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Building a religious brand: Exploring the foundations of the Church of Scientology through public relations

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ABSTRACT

Although L. Ron Hubbard is known for founding the Church of Scientology, he is not generally considered a public relations practitioner. However, his efforts to practice the discipline to advance Scientology are documented in Church publications. Unlike examinations of older religions, which require reinterpretations of activities through a public relations lens, existing Church documents allow for an evaluation of the role public relations played in building a religious movement. This article explores how Hubbard used public relations to establish Scientology, finding he embraced practices such as celebrity endorsement and image management but eschewed common media relations and crisis communication practices.

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Introduction

Religion and public relations have been intertwined throughout much of history, though not always in ways expected of public relations in its modern embodiment. Although modern public relations emphasizes managing mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their various publics (Broom & Sha, 2013), the application of this idea and the accompanying public relations strategies and tactics used prior to the more formal development of the public relations industry has been termed "proto-public relations" (Watson, 2012). Scholars have argued that religious figures like Hildegard Von Bingen (Spaulding & Dodd, 2014) and St. Paul (Brown, 2003) could be classified as public relations practitioners; others like Tilson (2011) and Watson (2008) have discussed the overall employment of strategic communication techniques by religious organizations. Such proto-public relations research suggests that public relations has been an essential part of religious movements throughout history. Religions in the 20th and 21st centuries have continued to employ public relations activities, although current activities are more readily labeled as such than practices embraced in earlier centuries.

Of particular focus for public relations scholars has been the evangelical Christian movement in the United States. Scholars have examined the movement's employment of advocacy techniques in American history, particularly on controversial issues like temperance (Lamme, 2014) and gay rights (Diamond, 1998), as well as followers' application of recognized public relations practices, such as crisis manangement (Legg, 2008; Spaulding, 2013). Other religions have also been analyzed from a public relations and promotional activities context, including Hinduism (Tilson & Venkateswaran, 2006) and Judaism (Toledano & McKie, 2013). Although these religions all have extensive histories from which to draw, some of the early historical activities of these faiths have inevitably been lost or forgotten. In contrast, new religious movements like Scientology evolved in the post-Industrial Era in response to rapid social change (Beckford, 1986), which allows easier access to their associated historical documents. In particular, North America experienced a proliferation of these movements

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in the post-World War II decades (Wuthnow, 1986), which means that many of their activities have been well-documented by the media of the time. Thus, analyzing newer religions offers an opportunity for public relations scholars to gain a comprehensive understanding of how public relations theories and techniques can be applied in a religious context, particularly because those movements may have been more consciously aware of public relations as a discipline.

In contrast to the relationship between religion and public relations, the employment of strategic communication techniques by corporations and governments has been well documented from Edward Bernays's first writings on propaganda (1928) and public opinion (1923). In this sense, the Church of Scientology fills an interesting place within the analysis of the public relations discipline and its history. According to journalist Lawrence Wright (2013), several people close to L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of the Church of Scientology, stated that he saw religion as a business where significant money could be made (though the Church disputes that he said this); later struggles between Scientologists and the US Internal Revenue Service over the Church's status as a legitimate religion (and its tax-exempt status) further underscored the blurred line between religion and business in this instance.

