theoretical framework, the study reviews extant literature on corporate use of websites to frame reputations and cultivate relationships. Key findings reveal that ORAU's competitors are more likely to promote new business, new hires/promotions, awards/honors, and project completions when issuing press releases but are rarely using any success-themed frames on their service-related webpages. The competitors' use of frames is not influenced by business type (for-profit or non-profit), and when it comes to new business opportunities and experience, ORAU's competitors are discussing one or the other, but not both. Lastly, the results of this content analysis revealed that ORAU's competitors are not quantifying their experience with statistics.

Keywords: framing theory, relationship management perspective, public relations, corporate websites, content analysis

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Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU), a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation, was

established in the wake of World War II as a way to connect the valuable scientific resources

developed in Oak Ridge as part of the Manhattan Project with 14 regional universities located in

the Southeastern United States (ORAU History, n.d.). Today, ORAU's university consortium has

expanded to include 98 Ph.D. granting institutions across the nation and has strong partnerships

with national laboratories, government, and private industry. ORAU business initiatives are

driven by a three-pronged mission to strengthen America's scientific research and education

enterprise, to build public trust and confidence in the management of public health and

environmental cleanup initiatives, and to enhance our nation's preparedness to respond to

emergencies related to terrorist incidents, natural disasters, and health threats (Oak Ridge

Associated Universities, 2010).

A combination of factors has led ORAU to re-energize its approach to marketing and new

business initiatives. Economic conditions over the past couple years have dramatically changed

the corporate landscape where new business opportunities are fewer in numbers, and companies

who previously might have ignored smaller-scaled contracts are now aggressively pursuing

them. Add to that the 2009 mandate from the Obama Administration that eliminates the ability

for government contractors to engage in "no-bid," or sole-source contracts (Zeleny, 2009), and

there are many reasons why ORAU has strong motivation to work to maintain its competitive

stature.

Today's competitive business and marketing plans extend well beyond the executive

board room. Information communication technologies have expanded greatly in recent years, and

corporations must now manage reputations in traditional—and electronic—based media. Consider that in the 18 years since the first web browsers were introduced (Leiner, et al., n.d.), Internet usage in North America has reached 272.1 million (Internet World Stats, n.d.), and 35% of American adults now own smartphones—87% of whom use the mobile device to browse the Internet (Smith, 2011). This unprecedented access to an infinite amount of information has directly connected businesses and customers in a whole new way. Both current and potential customers have the opportunity to engage in a dialogical relationship with corporations through a variety of online channels (Esrock & Leichty, 2000). Corporations, in turn, manage their online identities through a number of electronic platforms. One of these platforms in particular—the corporate website and its interactive features—is uniquely positioned to enable corporations to carefully craft the frames in which they present their accomplishments, capabilities, and even reputations.

Given this rapidly changing environment—and the fact that corporate websites are an extension of a company's branding, reputation and image—this study adopts a relational approach for the analysis of five ORAU competitor websites to determine what subject areas they are focusing on and how they are positioning themselves in those markets to a variety of publics. Using Entman (1991, 1993) and Hallahan's (1999) framing research as the theoretical framework, the study also reviews previous literature discussing corporate use of websites to frame reputations and cultivate relationships. A short background on ORAU, as well as some of the factors influencing the company's re-energized approach to obtaining new business, will also be discussed.

The reason this study is important to the public relations industry is twofold. First, while framing research has widely been used to examine the psychology of decision making

(Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981), the media's use of framing when reporting the news (Entman, 1991; Gitlin, 1980; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Scheufele, 1999; deVreese, 2005), and to describe message-creation activities within public relations (Hallahan, 1999), little research has demonstrated how the same theoretical framework can help corporations discern the message strategies of their competition. Second, public relations practitioners who are successful in obtaining this type of competitive intelligence are able to make meaningful comparisons between their company and others, thus positioning the communications department as a strategic contributor to the dominant coalition.

Defining the Parameters of a Relational Perspective

Public relations practitioners are often expected to provide evidence that communication activities have advanced business goals such as generating a profit, approving legislation, or giving back to the community (Anderson, Hadley, Rockland, & Weiner, 2009). It can be argued, however, that no matter the end goal, the way to successfully achieve a public relations objective is through the long-term management of key stakeholder relationships. Ledingham (2003) offered a theory of relationship management, postulating that "effectively managing organizational-public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics" (p. 190).

Hon and Grunig (1999) suggested a variety of strategies for achieving healthy organization-public relationships, including control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment. But, because an organization's relationship with its publics can change just as quickly as the circumstances under which they were formed, it is important for an organization to consistently measure the quality of those relationships. Grunig, Grunig and Ehling (1992) determined that the quality of a relationship could be measured through seven important

concepts: reciprocity, trust, credibility, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction, and mutual understanding.

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) later explored some of these concepts to determine if they could be used to predict public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. The authors concluded "organizational involvement in and support of the community in which it operates can engender loyalty toward an organization among key publics when that involvement/support is known by those key publics" (p. 63). This statement, with its emphasis on the importance of public *awareness* of an organization's support, adds credence to the notion that it is not enough to simply be involved with a community, but an organization must also engage in a dialogue with the community. Arguably, this emphasis on two-way communication with an organization's key stakeholders could also be applied to the online environment.

One of Grunig et al.'s (1992) seven dimensions for measuring relationships—reciprocity—plays a significant role in the development of organization-public relationships. Molm, Schaefer, and Collett (2007) defined reciprocity as "the giving of benefits to another in return for benefits received" (p.199). It is worth noting, however, that the benefits of reciprocity are not always tangible. That is because reciprocity is recognized as having an instrumental value (i.e., the goods, services and social outcomes received from the reciprocator) and a symbolic value, or the value conveyed simply by the act of reciprocity itself. The trust and solidarity that results from symbolic communication has the potential to influence future behavioral choices, which is especially imperative in situations where companies want to impart a call to action (Molm et al., 2007).

Framing Theory

Long before customers and key publics respond to that call to action, public relations departments serve a critical role in generating interest and establishing the reputation of the company that is providing the product or service. Hallahan (1999) advocated the value framing offers public relations when he stated that industry "workers routinely strive to position clients and their products or services so they will be elevated favorably and so key publics will respond in a desired way when they buy, invest, donate, work, or vote" (p. 225). Furthermore, the public relations industry adopts a constructivist approach that involves "attempts to define reality, at least as it relates to the organization" (p. 206). As Hallahan contesed, it is evident that public relations practitioners can benefit from understanding framing theory. The next section of this study reviews the path framing theory research has taken from its roots as an extension of agenda-setting research to its application as a tool for positioning an organization's product, services, and reputation.

Framing Origins and its Introduction to Communications

Before framing theory was applied to public relations, the research paradigm found its roots as an extension of agenda-setting theory (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997). McCombs and Shaw (1972) pioneered agenda-setting research by investigating its role in the 1968 presidential campaign. The two researchers concluded that not only did the mass media hold a significant influence on what voters considered to be major issues of the campaign, but also the media swayed the opinions voters had about those issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Gitlin (1980) introduced the communications field to framing theory when he illustrated how the *New York Times* and CBS trivialized the Chase Manhattan Bank demonstration—a student protest intended to call attention to the bank's revolving credit line for South America

during the region's turbulent apartheid in the early 1960s. The trivialization occurred, according to Gitlin, because the *Times* failed to acknowledge the novelty of such a protest by framing the event in a familiar narrative, the "continuing civil rights story" (p. 43). CBS did not cover the story at all because the demonstration's lack of arrests made the event un-newsworthy, evidence that even decisions about whether or not to run a story falls within the parameters of framing theory.

Seventeen years passed after Gitlin (1980) first applied framing theory to the field of communications before McCombs et al. (1997) solidified the connection between agenda-setting research and framing theory. They stated, "It seems that attribute agenda setting is a natural extension of the agenda-setting concept, but as a result, agenda-setting research and framing research are exploring almost the same problem—that of the reality-definition function of the media" (p. 24). For its part, framing is recognized as the action of calling attention to certain aspects of reality, while simultaneously directing attention away from other aspects (Entman, 1993).

Framing and Decision Making

Tversky and Kahneman (1981) examined a more narrow definition of framing by conducting a study to see what impact the framing of questions had on risky decision making. They concluded that the attractiveness of options will vary when the same problem or question is framed differently. Though Tversky and Kahneman's research applies directly to the field of psychology, similar decision-making studies have been executed for the benefit of consumer research and conflict resolution. For example, Levin and Gaeth (1988) conducted a study where respondents were asked to choose between ground beef that was either 25% fat or 75% lean. Though both options are the exact same proportion of fat, the majority of respondents chose the

latter because of its positively framed attributes. That same year, Fleishman (1988) published a study concluding that models of choice behavior in social dilemmas should expand to include framing effects because the concepts of gaining and losing are inherently linked with positive and negative frames.

Framing and News Reporting

Entman (1991) recognized the importance of comparing narratives when working to identify dominant news frames. He stated that "unless narratives are compared, frames are difficult to detect fully and reliably, because many of the framing devices can appear as 'natural,' unremarkable choices of words or images" (p. 6). Entman demonstrated this conundrum by comparing U.S. media coverage on two separate but similar incidents: the Soviet downing of a Korean airplane and the U.S. downing of an Iranian airplane—both of which were unarmed, commercial airliners carrying more than 250 passengers. The first case was framed with an emphasis on moral discourse while the second incident involving the U.S. Navy was restrained to a narrative about the tragedy of working with complicated missile technology.

Entman (1991) argued that dominant news frames, with their ability to obscure opposing information, acts as an independent variable for the influence of both public policy and public consensus. He concluded that news frames are composed of at least five traits that impact the way information is processed: importance judgments, agency (or the attempt to answer the who-did-it question), identification with victims, categorization (or the language and phrases used to describe the incidents), and generalization, such as the tendency to lump stories within pre-existing frames.

In a second framing study two years later, Entman (1993) recognized framing as a broken paradigm, because the theory lacked of a strong statement to guide future research. He offered an official definition of frames, stating:

Framing essentially involves *selection* and *salience*. To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described. (p.52, italics in original)

Entman also contends that framing can originate within four areas—or locations—of the communication process: the communicator, where judgments are made on what to say and what to omit; the text, where keywords and phrases reinforce themes; the receiver, where individual experiences and opinions can shape the way information is processed; and the culture, where people within the same society share contextual frames.

Expanding upon where framing can originate, de Vreese (2005) defined the act of framing as being an integrated process where separate parts contribute to the collective whole. He identified three steps in the process: frame-building, or "the factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames;" frame-setting, or "the interaction between media frames and individuals' prior knowledge;" and frame-consequences, or "the altered attitudes about an issue based on exposure to certain frames" (de Vreese, 2005, p. 52). To better understand how framing effects actually work, Chong and Druckman (2007) outlined a proposition for understanding the psychology of framing effects. The two suggest that in order for a frame effect to occur, the contextual framework being discussed must already be stored in the memory of the receiver and must be relatively accessible, meaning not too old of a memory that it cannot be easily recalled. If at least one of those two options comes to fruition, then the receiver will deliberate over any

alternatives and evaluate his or her position on the subject matter. "The important point here is that framing effects depend on a mix of factors including the strength and repetition of the frame, the competitive environment, and individual motivations" (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p.111).

Framing and Public Relations

The previous sections have outlined a relational approach toward framing theory as well as some of the ways in which the framework applies to decision-making and mass-media research. On the surface, framing and public relations might appear as two separate activities; however, upon further examination, the common thread between the two is that they both attempt to define a specific reality. With regard to the linkages between relationship management, framing, and public relations, Hallahan (1999) illustrated this connection well:

> If public relations is defined as the process of establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relations between an organization and publics on whom it depends, the establishment of common *frames of reference* about topics or issues of mutual concern is a necessary condition for effective relations to be established. (p. 207, italics in original)

After emphasizing the need for public relations practitioners to use framing devices when creating message content, Hallahan (1999) concluded that there are seven models of framing practitioners could adopt: situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibility, and the news. Framing of attributes, the model upon which this content analysis is based, is defined as "semantic framing [that] is used to focus on particular attributes that might be flattering or derogatory and, thus, be advantageous or disadvantageous to message sponsors in persuasive communications" (Hallahan, 1999, pp. 211-212). Consumer behavior researchers, marketers, and advertisers are all common users of attribute framing. Three categories of attribute framing are applicable to this study: problem framing, where "key aspects of the deliberation process are

altered to redirect consumer attention away from certain attributes in favor of others;" product

positioning, where a company's image or offerings "occupy a meaningful and distinctive

competitive position in the customer's mind;" and product claims, where product and service

attributes are examined on "whether the product is described (framed) based on price versus

benefits, product connections to political concerns (pro-environmental 'green marketing') versus

instrumental qualities, and the alternate anchoring (framing) of price references" (Hallahan,

1999, p. 212). Though problem framing, product positioning, and product claims are most

commonly used to describe marketing and advertising activities, the three categories are also

relevant in explaining how public relations practitioners "sell" a company and its services.

The Business of Online Relationships

Now that framing has been established as an integral component of public relations, let us

examine how practitioners' use of relationship management and framing strategies applies to the

online environment. The most significant impact the World Wide Web has had on public

relations is speed (Esrock & Leichty, 1998). Take for example the rate at which practitioners

disseminate information and audience segments access information. Even the rate in which

feedback is shared amongst the two groups has increased dramatically. The speed of

communications has changed and so has the cost. Some international magazine ads can cost as

much as $125,000 for placement on the inside-front-cover (Searls, n.d.). A corporate website, on

the other hand, is for the most part free—with the exception of any costs associated with the

labor it takes to maintain the site and any fees it may take to host a domain name. In essence,

websites are helpful message tools, particularly for organizations that do not have the funding

sources necessary for pursuing high-dollar media placements (Zoch, Collins, Sisco & Supa,

2008).

Corporate Websites and Audience Fragmentation

Although websites have not received as much attention in academic journals since the rise of social media, the dynamic platform still serves as the primary communication vehicle for obtaining new business. In fact, a 2011 survey of U.S.-based sales, marketing and engineering executives revealed that corporate websites are seven times more effective at generating sales leads than social media (Tech Journal, 2011). Perhaps one of the reasons why corporate websites are so successful in leads is because of their ability to address multiple audience groups. However, using a corporate website as a single tool for communicating with a variety of publics is not a simple task to achieve. For example, organizations must understand that their identities might embody a specific set of characteristics when communicating with potential customers but adopt a different set of characteristics when reaching out to investors. Esrock and Leichty (2000) recognized this challenge when the two researchers performed a content analysis of Fortune 500 websites:

> The corporate site must meet the needs of each audience without simultaneously alienating other groups. This matter is further complicated because each public has its own goals and purposes. Compared to when dealing with diverse and many-sided publics, identity management is easier when one is dealing with an homogeneous audience. (p. 330)

On occasion, some organizations operate in narrowly defined industries where communicating with a homogeneous audience is in fact the norm. These types of organizations can reach isolated publics by using search engine optimization—or strategic keyword placement on a website—to target niche audiences and overcome geographical barriers (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Interestingly, because website home pages are the section of the website that online

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visitors most frequently enter and—based on the content they see—decide whether to stay or leave the site, researchers have acknowledged it is possible to ascertain which key publics an organization values most by observing which audiences are addressed within that prime real estate (Esrock & Leichty, 2000).

Corporate Websites and Relationship Cultivation

Earlier, it was acknowledged that reciprocity, one of Grunig, et al.'s (1992) seven concepts for measuring the quality of a relationship, is also applicable to the interactive facets of organization's website. Websites are dynamic in nature, allowing communicators the flexibility to not only target multiple audiences but also respond to public issues and concerns in a timely manner (Esrock & Leichty, 1998). Kent and Taylor (1998) examined dialogic communication as a theoretical framework for building relationships through the Internet and identified five strategies for cultivating those relationships. Those strategies include the use of feedback options to create a dialogic loop; the inclusion of general information that would be helpful to all publics (i.e. historical background); regularly updated information to encourage repeat visitors; continuous work to improve the user friendliness of the website's architecture and navigation; and efforts to keep visitors on the site by providing links to additional content as well as avoiding "dead-end" pages.

Park and Reber (2008) revealed the importance of these strategies when they examined Fortune 500 websites as relationship-building tools and argued that "corporations need to motivate publics to constantly revisit their Web sites if the corporations want to engage publics in dialogue" (p. 411). The results of their content analysis of 100 Fortune 500 corporate websites concluded that while organizations designed their websites to reach multiple publics, they, for the most part, failed to use the site to gather feedback. Today, with the growing popularity of

social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, one might assume that more businesses are interested in using those newer platforms for gathering feedback. However, a 2010 survey determined that 94% of its 810 responding companies were not yet using social media to solicit customer feedback (MarketTools, Inc., 2010).