Although some scholars have examined Scientology from a legal and business perspective (Kent, 1999; Passas & Castillo, 2006), others have examined its categorization as a religious sect versus a cult (Wallis, 1975). Additionally, some public relations tactics used by the Church, such as the use of front groups, have been extensively discussed in publications by former scientologists (Young, 1993). Thus, this article seeks to build on the information disclosed in these earlier publications, analyzing it in relation to larger public relations concepts to gain an understanding of how public relations helped to shape and build the brand of Scientology. Unlike the proto-public relations scholarship mentioned earlier, this article does not seek to reinterpret all of Hubbard's activities through the lens of public relations. Rather, many of Hubbard's documents indicate a strategic intent to engage in public relations activities, mainly with the goal of attracting members to Scientology. Based on both Hubbard's writings and the activities of the Church, this article pays specific attention to examining larger public relations concepts like relationship building, reputation management, crisis communication, and issues management and exploring how these concepts helped build Scientology's public image from a movement to a religion. In addition to exploring these broader concepts, this article also examines how specific and prominent tactics used by Scientology's followers, such as celebrity seeding/influencer targeting, helped build the Church's image in its early years. Though we did not uncover any evidence suggesting Hubbard had a relationship or correspondence with the public relations pioneers of his day (e.g., Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee, and others), he was well-versed in public relations strategies and tactics, and several of his letters make reference to public relations concepts or texts. Finally, understanding how the Church of Scientology maintained its visibility and success beginning in the 1950s will also help build on the existing research centered on religion and public relations, which often ignores the new religious movements in favor of examining more established religions and their associated institutions.

This study begins with a description of the historical case study approach used for this study, followed by an exploration of how public relations has been historically conceptualized as a tool for religious organizations. This is woven into a discussion about the importance of building organizational identity, a public relations strategy that was central to developing the current iteration of Scientology. This is followed by an introduction to the Church's origins and identity building. Finally, this leads to a deep analysis of how traditional public relations practices were both embraced and eschewed during the Church's developmental stages.

Approach and method

In an effort to examine how the Church of Scientology historically employed public relations-based strategies to brand itself and communicate its mission, this study used an historical, case study approach. This involved deep reading, interpretation, and discussion of both primary and secondary research and articles by two researchers. Emphasis was placed on evaluating documents that were

provided by the Church or that contained information from current and former Church members. For example, one resource analyzed for this study is the book *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief*, written by Lawrence Wright (2013). This book, which was also the subject of a controversial documentary (Dargis, 2015), uses approximately 200 interviews with former and current Scientologists to explore the formation and workings of the Church. However, the Church roundly denounces this work for its bias (Beaumont-Thomas, 2015), so efforts were made to acquire primary documents directly from Church sources.

Successful attempts to contact members of the Church's National Affairs Office resulted in tours of both the office and the L. Ron Hubbard House. At the National Affairs Office, access was granted to review a full collection of audiobooks and lectures, as well as textbooks, manuals, and handbooks that are used to guide Church business and religious practices. These books primarily consist of notes and memos written by Hubbard, and often include replications of short notes Hubbard made in the margins to explain his thoughts and reasons for making specific comments or policies. Similarly, the Hubbard House is a museum and former church where Hubbard lived and wrote significant Church documents. Here, access was granted to view Church artifacts such as original electropsychometers (E-meters), Hubbard's former workspace, and designated meeting rooms. In all, documents were analyzed primarily for public relations qualities and evaluated based on their potential usefulness in guiding Church public relations policies and practices. These documents were also particularly useful for framing this study because they lent insight to the founder's perspective—something that is more difficult to obtain in historical religious research.

The use of these resources comes with acknowledged limitations. It is recognized that many secondary works, such as *Going Clear* (Wright, 2013), are written with particular agendas—to expose the inner workings of the Church from the perspectives of former and current members. Conversely, it is worth noting that the Church's documents and perspectives are equally agenda-driven, both to protect the Church's practices and defend their positions against critics. Though this is indeed an essential function of traditional public relations, it also means that the documents must be read with the understanding that they alone may not provide a comprehensive view of the history and activities of Hubbard, the Church, and their critics. As such, although this historical analysis lends insight into how the organization formed, it is important to recognize that the polar perspectives primarily serve as a starting point for interpreting public events experienced by the organization.

Although this article relies heavily on historical analysis and interpretation of publicized events related to the Church, a case study approach is simultaneously used to strengthen the scholarly value of this work. Yin (2014) presented the case study method in the context of social science research, but his arguments for the value of the method applied to this study. First, Yin argued that case studies should be used to answer *how* and *why* questions; this study explored how the Church of Scientology employed public relations strategies to further its mission and brand during its developmental phases. Second, he argued that case studies are best used for examining contemporary events or cases in which the researcher has little control. This is slightly different from a purely historical approach, which involves studying events for which no direct observations or contact with people who experienced an event is possible. As such, although the Church's past actions cannot be manipulated, it is possible to examine recent historical events related to the organization. It is also possible to gain insight from individuals who have been involved in relevant events. This is an important distinction, as this study aims to enhance the understanding of how public relations techniques are used in a more contemporary religious context.

Finally, Yin's (2014) concept of theoretical triangulation is achieved by examining the Church's strategies through the lenses of multiple perspectives and relevant public relations theories. By using conversations with officials, original documents, and popular press writings related to the Church, the method allows an exploration of the breadth of traditional public relations techniques used in this particular religious movement. Showing how public relations strategies were used to build a contemporary religious brand simultaneously builds an understanding of how religious groups have historically used public relations strategies to build brands, gain followers, and respond to outsider audiences.

This study focuses primarily on the first 10–20 years of Scientology's formation, exploring how public relations strategies contributed to the growth and development of the organization as it developed from the Dianetics movement. By using an historical, case study approach, the goal is not to uncover new information about Scientology, but rather to reorganize and reinterpret knowledge about the religion's origins within the context of public relations.

Public relations and scientology

Arguably, understanding the shift from Dianetics to Scientology, and situating that shift in the context of public relations and religion, is important for understanding how public relations strategies have been used to brand a modern religious movement. Although the intersection of public relations practices and religion has been examined in older historical contexts, as was mentioned in the introduction, the exploration of a prominent organization in the new religious movement helps illustrate how the field contributes to building religious organizational identities.

Building identity in religious organizations

Identity is an important component of building a successful brand regardless of whether one is discussing a company or a nonprofit organization. This study explores identity in religious organizations, particularly focusing on the point when Scientology and Dianetics shifted from a self-help movement and philosophy into an organized religion. Specifically, corporate identity is the mixture of ways an organization expresses its character, and the mixture can be made up of symbols, corporate culture, behavior, communication style, and associations (Wood & Somerville, 2012). Conveying an identity that is acceptable to the public and easily identifiable is a key step in the communication process. Thus, creating and reinforcing brand identity is often a goal of public relations functions. Though organizations have clear business goals, it is often not enough to simply provide goods and services or weigh in on issues. Rather, an organization must distiguish itself to both external and internal audiences as it builds its profile and story (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). Essentially, organizational identities are created to commodify the presented *self*, which is then sold to an organization's target audiences (Du Gay, 1996; Motion, 2000).

In public relations, relationship building is a key component of creating a relatable corporate identity. Other individuals and organizations an entity associates itself with can provide indicators to the public about the identity to which it aspires. For example, part of creating and reinforcing an organization's brand and identity involves seeking celebrity relationships and third-party endorsements. Useful celebrity endorsers are those perceived to have some level of credibility based on the combined factors of attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness, and even celebrities with low levels of credibility may still help build a brand's reputation (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011). Celebrities are often courted by organizations and social causes for their wealth and access to global media, which lends them status and the ability to confer a sense of charisma on those they support or endorse (Kent, 2002). In the case of a religious organization, the celebrity endorsement may also help convey the acceptability and legitimacy of a new religion. Other new religious movements, such as the Church of Satan, Transcendental Meditation, and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, have made a point of courting celebrities to join their movements (Cusack, 2009). Though modern concepts of celebrities differ from historical ones, the idea of saints, monarchs, and prominent religious figures (e.g., abbotts and abbesses) filling a celebrity-type role has been noted by scholars (Cusack, 2009; Howells, 2011; Spaulding & Dodd, 2014; Tilson, 2011). These historical antecedents to modern celebrities were used similarly to more contemporary personalities in that they were held up as role models, with the expectation that the public would either be persuaded to join or reaffirm their faith in the religion.