Corporate Websites and Framing

Affordability, two-way communication, and the ability to address multiple publics have been identified as reasons why corporate websites are beneficial to the long-term cultivation of relationships. However, it would be remiss to identify these characteristics without also acknowledging the ability for corporations to use websites a framing device that "presents the identities that a corporation claims for itself as a unit or corporate identity" (Esrock & Leichty, 2000, p. 329). Indeed, websites provide organizations with control over content without the restrictions that might otherwise be evident in traditional media coverage. Esrock and Leichty (1998) made this same observation when they examined how corporations were using websites to portray themselves as good corporate citizens and for promoting their own policy issues. They concluded that companies were using websites as image-building tools by demonstrating how they were meeting societal expectations through good deeds or how they were avoiding actions that cause harm (i.e. to the environment).

In more recent years, other studies have examined the use of framing as it relates to online activist content as well as how it influences a consumer's decision to buy online. Zoch, Collins, Sisco, and Supa (2008) looked at how framing devices were used within public relations messages on activist organizations' websites. They determined that activists, on the whole, failed to capitalize on framing and its ability to position causes and issues in such a way that creates personal investment. "People may not be aware of how critical the right choice of language can

be in affecting the way a cause is viewed. Public relations practitioners, however, cannot afford this luxury of ignorance" (Zoch et al., 2008, p. 357). In an attempt to define how product and price cues can influence shoppers to purchase products online, Wu and Cheng (2011) conducted an experiment with 318 undergraduate students to see if positive and negative product attributes would impact a decision to purchase a product online. Results of the experiment produced a significant framing effect which, according to Wu and Cheng (2011), "suggests the influence of message framing can be replicated in the Internet purchase context" (p. 366). While many corporate websites do not actually sell physical products online, they still fulfill a number of profit-driven actions such as informing customers about available services, partnership opportunities, and contracting vehicles.

Organizational Background

After reviewing the literature on relationship management, framing theory, and corporate use of websites, it is necessary to review some background information on the organization for which this study was conducted. Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU) received its charter of incorporation from the state of Tennessee just one year after World War II ended. Its town namesake—Oak Ridge, Tenn.—was one of three secret sites established in 1942 under the Manhattan Project. Commissioned by President Roosevelt, the Manhattan Project was a top-secret, government program established to counter Adolf Hitler and the German nuclear development program (McDaniel, Bradshaw, & Smith, 2005). To help with the war effort, the U.S. government recruited scientists, engineers, and technicians to Oak Ridge for the purpose of producing enough highly enriched uranium for the creation of atomic weapons.

America's race to develop the world's first atomic bomb was successful, and on Aug. 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, a second atomic

bomb was dropped on Nagasaki (History Channel, n.d.). After the war was over, much debate ensued about whether Oak Ridge would continue to exist, and, if so, what its peace-time activities would look like. During this time of uncertainty, Dr. William Pollard, a professor at the University of Tennessee, began discussing with his colleagues the merits of linking the valuable scientific resources developed in Oak Ridge as part of the Manhattan Project with 14 regional universities located in the Southeastern United States (ORAU History, n.d.). In 1946, Pollard's vision became reality when the Oak Ridge Institute for Nuclear Studies, what would eventually become ORAU, was established with the mission of connecting college faculty and students to Oak Ridge, allowing them to use reactors, accelerators, and other scientific instruments to conduct their research (McDaniel, Bradshaw, & Smith, 2006).

Initially, ORAU focused on providing its 14 member universities with education research opportunities, radiation medical research, and nuclear training programs. Today, ORAU's university consortium has expanded to include 99 Ph.D. granting institutions across the nation and has strong partnerships with national laboratories, government, and private industry. ORAU business initiatives are driven by a three-pronged mission to strengthen America's scientific research and education enterprise, to build public trust and confidence in the management of public health and environmental cleanup initiatives, and to enhance our nation's preparedness to respond to emergencies related to terrorist incidents, natural disasters, and health threats (Oak Ridge Associated Universities, 2010).

ORAU's Changing Business Climate

As a government contractor with deep historical ties to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), ORAU has managed the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE) on behalf of DOE since 1992. To this day, ORISE remains one of ORAU's largest contracts, but it

is operated on a "capped" system where the amount of money ORAU can earn is restricted at a certain amount and does not increase. Recognizing this limitation, ORAU has recently begun communicating to employees the importance of competing for new corporate contracts. Only then will ORAU's discretionary funds increase and enable the organization to invest in training, hiring, philanthropy, and other strategic improvements (Beene, 2010).

In addition to the pursuit of corporate contracts, changes in organizational culture have also influenced ORAU's decision to re-energize its marketing and new business initiatives. As a 501(c)3 organization, ORAU has historically avoided the self-promotion of new contracts based on the perception that non-profits should not promote its own successes and to do so might become a competitive liability. The reality, however, is that most, if not all, of newly awarded federal contract information is publically available through government records, specifically as it relates to various contracting vehicles such as the General Services Administration schedule (GSA Schedule: GSA Schedule FAQ, n.d.).

Aside from internal factors, there are several external factors influencing ORAU's decision to become more competitive. Economic conditions over the past couple years have dramatically changed the corporate landscape into a reality where new business opportunities are fewer in numbers, and companies who previously might have ignored smaller-scaled contracts are now aggressively pursuing them. Add to that the 2009 mandate from the Obama Administration that eliminates the ability for government contractors to engage in no-bid contracts (Zeleny, 2009), and there are many reasons why ORAU has strong motivation to work to maintain its competitive stature.

Research Questions

Given this changing business environment, ORAU must remain agile in its ability to compete with similar businesses. One such way is through competitive intelligence—or the act of researching the priorities, strengths, and weaknesses of a company's competition. Collecting competitor information at random, however, does not serve as a meaningful analysis tool, nor does it provide a competitive advantage. Instead, competitive intelligence must start with a clear objective: to develop a profile of each competitor and to ultimately transfer market share profitably from specific competitors to the company. Recognizing that reallocating market shares among competing businesses is not a task that can be achieved overnight, this content analysis seeks to jump start ORAU's intelligence gathering process by using the Internet to determine how competitors are framing their successes and capabilities on their websites. A relational approach to framing theory provides a sound, theoretical basis for interpreting the results this content analysis, and so the following questions were asked:

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in how competitors are framing their successes on service-related webpages versus in their press releases headlines?

RQ2: Is there a significant relationship between the type of company (non-profit or for-profit) and the types of frames they adopt?

RQ3: Is there any correlation between competitors that frame their core competencies (i.e. unique skills or experience) on their websites and competitors that promote new business successes on their websites?

RQ4: Is there any correlation between competitors who frame their core competencies (i.e. unique skills or experience) on their websites and competitors who quantify their level of expertise through statistics?

Methods

To answer these questions, a coding scheme of content-based framing devices was conceptualized and used to examine the corporate websites of five ORAU competitors.

Sampling

ORAU is a multifaceted organization with seven different service categories: science education and workforce development; scientific peer review; national security and emergency management; radiation emergency medicine; environmental assessment and health physics; health communication and technical training; and occupational exposure and worker health. Since this collection of services is rather complex, it is logical to assume that ORAU has hundreds of competitors, including many small niche consultancies. For the purpose of this study, five competitor websites—2 non-profits and 3 for-profits—were chosen based on the premise that they competed with ORAU in at least two or more service categories. It is important to note that the non-profits included within this study differ from charitable non-profit organizations such as United Way, Red Cross, and American Cancer Society. For example, in ORAU's case, earnings acquired through each of the seven business lines are reinvested into the organization's non-profit mission, which is to support the advancement of science education (J. Kennedy, personal communication, November 14, 2011).

Battelle.

Headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, Battelle boasts 22,000 employees in more than 130 locations across the globe (Battelle: About Us, n.d.). The 501(c)3 organization serves as the managing contractor for seven national laboratories for both the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Battelle conducts $6.2 billion annually in global research and development activities (Battelle History, n.d.), and directly competes with ORAU in

the science education and workforce development and the national security and emergency management service categories.

ICF International.

ICF International was founded in 1969 as the Inner City Fund and originally focused on finding ways to finance inner-city businesses (Our History, n.d.). Today, ICF is a publicly traded company (NASDAQ: ICFI) headquartered in Fairfax, Va., with more than 3,700 employees in 50 offices across the globe. According to the company's corporate website, ICF operates across 11 different market areas, and in 2010, reported $765 million in gross revenue (ICF at a Glance, n.d.). ICF directly competes with ORAU in four different service categories: science education and workforce development; environmental assessment and health physics; health communication and technical training; and national security and emergency management.

RTI International.

The non-profit RTI International was established in 1958 as the Research Triangle Institute and is one of 170 global companies headquartered at the world-renowned Research Triangle Park. In addition to its North Carolina headquarters, RTI employs 2,800 employees across 40 countries (About RTI, n.d.). The company reported $759 million in revenue for the 2010 fiscal year (RTI International 2010 Annual Report, 2010). RTI directly competes with ORAU in three service categories: environmental assessment and health physics; health communication and technical training; and national security and emergency management.

SAIC.

Science Applications International Corporation—or SAIC for short—is a Fortune 500 company founded in 1969 and headquartered in McLean, Va. This past year, SAIC reported $11.1 billion in revenue, up 2% from the year before, and claims more than 41,000 employees

worldwide (SAIC Corporate Factsheet, 2011). SAIC has two service categories that directly align with ORAU: environmental assessments and health physics; and national security and emergency management.

SRA International.

Founded in 1978, SRA International is headquartered in Fairfax, Va., and employs more than 7,000 employees in more than 50 locations across the globe. In 2010, SRA reported $1.7 billion in revenue, up 8.2% from the year before (SRA International 2010 Annual Report Summary, 2010). Until recently, SRA International was a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE: SRX); however, on July 20, 2011, it was announced that SRA had been acquired by Providence Equity Partners, thus making it a privately owned company (SRA International, 2011). SRA competes with ORAU in two service categories: health communication and technical training; and national security and emergency management.

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Framing Categories

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Using an inductive approach to the content analysis, framing categories were conceptualized and defined by the researcher during a preliminary investigation. To accomplish this, the website content of the five competitors selected for the study was closely read several times with the intention of identifying multiple meanings within the text. The researcher identified text segments (i.e., words, phrases or sentences) that contained framing or positioning statements. Labels were then assigned to represent each category or framing device. When relevant, additional subcategories were added to labels as a way to provide further clarification behind the framing use. Continued revision and refinement of the category system, such as expanding topics and clarifying contradictory points of view, did occur throughout coder training

and reliability testing. As a result of the preliminary investigation, the following framing devices for projecting preferred identities emerged:

1. *Success Frame*: Language that calls attention to some sort of achievement obtained by the company, either on its own behalf or on the behalf of its customers. Examples include new business/contract, new hires/promotions, honors/awards, project completion, new product/service line, merger/acquisition, and financial results.

2. *Egocentric Frame*: Language that is focused directly on the company; particular phrases might include, "Here at Company X, we are passionate about…," or "Company X is a recognized leader." Egocentric content might focus on a company's experience, enthusiasm, services, values, or mission.

3. *Customer-Centric Frame:* Language that is focused on beneficiaries outside of the company; wording may lead with a customer and its specific need, such as "Customer Y depends on Company X for all of its BLANK needs." Some references may be generic, like military, government, or utility. Other references might include more specific names of customers in an attempt to build rapport or convince other entities with similar interests to conduct business with the company.

4. *Altruism Frame:* Language that attempts to link a company's services as being altruistic or making a difference in the world. Possible frames might include how the company is contributing to the needs of the nation, improving the quality of life, working to build a greener planet, etc.

5. *Innovative Frame:* Language that frames a company's products and services as being innovative, ground breaking, cutting edge, state-of-the-art, or any other phrase that indicates a unique approach for reaching a solution.

6. *Proof Frame:* Language that includes quantitative data or statistics that provide evidence of the breadth of expertise; an example for how this frame might appear: "Company X tracks the achievement of more than 21,000 students in more than 900 schools nationwide."

For a more comprehensive look at the content analysis code book, see Appendix A.

Coding Procedures

Two coders went through extensive training and were directed to code for the presence or absence of the framing device categories, which could take the form of paragraphs, sentences, or word phrases. There were two locations—or areas of analysis—previously identified by the researcher for each of the five competitor websites. Screen shots of each of the locations were captured on Oct. 1, 2011, to ensure that the same content was analyzed even if coders conducted their analyses on separate days. The first area of analysis—webpages describing a company's services—is of particular importance to this study because these pages are the website locations where a company is most likely to incorporate problem framing, product positioning, and product claims. The second area of analysis is a company's press release headlines dated July 1, 2011—Sept. 30, 2011. This time period, also known as the 4th Quarter in the government-contractor industry, was specifically chosen because the government tends to award new contracts during this time so that work can begin at the start of the government fiscal year on Oct. 1.

For service-related webpages, coders were asked to read the content in its entirety, but only code for the first framing device. Coders used a highlighter or marker to indicate the words or phrases that fell within the parameters of that first framing device (see the code book's color scheme in Appendix A). Next to the highlighted text, the coder was directed to write the number

of the variable for which that specific frame addressed. After coding the entire screen shot for the first framing device, the coders then read the webpage content a second time but only coded for the second framing device. The process was repeated until the webpage content was coded for all six framing devices. At that time, the coders entered the data into the coding sheet under its corresponding rows and columns. For the press release headlines, coders were instructed to code for the dominant theme, or the main subject of the news hook. If not enough information was present to make an informed coding decision, coders were permitted to examine the lead for additional details. Press release data was entered in the coding sheet according to the month in which it was issued. A template of the coding sheet is provided in Appendix B.

As was mentioned earlier, two coders coded all of the selected web content. In a first wave of coding, the coders coded 41% of the total sample. The measure of agreement was calculated in SPSS using Cohen's Alpha Kappa (κ)–a measure of reliability that is corrected for chance agreement. Table 1outlines the initial results of the inter-coder reliability analysis.

Table 1: Results of Initial Reliability Analysis

N of Valid Cases = 13

No.	Variable	Cohen's Kappa (κ)
1	**Success** New Business	1.00
2	**Success** New Hires	0.806
3	**Success** Honor	1.00
4	**Success** Project Comp.	0.418
5	**Success** New Product, Service	0.806
6	**Success** Merger, Acquis.	1.00
7	**Success** Financial Results	1.00
8	**Success** Other	0.77*
9	**Egocent.** Experience	0.843
10	**Egocent.** Enthusiasm	0.755
11	**Egocent.** Services	1.00
12	**Egocent.** Values	1.00
13	**Egocent.** Mission, Vision	0.264
14	**Egocent.** Other	-0.114
15	**CustCent** Military	0.629
16	**CustCent** State, Local Gov	0.683
17	**CustCent** Federal Gov	0.675
18	**CustCent** Utility	1.00
19	**CustCent** Private Industry	-0.182
20	**CustCent** Education	1.00
21	**CustCent**Other	0.690
22	**Altruism** National Security	0.629
23	**Altruism** Global Compet.	1.00
24	**Altruism** Health	0.755
25	**Altruism** Environ.	1.00
26	**Altruism** Quality of Life	1.00
27	**Altruism** Enhancing Education	0.683
28	**Altruism** Other	-0.114
29	**Innov.** Product	0.567
30	**Innov.** Service, Approach	0.843
31	**Innov.** Other	0.92*
32	**Proof** Years of Experience	0.629
33	**Proof** Dollars	1.00
34	**Proof** Number Served	1.00
35	**Proof** Product Quantity	1.00
36	**Proof** Other	0.629

* Due to lack of variation, Cohen's Alpha Kappa (κ) could not be computed; however, percent of agreement scores were acceptable.

Five of the 36 variables produced poor reliability scores: Success Project Completion (κ = 0.418), Egocentric Mission/Vision (κ = 0.264), Egocentric Other (κ = -0.114), Customer-Centric Private Industry/Sector (κ = -0.182), and Altruism Other (κ = -0.114). Coders regrouped to discuss discrepancies and worked to develop a shared understanding of how to address these five variables moving forward. Upon a second attempt at recoding the five problematic variables, the reliability scores greatly improved, as is demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of the Reliability Re-test

N of Valid Cases = 9

No.	Variable	Cohen's Kappa (κ)
4	**Success** Project Comp.	1.00
13	**Egocent.** Mission, Vision	1.00
14	**Egocent.** Other	.609
19	**CustCent** Private Industry	1.00
28	**Altruism** Other	1.00

Results

Based on the previously captured screen shots for the service pages, there were 17 service-oriented webpages among the five competitors that directly aligned with ORAU. The press release archives, also captured prior to the content analysis, resulted in a combined total of 91 headlines between July 1 and Sept. 30, 2011. Of all coded web content, there were 4 of the 36 variables that did not appear at all during the content analysis: Egocentric Mission/Vision, Customer-Centric Utility, Innovation Other, and Proof Product Quantity.