Church of Scientology identity building

Though the Church of Scientology was officially founded in 1954 with the establishment of its first church in Los Angeles, California (Scientology Religion Facts, n.d.), it has its roots in the Dianetics movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The first public document discussing Dianetics was an article titled "Terra Incognita: The Mind," published in the Winter-Spring 1950 issue of *The Explorers Journal* (Hubbard, 2012). This was followed by the publication of an article called "Dianetics, The Evolution of a Science" in the May 1950 issue of the *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine (Hubbard, 2012). The author of these articles, L. Ron Hubbard, was a well-known pulp science fiction author who went on to found the Church of Scientology. Later in 1950, Hubbard expanded on his articles with the publication of a book called *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. The book outlined a practice, Dianetics, that claimed to offer "spiritual healing technology" that improved personality and IQ and could "alleviate unwanted sensations, emotions, irrational fears and psychosomatic illnesses" (Dianetics, n.d., para. 1).

The basic idea behind Dianetics is that the human mind is divided into separate components. The analytical mind is logical and rational, and the reactive mind holds *engrams* (traces of negative memories) that are responsible for psychological and health problems (Urban, 2011). Dianetics focused on removing these engrams through an auditing process that encouraged individuals to revisit the original events that caused them physical and mental harm. When an engram was erased, and the individual was *cleared*, the reactive mind and the problems it caused a person were eliminated (The Clear, n.d.; Urban, 2011).

Despite criticisms of Dianetics by many in the scientific community, including the prominent pyschoanalyst Erich Fromm, it was tremendously successful at the time it was introduced; some medical doctors even began following Dianetics techniques. Wright (2013) theorized that many people were attracted to the movement due to its ties to science fiction, the prospect of employment in the Dianetics movement, Hubbard's own mythology and his claims to have healed himself of grievous injuries using Dianetics, and the fact that Dianetics offered an easier to apply and cheaper alternative to psychiatric or psychological treatments. Hubbard (2012) argued that people responded to Dianetics because it answered a unfulfilled need to successfully treat psychological illnesses, and he believed that the goals of Dianetics were "emptying sanitariums and prisons and raising the general tone of the nation" (p. 89).

The Dianetics movement began facing challenges around 1950 when Hubbard started experiencing both personal and professional issues related to the movement. First, Hubbard was declared insane by doctors that his wife, Sarah, had consulted prior to requesting a divorce (Miller, 2014). Then, the first Clear individual Hubbard presented to the public failed to live up to the promises of what could be achieved at the Clear level (Urban, 2011; Wright, 2013). Last, despite setting up the Hubbard Dianetic Research Foundation in 1950, a schism began developing in the Dianetics movement as a result of what many followers saw as a move away from a scientific orientation (Urban, 2011). The foundation's Board of Trustees even passed a resolution banning the subject of past lives, which Hubbard had begun introducing into the movement (Urban, 2011). This reinforced the main point of friction between Hubbard and members of the Dianetics movement: The movement had grown so rapidly that he had little to no control over its direction, and the ease with which people could enact his directions from the Dianectics texts allowed them to dilute his teachings and make alterations to them (Wright, 2013). Hubbard himself (2012) pointed to the bankruptcy of the Wichita, Kansas-based Dianetics Foundation as a key point in the struggle for the viability of the movement, and his writings indicated he was asked to lead that foundation, but the organization shortly thereafter declared bankruptcy, losing him the copyrights to Dianetics and his own name.

Shortly after this schism in the Dianetics movement, Hubbard began developing the underlying philosophies of Scientology. The Church states that Scientology is the direct result of Hubbard's determination that humans are inherently spiritual and, as such, takes the position that Scientology

has been a religion since its inception; arguably, the religion itself is informed by Hubbard's discoveries about the "fundamental truths of spiritual existence" (Chronology—L. Ron Hubbard: A profile, n.d., para. 1). Although Hubbard declared that Scientology was a response to the idea that humans might destroy each other with the new weapons of the Atomic Age (Urban, 2006), many journalists and scholars took a more cynical view of the reasons for the founding of Scientology; specifically, the idea that a religion has clear legal and tax advantages compared to a business (Wright, 2013). Religious studies scholar Hugh Urban (2011) notes that beginning in 1952 with the establishment of the Hubbard Association of Scientologists, Hubbard and Scientology began a gradual shift toward a religious identity that "seems to have been in response to various legal and political challenges in the early 1950s" (pp. 64–65). The shift was formalized in 1955 with the incorporation of the Founding Church of Scientology in Washington, DC, which included statements acknowledging that this would serve as the parent church for the religious faith (Urban, 2011). Regardless of the reasons for the founding of the Church, its establishment marked the beginning of one of the most prominent organizations of the new religious movement.

Although proponents and critics have debated whether the shift to Scientology was truly based on religious motives, little scholarly work has examined how public relations practices were used to build the Church's identity and launch its growth. So, with this historic overview in mind, this study aims to explore how a new religion such as Scientology may have knowingly employed public relations theories and techniques to establish an image and build a following.

Embracing relationship building

Hubbard appears to have recognized the benefits of gaining endorsements, and celebrity recruitment was a key promotional strategy from early in the Dianetics movement, although celebrity recruitment and endorsement was a branding strategy on a somewhat lesser scale than what has been used historically by Scientology. The current Church of Scientology is known for its celebrity members, including actors Tom Cruise and John Travolta, among others, but the desire to involve famous individuals in the Church is not a new practice. Early proponents of the Dianetics process included many figures in the science fiction and literary worlds, including John Campbell, editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*, and science fiction author A. E. van Vogt (Urban, 2011).

Though Campbell may not have been a household name, his endorsement of the practice of Dianetics was key to the movement's success. As editor of a very popular science fiction magazine, Campbell had the ability to give Hubbard a platform through which to spread the ideas of Dianetics and begin connecting with audiences, which he did with the publication of an essay, "Dianetics, the Evolution of a Science," in the May 1950 issue (Urban, 2011). Although Campbell gave Hubbard a platform to reach an audience, the endorsement of Dianetics by van Vogt gave Hubbard's movement credibility—at least in the minds of science fiction fans. At one point van Vogt even led the Los Angeles branch of the Hubbard Dianetic Research Foundation (Reitman, 2011; Urban, 2011). Additionally, Hubbard actively spoke with and attempted to recruit other luminaries of the time, albeit unsuccessfully, including Aldous Huxley and Robert Heinlein, and he even went so far as to audit Huxley and his wife (Urban, 2011; Wright, 2013).

In the early days of the Dianetics movement, celebrities were not Hubbard's only targets; he also sought to build relationships with the medical community in a bid to build credibility and legitimize Dianetics as a solidly scientific process. Because scientific knowledge is socially constructed, attracting the support of even just a few medical and mental health professionals can help alternative therapies gain acceptance within the medical community (Manca, 2010; Hirschkorn & Bourgeault, 2005). Prior to publishing his essay on Dianetics in *Astounding Science Fiction*, Hubbard sent letters to the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the Gerontological Society, and the American Psychological Association, discussing the findings about his new technology, but all of the medical communities turned him down (The Birth of Dianetics, 2015; Reitman, 2011). One letter from a physician to the editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*

expressed sentiments echoing those of the medical community voicing concern that medically untrained auditors could do harm to those being audited and reduce their chances of recovery (Ravitch, 1951).

Despite the rejections and criticisms from the medical and scientific communities, Hubbard was able to convince some doctors to adopt Dianetic principles. Chief among them was Dr. Joseph Winter, who was the medical director for the Dianetics Research Foundation, and who wrote an introduction (which has been removed in subsequent editions) to *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. However, Winter broke with Hubbard before the practice of Dianetics was incorporated into Scientology, and then wrote a book critical of Hubbard and some of the Dianetics practices (Manca, 2010; Wright, 2013). Many other medical professionals also left the Dianetics movement prior to its incorporation into Scientology (Manca, 2010), but it is likely that their initial participation in the movement encouraged others in the profession or public to follow suit. Thus, Hubbard's initial stab at relationship building, while not lasting, was at least successful in part.