Research Question 1 Findings

Research question 1 asked: Is there a significant difference in how competitors are framing their successes on service-related webpages versus in their press releases headlines? Using Fisher's F ratio, eight separate chi-square crosstabulations were conducted using the

content type (service-related pages, press release headlines) and each of the variables under the Success frame. The results demonstrated statistically significant differences between the New Business [χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 16.49, F = .000], New Hires/Promotions [χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 12.09, F = .001], Awards/Honors [χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 6.41, F = .021], and Project Completion [χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 4.80, F = .049] variables. There were no statistically significant differences for the New Product/Service [χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 1.16, F = .383], Merger/Acquisition [χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 3.75, F = .092], Financials [χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 3.75, F = .092], and Other [χ^2 (1, N = 32) = .41, F = .645] variables.

Research Question 2 Findings

Research question 2 asked: Is there a significant relationship between the type of a company (non-profit or for-profit) and the types of frames they adopt? For example, are for-profits—or organizations that answer to investors and other stakeholders—more success-oriented and egocentric? And for the opposite company type, are non-profits—or organizations that are not held to the same profitability standards as for-profits—more adept to use the Customer-Centric and Altruism frames? To answer this question, six chi-square crosstabulations were conducted using the company type (non-profit/for-profit) and each of the framing devices. The results were gathered using Fisher's F ratio and did not yield any statistically significant results other than the Success Other variable, χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 9.88, F = .004. See Table 3 for a complete list of results to Research Question 2.

Table 3: Research Question 2 Findings

Variable	F	No. of occurrences for-profit websites	No. of occurrences non-profit websites
Success New Business	.703	7	3
Success New Hires	1.00	5	3
Success Honor	.438	5	5
Success Project Completion	.696	5	4
Success New Product/Service	.165	2	4
Success Merger/Acquisition	.274	3	0
Success Financials	.274	3	0
Success Other	.004	0	5
Egocentric Experience	1.00	9	5
Egocentric Enthusiasm	1.00	1	1
Egocentric Services	1.00	11	6
Egocentric Values	.133	0	2
Egocentric Mission/Vision	n/a	0	0
Egocentric Other	.540	1	2
Customer-Centric Military	.375	0	1
Customer-Centric State/Local Gov.	1.00	6	4
Customer-Centric Federal Government	.713	9	4
Customer-Centric Utility	n/a	0	0
Customer-Centric Private Industry/Sector	.133	0	2
Customer-Centric Education	1.00	3	2
Customer-Centric Other	.718	8	6
Altruism National Security	1.00	1	1
Altruism Global Competitiveness	.375	0	1
Altruism Human Health	.626	4	1
Altruism Environment	.375	0	1
Altruism Quality of Life	1.00	2	1
Altruism Enhance Education	1.00	4	3
Altruism Other	.620	2	2
Innovative Product	1.00	3	1
Innovative Service/Approach	1.00	4	3
Innovative Other	n/a	0	0
Proof Years of experience	1.00	1	1
Proof Dollars	1.00	1	0
Proof Number Served	.516	2	0
Proof Quantity of Product	n/a	0	0
Proof Other	.540	1	2

Research Question 3 Findings

Research question 3 asked: Is there any correlation between competitors that frame their core competencies (i.e. unique skills or experience) on their websites and competitors that promote new business successes on their websites? To answer this question, a chi-square crosstabulation of Success New Business and Egocentric Experience frames was conducted using Fisher's F ratio. The results (Table 4) reveal a statistically significant relationship [χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 11.31, F = .001] between the two.

Table 4: Success New Business & Egocentric Experience Crosstabulation

		Egocentric Experience		Total
		0	1	
Success New Business	0 Count	8	14	22
	1 Count	10	0	10
Total		18	14	32

Research Question 4 Findings

Research question 4 asked: Is there any correlation between competitors who frame their core competencies (i.e. unique skills or experience) on their websites and competitors who quantify their level of expertise through statistics? To answer this question, a chi-square crosstabulation was conducted for each of the five Proof frame variables against the Egocentric Experience frame. Results determined that there was no significant correlation between competitors who use the Egocentric Experience frame and those who use the Proof frame. The chi-square analysis results are as follows: Years of Experience, χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 2.74, F = .183; Dollars, χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 1.33, F = .438; Number Served, χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 2.74, F = .183; Other,

χ^2 (1, N = 32) = 4.26, F = .073. No statistics were computed for the Proof/Quantity-of-Product variable since it did not appear at all within the content analysis.

Discussion

Public relations practitioners are uniquely positioned to advance the organizations they represent on a number of fronts including employee relations, media relations, and organization-public relationships. Yet, despite many activities that rely on a practitioner's ability to disseminate information, strategic support does not always have to focus entirely on content creation. Instead, communicators can apply their content-related skills to observe the marketing strategies of their competition. Framing theory provides public relations practitioners with this ability to support business intelligence gathering, an aptitude that positions the communications department as a strategic contributor to the dominant coalition. Just as Entman (1991) employed framing theory to compare narratives in contrasting media coverage, so too can practitioners use the theory to compare message strategies of their competition. In recognition of this opportunity, this study was designed to build upon extant framing theory research and provide a glimpse of how government contractors are framing their identities on corporate websites. Findings suggest that ORAU's competitors are indeed using their websites to define constructed realities where certain attributes are emphasized over others.

Arguably, the simple act of deciding which attributes are magnified and which attributes are excluded qualifies each competitor as a framer of messages. However, Hallahan's (1999) three attribute framing types—problem framing, product positioning, and product claims—are also present in the business-to-business marketing models adopted by the five corporate websites. The first type, problem frames, occurred in association with the Customer-Centric frame and usually involved both hypothetical and real problems where the company's services

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were presented as logical solutions. Battelle incorporated this approach to problem framing on one of its service-related webpages titled Talent and Workforce Development. The non-profit stated it had "worked extensively with regions and states in the development of overall strategies and action plans that address workforce development issues." The webpage continued by noting that the company's "expertise translates fast-paced technology-based developments into on-the-ground successful economic development initiatives involving talent generation, university-industry partnerships and targeted development programs" (Battelle: Talent and Workforce Development, n.d.). Online product positioning, which also applies to the positioning of services, occurred when a combination of Egocentric and Success frames were used to heighten expectations and differentiate brands in the minds of potential consumers. And several product claims, such as being altruistic or innovative, relied heavily on positively valenced frames when describing attributes. For example, one statement on an ICF International service webpage incorporated both the Altruism and Innovative frames when stating that the company "uses both traditional tactics and innovative tools to craft precise, culturally appropriate messages and materials that resonate with target markets and help improve quality of life and health outcomes" (ICF International : Health Communication and Social Marketing, n.d.).

To reveal how ORAU's competitors are framing their messages online, let us take a closer look at the findings. Results from RQ1 revealed that when using the Success frame, ORAU's competitors are more likely to promote new business, new hires/promotions, awards/honors, and project completions when issuing press releases. This result, though not unexpected, illustrates the subject areas ORAU's competitors deem newsworthy. Many Success New Business frames that appeared in the press release headlines were also used in combination with the Proof Dollars and Customer-Centric frames. SAIC, which announced eight new

contracts during the month leading up to the start of the government fiscal year, issued this press release on Sept. 26, 2011, "SAIC Awarded $15 Million Contract by Department of Health and Human Services" (SAIC – News & Media – News Releases, n.d.). Quantifying the dollar amount and identifying the initiator of new contracts not only assures stakeholders of the company's continued success but also communicates to other potential customers the types of services that are available. On the other hand, ORAU's competitors are rarely using Success frames on their service-related webpages. Instead, most of the service-related content addressed core competencies (i.e., unique skills or experience) on a generic level—where specifics about certain projects were not discussed.

Since ORAU's corporate culture is one that does not readily promote new business successes, it is important for ORAU to know whether other non-profit government contractors are also refraining from this unabashed form of self-promotion. To answer this question, RQ2 sought to determine if there was any relationship between the type of a company (non-profit, for-profit) and the type of frames they adopt. The results demonstrated that, for the most part, the competitors' use of framing devices is not influenced by the types of businesses they operate. In fact, key findings for RQ2 imply that the non-profit organizations analyzed for this study are incorporating framing devices on their websites with the same frequency as the for-profit organizations. Activist organizations, such as those profiled in Zoch et al.'s (2008) study, have already recognized the Internet as an affordable, unmediated tool for framing messages. Perhaps with today's poor economy, all organization types have to become more aggressive in their product and service claims.