Once the Church of Scientology was founded, Hubbard slowly found some success bringing celebrities into the religion, and the writer William S. Burroughs and American football star John Brodie were two early celebrities to follow Scientology (Davidson, 2013). Burroughs was introduced to Scientology in 1959 by the artist Brion Gysin, and he was so impressed by some of its tenets that he wrote to some of his famous friends, like Allen Ginsberg, encouraging them to go to their local auditor for a reading (Hibbard, 1999; Lardas, 2001). Additionally, after his introduction to the religion, much of Burroughs writing—particularly *The Soft Machine*—highlighted Scientology's foundational concepts (Lardas, 2001). Burroughs eventually became disaffected with the religion and published denunciations of Church policies in the book *Ali's Smile: Naked Scientology*. Brodie was also introduced to Dianetics by a third party as a way to help repair his arm, which had been giving him trouble for several years after breaking it in an accident in 1963 (Jones, 1971). Brodie became a dedicated convert to Scientology following this experience and very vocally discussed his adherence to it with the media; however, he ultimately became disillusioned when some friends were expelled from the Church following an internal power struggle (Sappell & Welkos, 1990).

Given the research reinforcing the impact of celebrity endorsements and their impact on identity formation, it is easy to see why the church would employ a celebrity endorsement and recruitment strategy—not only is the religion legitimized by the joining of high-profile individuals, but also they may intentionally or unintentionally aid in recruiting more people to the faith and increase favorable attitudes to toward it. Hubbard appeared to recognize this as a key promotional strategy, and he actively pursued these endorsements. As noted in the church's *Ability* newsletter in 1955, Hubbard initiated "Project Celebrity" in which he asked readers to help him target certain celebrities and bring them in for auditing sessions to make them aware of how Scientology principles could benefit them (Hubbard, 1955).[1] He rationalized this strategy by stating:

> There are many to whom America and the world listens. On the backs of these are carried most of the enthusiasm on which society runs. It is vital … to put such persons into wonderful condition. … It is obvious what would happen to Scientology if prime communicators benefitting from it would mention it now and then. (Hubbard, 1955, para. 3–4)

Other language in the statement directs followers how to convince the celebrities to join Scientology by following them constantly and not accepting *no* for an answer, and this advice is followed by a list of potential celebrity targets, including Bob Hope, Orson Welles, and other well-known figures of the time.

Though Hubbard's initial stab at celebrity recruitment was only minimally successful, in the decades following the start of the Dianetics movement and the founding of the Church of Scientology, the Church was more successful at recruiting celebrities. In 1970, the church established

[1]The Project Celebrity document was posted to the Xenu.net archive by Robert Vaughn Young (a former high ranking Scientologist) and accepted as legitimate by several prominent media outlets like the *Los Angeles Times*. So, although Xenu.net certainly has an anti-Scientology agenda, this document appears to be legitimate.

the Celebrity Centre International in Los Angeles, which also publishes *Celebrity* magazine, and has since established a network of six other Celebrity Centres throughout the world (Church of Scientology Celebrity Centre International, 2015).

In addition to recruiting celebrities as a PR strategy, Hubbard also directed his followers to purchase very specific mailing lists for the purpose of creating direct mail campaigns to potentially interested parties like "mystical" and "self-betterment" groups (Hubbard, 1991, p. 218). Similarly, Hubbard (1991) saw great value in creating and publishing internal magazines, and he stated that: "The magazine is the talking piece of the org. Without it the org is dumb" (p. 222). These magazines were mainly oriented toward maintaining relationships with those already following Scientology and/or Dianetics, and they helped "sell only those people already sold" (Hubbard, 1991, p. 223). Many other organizations (both for-profit and nonprofit) employ a similar strategy in publishing and sending out magazines to employees or donors, and this has become a key tactic in internal/employee communications campaigns.

Hubbard's favored public relations strategy of one-on-one contact is reiterated throughout his memos to the Church officials. His early recommended tactics reinforce this idea, such as his 1959 "promotion plan," which directs members to facilitate individual contact through the distribution of small calling cards that included their own contact information with promotional messages about Scientology, claiming it is "the bright new answer to Life" (Hubbard, 1991, p. 161). This strategy followed Hubbard's principle, and intuitive public relations industry logic, that an organization must continually remain in the public consciousness in order to maintain its relevance and continue to gain members.

Dianetics and Scientology's emphasis on relationship building through endorsements and individualistic communications are not unique to these organizations and many of these strategies and tactics are seen in use in many organizations today and codified in many basic public relations textbooks. Hubbard's understanding of these techniques certainly contributed to the success of the Church of Scientology.

Issues management and crisis communication

Celebrity endorsement was only one way the Church sought to establish relationships with followers, and early memos from Hubbard ranked the best ways to disseminate and promote the Church's teachings. Although one-on-one contact was noted as the most effective way to build relationships with potential converts, the creation and distribution of books about the religion was a close second. However, Hubbard saw outreach to and speaking with groups as a generally useless strategy, and he viewed newspaper stories and letters to the editors as "more or less a liability and should be avoided" (Hubbard, 1991, p. 167). Additionally, suggestions for handling crises—or opposition—generally failed to embrace what would be considered common public relations practices as they favored attacking opponents. And ultimately, his position on Scientology as an alternative mental health solution meant that his general dislike of psychology impacted his beliefs about how useful public relations could be.

Memos from shortly after the Church of Scientology's founding indicated a departure from generally accepted public relations tactics of speaker's bureaus and media relations. For example, in a reprinted and annotated version of Cutlip and Center's classic *Effective Public Relations* textbook, Hubbard suggested the majority of the chapter "Ecology—The PR environment" should be omitted (Hubbard, 1988). Side notes available in the reprinted version of the book explained: "This text is mass-media oriented and big-business specialized. The chapter not-ises the vital role of personal contact in PR" (Hubbard, 1988, p. 56) and that data presented "overlooks successful small group PR" (Hubbard, 1988, p. 57). Essentially, Hubbard did not believe that he needed the media or broad promotional strategies to share his messages. Instead, he seemed to value theories such as two-step flow and diffusion, which he highlighted and emphasized in *Effective Public Relations*. Although notations are not provided to indicate how he specifically felt about these theories, the emphasis suggests he wants readers to pay attention to the material. The specifically

noted techniques used in this section are opposite his practice of crossing out large swaths of text and challenging what is written with short notes. Arguably, it appears as though he may have interpreted such theories as more personalized methods for reaching audiences with messages that he originated. In a way, it illustrates the notion that he imagined himself as an opinion leader who shared resources with followers, who could then share their knowledge with recruits. For example, Hubbard emphasized the idea that those doing outreach should not attempt to persuade, but should "penetrate" by having an understandable goal and not overwhelming the intended audience with information (Hubbard, 1991). This involved engaging potential recruits one-on-one, for example by having them participate in audits; Hubbard even suggested taking an E-meter to a Boy Scout meeting to test the children so notes could be sent to the parents about their child's results (Hubbard, 1991). Arguably, he viewed this type of personalized communication as a way to know his audiences better than one would if the audience had been evaluated and communicated with at a group level or with a broad campaign (Hubbard, 1988).