RQ3 sought to determine if there was any correlation between competitors that frame their core competencies (i.e., unique skills or experience) on their corporate websites and

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competitors that promote new business successes on their websites. Interestingly, when it comes to new business and experience, ORAU's competitors are discussing one or the other, but not both. These results might seem counter-intuitive because it is logical to assume that competitors who are frequently winning new contracts are also touting their levels of expertise. Perhaps an alternate explanation for this result is that organizations that chose not to highlight new contracts felt pressure to demonstrate their core competencies in another way. And conversely, organizations that chose to highlight new contracts focused less on Egocentric Experience frames because they felt the new work spoke for itself. Practitioners seeking to interpret competitor message strategies should regard this choice between which attributes to highlight and which attributes to avoid as a matter selection and salience—or an attempt at "making information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences" (Entman, 1993, p.53).

As for RQ4—which asked if there was any correlation between competitors who frame their core competencies (i.e., unique skills or experience) on their websites and competitors who quantify their level of expertise through statistics—the analysis did not yield a statistically significant result. That is, even though ORAU's competitors frequently used Proof frames in association with the press release headlines, they, for the most part, did not quantify their experience on the service-related pages with statistics. Recognizing that a thorough content analysis examines content that is both present and absent, it is valuable to acknowledge the lack of Proof frames being used by ORAU's competitors on service-related webpages. Rather than using the specific subcategories identified in the Proof frame, the competitors' service-related pages incorporated altruistic and innovative product claims. When comparing the results of RQ1 with the results of RQ4, the competitors appear to "stick to the facts" when it comes to press release content but also tend to accept some level of embellishment on the service-related pages.

Despite these results, the question that is still left unanswered is, "how will potential customers perceive this choice of language?" Will customers be more inclined to do business with companies that have demonstrated their experience through examples of new contracts? Will they be less inclined to do business with companies who "speak" in a series of generalizations and fail to provide proof of their product claims? Although receivers of message frames will create preferences based on existing values and individual motivations, they will also compare the relative strengths of competing frames, oftentimes choosing to adopt the stronger of the two (Chong & Druckman, 2007). For an example, think back to Levin and Gaeth's (1988) study where respondents were asked to choose between ground beef that was either 25% fat or 75% lean. Much like the ground beef study, the choice of which government contractor to do business with becomes a matter of comparison. Customers will likely compare alternatives among the competing websites and eventually make a choice based upon positively valenced attributes.

Though ORAU's website was not one of the sites coded in this analysis, a quick glance through the company's press release archive reveals that ORAU does not announce its own new business. Imagine the decision-making process a potential customer might engage in after comparing ORAU's press release archive to that of a competitor. If forced to make a comparison of attributes between the two, then the customer will likely see ORAU's competitor as being more successful and experienced. By adding new business contracts as a regularly featured press release topic, ORAU better positions itself to compete with all types of competitors—those that tout experience as well as those that tout new business. When possible, ORAU's new business press releases should also incorporate elements of the Proof Dollars and Customer-Centric frames.

As it is with press releases and all other types of content, Entman (1993) argued that specific pieces of text can be made more salient through placement and repetition. ORAU can incorporate this advice by rounding out and expanding its web content frames in an effort to be competitive with both non-profit and for-profit contractors. Service-related pages should incorporate more specifics to back-up Egocentric Experience claims, including elements of both the Success and Proof frames. Since the websites examined for this study do not incorporate statistics as a way to support service-related content, ORAU has an opportunity to differentiate itself from its competition by providing salience and prominence to its experience and core competencies through quantitative data such as years of experience, dollars, number served, and quantity of product. The use of Altruism and Innovative frames should be used sparely on the service-related pages. Such product claims can be effective when used in moderation, but overstating the impact or influence of a company's services will not be well received by business-savvy customers. By combining a stronger emphasis on specifics with a moderate use of generic product claims, ORAU can position its corporate website to reach multiple audience groups, as was recommended by Esrock and Leighty (2000).

Earlier, it was concluded that ORAU's competitors deemed new business, new hires/promotions, awards/honors, and project completion as newsworthy subjects. If the same judgment were made of ORAU based on its press release archives, it would appear that science education and workforce development activities are ORAU's most newsworthy activities. Given that ORAU has seven separate business lines, more effort to promote newsworthy announcements in all programmatic areas is critical for depicting a more accurate and diversified picture of the company for potential customers.

Ultimately, the framing devices developed in support of this content analysis can be applied industry-wide to expand framing research as a method for discerning the message strategies of a company's competition. One of the limitations for this study includes the fact that only the dominant theme of each press release was coded. During the research analysis stage, it was difficult to compare the service-related pages to the news release headlines when there was a different method for collecting the data between the two sections. Future studies should adopt a "code-all-frames-that-apply" approach when coding press release headlines. Finally, opportunities for future research certainly exist, especially within ORAU's seven business lines. The scope of this study was conducted at the macro-level and limited to five competitor websites that competed with the corporation as a whole. This content analysis has even greater potential when it is replicated on the programmatic level, where competitor websites can be chosen based on more specificity to each business line. As a complement to this study, more research should also be conducted from the customer perspective to determine how language choice and the framing of attributes impacts decision-making activities.

Conclusion

Despite the corporate website's ability to reach an infinite number of potential customers, most messages created for websites are constructed with less methodological research and less strategic planning than is necessary for responding to a request for proposals (RFPs). Indisputably, when it comes to pursuing new business opportunities, the corporate website is a highly underutilized tool. If organizations like ORAU are committed to strengthening their competitive statures during tough economic times, it makes sense to start with the tools and resources that already exist in-house. Public relations practitioners who are familiar with framing theory can not only motivate potential customers to take a specific action (Esrock & Leichty,

1998; Esrock & Leichty, 2000; Fleishman, 1988; Hallahan, 1999; Levin & Gaeth, 1988; Wu & Cheng, 2011; Zoch et al., 2008), but they can also provide the competitive intelligence that is necessary for competing in a reality where opportunities are fewer in numbers. That is because practitioners can provide invaluable insight as to how their company stacks-up against the competition, and when coupled with the facets of relationship management, this same information can be useful in targeting potential customers in the online environment.

For ORAU, discerning the message strategies of its competition may not be enough, in and of itself, to make the organization more competitive. Instead, ORAU must empower its communicators to counteract the competition with its own effective use of framing and enable them to do so without clashing against corporate culture. As one of Entman's (1993) four locations for where framing devices can originate, cultures represent an organized set of beliefs. This notion also applies to a corporate culture where shared values and norms can guide a common acceptance for what is and what is not appropriate when promoting one's corporate identity. In other words, before ORAU can successfully implement framing devices that stack-up against the competition, ORAU must foster a corporate culture that deems it appropriate to announce new business successes, values the strategic recommendations of the Communications and Marketing department, and provides adequate funding for proactively marketing the organization.

Based on the literature review and the results of this content analysis, the following recommendations for refining ORAU's online competitive strategy are proposed.

- *Announce new business*. With even the U.S. Government calling for increased competitiveness for government contracts through the elimination of sole-source contracts (Zeleny, 2009), ORAU must become comfortable with the notion of publically

announcing its new business successes. Press releases should regularly announce new work—especially corporate contracts—and when possible, use dollar amounts and customer names.

- *Apply more specifics to back-up Egocentric Experience frames.* Any experience-related claims that are made on service webpages must incorporate a combination of variables from the Success and Proof frames such as project completions, awards, number served, quantity of product, and years of experience.

- *Use the Altruism and Innovative frames sparingly.* Altruism and Innovative frames can be very effective when used in moderation, but keep in mind that just because a new service or approach is innovative to ORAU does not necessarily mean it is innovative to the industry. Likewise, ORAU content creators should also be cautious about over using altruistic statements that seem to suggest more credit for ORAU than is truly warranted.

- *Expand press release topics.* ORAU's programmatic directors must become more cognizant and forthcoming with the newsworthy activities occurring in each of their programs. ORAU competitors are touting a variety of successes and ORAU must counter with its own publicity that highlights a diverse portfolio of services.

- *Share the results of this study.* The hallmark of ORAU's current competitiveness strategy is to encourage employees to understand the business of what ORAU does, share what they have learned with others across the organization, and take action to improve practices when possible. In keeping with that theme, it is recommended that employees from all levels of the organization be invited to attend a brown bag or informational session where the results of this study will be presented.

- *Replicate this study.* As an extension of the previous bullet, one of the takeaways from this informational session should be to develop a plan for replicating this content analysis within each of ORAU's seven programmatic areas. Plans should target competitors that are specific to each program and include coder training to ensure consistent results.

- *Allow enough time for research.* When working to refresh or redesign the ORAU corporate website, there should be enough time built into the early phase of the production schedule to allow for competitor research and analysis before any content is written.

- *Seek input from outside ORAU.* Early research for redesigning the corporate website should also involve focus group analysis to determine how customers react to the language choice and framing techniques employed on the websites of both ORAU and its competitors.

- *Improve cohesion within ORAU.* As a way to break down silos between ORAU's programmatic areas and support departments, ORAU must create a shared knowledge bank where customer-related information can be accessed. One way to accomplish this is by investing in a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system—or a database that brings information from all areas of an organization to provide a complete overview of each customer. Among other benefits, a CRM system creates a central hub for customer-related information which could fuel web content frames, supplement proposal information and even support predictive analysis for future customer needs.

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Appendices

INTRODUCTION

This code book is designed to assist you in the process of coding the corporate websites of five Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU) competitors:

Battelle		SRA International
www.battelle.org		www.sra.com
	RTI International	
ICF International	www.rti.org	SAIC
www.icfi.com		www.saic.com

This is a study of how ORAU competitors are framing their identities on their corporate websites. Your task is to read the selected pages of the websites and identify words or phrases that fall within the defined parameters. Each framing device is defined based on its use in this study. You are to refer to these definitions and only these definitions while coding the components of these websites.

BASIC INSTRUCTIONS

1. Read through the list of framing devices below and become familiar with their assigned colors and corresponding definitions.

2. Two locations—or areas of analysis—have been identified for each of the five websites:
   - Part 1: Services
   - Part 2: News Release Headlines

3. Work from previously captured screen shots of each webpage location to ensure that the same content will be analyzed even if coders conduct their analyses on separate days.

4. Print the webpage screen shots you were assigned to code.

5. Read the webpage content, but only code for the first framing device.

6. Use a highlighter or marker to call out the words or phrases that fall within the parameters of that first framing device (see color scheme below).

7. Next to the highlighted text, write the number of the variable for which that specific frame addresses. For example, if you used a green highlighter to mark the phrase "to advance the quality of life" because you recognized it as an altruism frame, write the number 5 next to it to signify it as a quality-of-life variable.

8. After coding the entire screen shot for the first framing device, read the webpage content a second time, but only code for the second framing device. Repeat steps 5-7 until the webpage content has been coded for all 6 framing devices.

9. Once the website content has been coded for all 6 framing devices, enter the data into the Excel coding sheet under its corresponding rows and columns.

PART 1 – SERVICES ANALYSIS

1. Screen shots of service pages were previously gathered on Oct. 1, 2011.

2. ORAU has seven service categories:
   - Science Education and Workforce Development
   - Scientific Peer Review
   - National Security and Emergency Management
   - Radiation Emergency Medicine
   - Environmental Assessment and Health Physics
   - Health Communication and Technical Training
   - Occupational Exposure and Worker Health Studies

3. Given the complexity of this collection of services, ORAU has hundreds of competitors including many small niche consultancies. For the purpose of this study, the five competitor websites were chosen on the premise that they each competed with ORAU in at least more than one service category. For Part 1 of this analysis, only code those competitor service webpages that align directly with ORAU's 7 business lines. These aligned webpages have been pre-identified by the author and are listed below:

   - **Battelle**
     Science Education and Workforce Development (SE):
       - SE1: Innovation in Education
         http://www.battelle.org/community/Education/index.aspx
       - SE2: Talent and Workforce Development
         http://www.battelle.org/solutions/?Nav_Area=Solution&Nav_SectionID=14&Nav_CatID=14_TalentandWorkforceDevelopment

     National Security and Emergency Management (NS):
       - NS1: CBRNE Response / Preparedness
         http://www.battelle.org/solutions/default.aspx?Nav_Area=Solution&Nav_SectionID=4&Nav_CatID=4_CBRNEResponse

   - **ICF International**
     Science Education and Workforce Development (SE):
       - SE1: Education Research + Evaluation
         http://www.icfi.com/markets/education/research-and-evaluation
       - SE2: Education Training + Technical Assistance
         http://www.icfi.com/markets/education/training-and-technical-assistance

     Environmental Assessments and Health Physics (EA):
       - EA1: Environmental Risk + Toxicology
         http://www.icfi.com/markets/environment/environmental-risk-and-toxicology

Health Communication and Technical Training (HC):
- HC1: Health Training + Technical Assistance
  http://www.icfi.com/markets/health/training-and-technical-assistance
- HC2: Health Communications + Social Marketing
  http://www.icfi.com/markets/health/communications-and-social-marketing

National Security and Emergency Management (NS):
- NS1: Public Safety + Security
  http://www.icfi.com/markets/homeland-security/public-safety-and-security

- **RTI International**
  Environmental Assessments and Health Physics (EA):
  - EA1: Site Assessment, Remediation, and Redevelopment: Capabilities
    http://www.rti.org/page.cfm?objectid=2FD2487D-6DF8-4FB0-9E19A90C29DE518F

  Health Communication and Technical Training (HC):
  - HC1: Health Communication and Marketing
    http://www.rti.org/page.cfm/Health_Communication_and_Marketing

  National Security and Emergency Management (NS):
  - NS1: Forensic Science Education
    http://www.rti.org/page.cfm/Forensic_Science_Education

- **SAIC**
  Environmental Assessments and Health Physics (EA):
  - EA1: Site Management and Remediation
    http://www.saic.com/environment/site-management.html

  National Security and Emergency Management (NS):
  - NS1: Emergency Preparedness and Response
    http://www.saic.com/natsec/homeland-security/preparedness-planning.html
  - NS2: Terrorism Response Training
    http://www.saic.com/natsec/homeland-security/response-training.html

- **SRA International**
  Health Communication and Technical Training (HC):
  - HC1: Enhancing Human Health:
    http://www.sra.com/global-health/

  National Security and Emergency Management (NS):

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- NS1: Emergency Management
  http://www.sra.com/security-privacy/emergency-management.php

PART 2 – NEWS RELEASE HEADLINES

1. Screen shots of news release headlines for press releases dated July 1, 2011 – Sept. 30, 2011, were previously gathered on Oct. 1, 2011.

2. Code the press release headlines for the existence of a dominant framing device or theme. Even though headlines may contain multiple frames, <u>only code the headline's dominant theme</u>. For example, if a headline read, "Company X Awarded $400 Million Contract from Department of Defense," the dominant theme is the new contract; therefore this headline is coded as a success/new business (highlight in yellow, number 1).

3. If there are any press releases you cannot code based solely on the dominant theme present in the headline, pull the release up online and use the lead for the additional information you need.

DEFINITIONS & CODING OF FRAMING VARIABLES (1-6)

1. **Success Frame:** Language that calls attention to some sort of achievement obtained by the company, either on its own behalf or on the behalf of its customers. Use caution; just because the web content uses the word *success* doesn't mean it automatically gets coded. Be sure the word *success* is used in the context of an actual accomplishment.

   <div align="center">0=No   1=Yes</div>

   1. New business: sometimes also worded as a new contract or task order.
   2. New hires: also include promotions.
   3. Honor: includes awards, distinctions or honors such as being named to a committee, panel or partaking in a speaking opportunity such as a keynote address.
   4. Project completion: successful completion of a project or initiative.
   5. New product/service line
   6. Merger/acquisition
   7. Financial results
   8. Other

2. **Egocentric Frame:** Language that is focused directly on the company; particular phrases might include, "Here at Company X, we are passionate about," or "Company X is a recognized leader." Look for phrases that use pronouns such as "we," "us" or "our."

   <div align="center">0=No   1=Yes</div>

   1. Experience: focused on the previously acquired knowledge and skills of the company; can also include human capital or employee expertise.
   2. Enthusiasm: expressed feelings of passion or pride; feels strongly about something, or emphasizes a particular stance on a subject.
   3. Services: focused on the service areas the company specializes in; its business areas.
   4. Values: volunteer-driven, honesty, integrity, and mutual respect, client-driven, etc.
   5. Mission/vision: phrases that signify areas applicable to the company's mission/vision.
   6. Other

3. **Customer-Centric Frame:** Language that is focused on beneficiaries outside of the company; wording may lead with a customer and its specific need, such as "Customer Y depends on Company X for all of its BLANK needs." Some references may be generic, like the U.S. military, government or utility. Other references might include more specific names of customers. Code all that apply.

<div style="text-align:center">0=No   1=Yes</div>

1. Military
2. State/Local Government
3. Federal Government
4. Utility
5. Private Industry/Private Sector
6. Educational Institution
7. Other

4. **Altruism Frame:** Language that attempts to link a company's services as being altruistic, advancing a cause, or making a difference. Possible frames might include how the company is meeting the needs of the nation, improving the quality of life, working to build a greener planet, etc. Code all that apply; there can be more than one altruistic reference in a sentence.

<div style="text-align:center">0=No   1=Yes</div>

1. National security
2. Global competitiveness
3. Human Health—in the context of public health, world health, the nation's health, etc.
4. Environment—greener planet, sustainable energy, alternative energy, etc. It's not enough to say they recycle. They have to claim that as a result of it, they're making the world or community a better place.
5. Quality of Life
6. Enhance Education
7. Other

5. **Innovative Frame:** Language that frames a company's products and services as being innovative, ground breaking, cutting edge, state-of-the-art, the newest/latest of its kind, or any other phrase that indicates a unique approach for reaching a solution.

<div style="text-align:center">0=No   1=Yes</div>

1. Innovative product
2. Innovative service/approach
3. Other

6. **Proof Frame:** Language that includes quantitative data or statistics that provide evidence of the breadth of expertise; an example for how this frame might appear: "Company X tracks the achievement of more than 21,000 students in more than 900 schools nationwide."

<div style="text-align:center">0=No   1=Yes</div>

1. Years of experience
2. Dollars
3. Number served

4. Quantity of product
5. Other

Appendix B: Merrifield Master's Thesis Coding Sheet

* During the coding process, this coding sheet consisted of 32 cases on the spreadsheet rows and each of the six framing devices spread across the spreadsheet columns. For the purpose of this final document, the framing devices have been separated for ease of printing.

Coded Variable	Success New Business	Success New Hires	Success Honor	Success Project Comp.	Success New Product, Service	Success Merger, Acquis.	Success Financial Results	Success Other
Battelle-SE1								
Battelle-SE2								
Battelle-NS1								
Battelle-News-July								
Battelle-News-August								
Battelle-News-Sept.								
ICF Int'l-SE1								
ICF Int'l-SE2								
ICF Int'l-EA1								
ICF Int'l-HC1								
ICF Int'l-HC2								
ICF Int'l-NS1								
ICF Int'l-News-July								
ICF Int'l-News-August								
ICF Int'l-News-Sept.								
RTI Int'l-EA1								
RTI Int'l-HC1								
RTI Int'l-NS1								
RTI Int'l-News-July								
RTI Int'l-News-August								
RTI Int'l-News-Sept.								
SAIC- EA1								
SAIC- NS1								
SAIC- NS2								
SAIC-News-July								
SAIC-News-August								
SAIC-News-Sept.								
SRA Int'l-HC1								
SRA Int'l-NS1								
SRA Int'l-News-July								
SRA Int'l-News-August								
SRA Int'l-News-Sept.								

Coded Variable	Egocent. Experi-ence	Egocent. Enthusi-asm	Egocent. Services	Egocent. Values	Egocent. Mission, Vision	Egocent. Other
Battelle-SE1						
Battelle-SE2						
Battelle-NS1						
Battelle-News-July						
Battelle-News-August						
Battelle-News-Sept.						
ICF Int'l-SE1						
ICF Int'l-SE2						
ICF Int'l-EA1						
ICF Int'l-HC1						
ICF Int'l-HC2						
ICF Int'l-NS1						
ICF Int'l-News-July						
ICF Int'l-News-August						
ICF Int'l-News-Sept.						
RTI Int'l-EA1						
RTI Int'l-HC1						
RTI Int'l-NS1						
RTI Int'l-News-July						
RTI Int'l-News-August						
RTI Int'l-News-Sept.						
SAIC- EA1						
SAIC- NS1						
SAIC- NS2						
SAIC-News-July						
SAIC-News-August						
SAIC-News-Sept.						
SRA Int'l-HC1						
SRA Int'l-NS1						
SRA Int'l-News-July						
SRA Int'l-News-August						
SRA Int'l-News-Sept.						

Coded Variable	CustCent Military	CustCent State, Local Gov	CustCent Federal Gov	CustCent Utility	CustCent Private Industry	CustCent Education	CustCent Other
Battelle-SE1							
Battelle-SE2							
Battelle-NS1							
Battelle-News-July							
Battelle-News-August							
Battelle-News-Sept.							
ICF Int'l-SE1							
ICF Int'l-SE2							
ICF Int'l-EA1							
ICF Int'l-HC1							
ICF Int'l-HC2							
ICF Int'l-NS1							
ICF Int'l-News-July							
ICF Int'l-News-August							
ICF Int'l-News-Sept.							
RTI Int'l-EA1							
RTI Int'l-HC1							
RTI Int'l-NS1							
RTI Int'l-News-July							
RTI Int'l-News-August							
RTI Int'l-News-Sept.							
SAIC- EA1							
SAIC- NS1							
SAIC- NS2							
SAIC-News-July							
SAIC-News-August							
SAIC-News-Sept.							
SRA Int'l-HC1							
SRA Int'l-NS1							
SRA Int'l-News-July							
SRA Int'l-News-August							
SRA Int'l-News-Sept.							

Coded Variable	Altruism National Security	Altruism Global Compet.	Altruism Health	Altruism Environ.	Altruism Quality of Life	Altruism Enhancing Education	Altruism Other
Battelle-SE1							
Battelle-SE2							
Battelle-NS1							
Battelle-News-July							
Battelle-News-August							
Battelle-News-Sept.							
ICF Int'l-SE1							
ICF Int'l-SE2							
ICF Int'l-EA1							
ICF Int'l-HC1							
ICF Int'l-HC2							
ICF Int'l-NS1							
ICF Int'l-News-July							
ICF Int'l-News-August							
ICF Int'l-News-Sept.							
RTI Int'l-EA1							
RTI Int'l-HC1							
RTI Int'l-NS1							
RTI Int'l-News-July							
RTI Int'l-News-August							
RTI Int'l-News-Sept.							
SAIC- EA1							
SAIC- NS1							
SAIC- NS2							
SAIC-News-July							
SAIC-News-August							
SAIC-News-Sept.							
SRA Int'l-HC1							
SRA Int'l-NS1							
SRA Int'l-News-July							
SRA Int'l-News-August							
SRA Int'l-News-Sept.							

Coded Variable	Innov. Product	Innov. Service, Approach	Innov. Other	Proof Years of Experience	Proof Dollars	Proof Number Served	Proof Product Quantity	Proof Other
Battelle-SE1								
Battelle-SE2								
Battelle-NS1								
Battelle-News-July								
Battelle-News-August								
Battelle-News-Sept.								
ICF Int'l-SE1								
ICF Int'l-SE2								
ICF Int'l-EA1								
ICF Int'l-HC1								
ICF Int'l-HC2								
ICF Int'l-NS1								
ICF Int'l-News-July								
ICF Int'l-News-August								
ICF Int'l-News-Sept.								
RTI Int'l-EA1								
RTI Int'l-HC1								
RTI Int'l-NS1								
RTI Int'l-News-July								
RTI Int'l-News-August								
RTI Int'l-News-Sept.								
SAIC- EA1								
SAIC- NS1								
SAIC- NS2								
SAIC-News-July								
SAIC-News-August								
SAIC-News-Sept.								
SRA Int'l-HC1								
SRA Int'l-NS1								
SRA Int'l-News-July								
SRA Int'l-News-August								
SRA Int'l-News-Sept.								

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Originally from Pittsburgh, Penn., Mrs. Merrifield graduated from Knoxville's Karns High School in 1999 and received her undergraduate degree in mass communication in 2003 from East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tenn. After returning to Knoxville upon graduation, she joined the government relations agency AkinsCrisp Public Strategies as an assistant account executive. Merrifield advanced over a three-year period, ultimately becoming an account executive with strong academic, government, and private-sector relationships. In 2006, Merrifield joined the full-service advertising agency Asen Strategic Advertising and Marketing. As the agency's senior public relations coordinator, Merrifield managed a variety of efforts including the creation of Asen's first official public relations department—eventually building the clientele to more than 15 retainer-based clients. In 2008, Merrifield accepted her current position as a communications and marketing specialist for Oak Ridge Associated Universities—a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation and U.S. Department of Energy contractor. Merrifield has been a member of both the national and local chapters of the Public Relations Society of America since 2003 and has held various local PRSA board positions such as newsletter editor, secretary and director at large.