The notion that individualized promotion was more valuable than media-driven messaging was also rooted in the fact that he viewed the media as a vehicle for controversy. Among his earliest negative brushes with the media was his failed attempt to reveal Sonya Bianca, a young student from Boston, as the first clear. In August 1950, Hubbard invited the public to attend a rally where he would reveal the first clear—a person who had complete control and recollection of their memories through the power of Dianetic techniques (Miller, 2014). When Bianca failed to answer random questions from the audience—suggesting she did not have perfect recall of her life—Hubbard went on the defensive. Arguing that the stress of the event changed her ability to recall details of her life, he eventually cut the demonstration short and subsequently stopped calling her the first clear (Jacobsen, 1992; Miller, 2014). Because of the negative reaction to the event, it would be another 16 years before Hubbard attempted to present another clear (Hubbard, 1968). Moreso, the backlash he experienced from the failed attempt at revealing the first clear, paired with the fact he felt mass media "was controlled by only a handful (of people) and does not express public opinion" (Hubbard, 1988, p. 62), caused Hubbard to make fewer events open to the public and subsequent media scrutiny (Bainbridge & Stark, 1980). This only seemed to exacerbate issues the organization faced, further increasing his distaste for the media.

Similarly, communication policy letters from Hubbard suggest that some of his primary concerns centered on combatting criticism and, more importantly, protecting his image and the image of the organization. In various writings, he indicated to followers that they should constantly be on alert for reports containing false information that might discredit him or the organization. He even developed the term *suppressive person* to indicate someone "who seeks to suppress other people in their vicinity" (Scientology.org, 2016). However, instead of turning to common stakeholder management or crisis communication strategies to deal with false information or so-called suppressive people, he suggested that followers should go on the offensive to discredit and delegitimize anyone who attempted to tarnish his or the Church's reputation. In one policy letter, he suggested that, "If attacked on some vulnerable point by anyone or anything or any organization, always find or manufacture enough threat against them to cause them to sue for peace" (cited in Reitman, 2011, p. 85). In the following years, he would go on to suggest that all critics of Scientology have criminal pasts and that these pasts should be used against critics and fed to the press (Hubbard, 1967;[2] Miller, 2014). Embracing such strategies generally goes against common crisis communication practices, as it privileges attacking opponents rather than determining an image restoration strategy or crisis response based on the type of damage faced by the organization.

[2]The Critics of Scientology and Targets, Defense documents were posted to the suppressiveperson.org website, which is run by two former Church members, Gerald "Gerry" Armstrong and Caroline Letkeman. Armstrong was previously sued by the Church, and acknowledges that content on the site violates an injunction obtained by the church. However, although suppressiveperson.org has an anti-Scientology agenda similar to xenu.net, the available documents appear to be legitimate scans or reproductions of original policy letters.

Finally, with Scientology considered an alternative to psychiatry and psychology, Hubbard considered the two practices and their related theories to be uninmportant in the realm of communication. In one communications policy letter, Hubbard suggested:

> The names and connections, at this time, of the bitterly opposing enemy are: 1. Psychiatry and psychology (not medicine). 2. The heads of news media who are also directors of psychiatric front groups. 3. A few key political figures in the fields of "mental health" and education. 4. A decline of monetary stability caused by the current planning of bankers who are also directors of psychiatric front organizations [that] would make us unable to function. (Hubbard, 1969, p. 2)

This distate for mental health professions and their proponents is also revealed in his disbelief that communication practices can be informed by psychological principles. In his notes, he literally crossed out all mentions of psychological traits and foundations—particularly related to consumer rationality, attitude formation, specific types of motivations, and persuasion in general—discounting them as proof that public relations was overly reliant on psychological principles (Hubbard, 1988). Instead, he emphasized to his followers that attempts should be made to privilege audience segmentation and the development of public opinion, arguably seeing himself as someone who, as an opinion leader, could bring supporters to his cause. And although practitioners would generally argue that the latter communication practices are grounded in psychological principles, he seemingly interpreted these approaches as being best suited for one-on-one recruitment strategies and image building.

Implications

An evaluation of Church of Scientology documents, personal conversations with Church of Scientology officials, and popular press resources related to the Church suggests that efforts were made to both embrace and eschew current, accepted public relations strategies. Specifically, although the Church embraced certain aspects of image maintenance—such as the use of third party and celebrity endorsements and interpersonal relationship building—its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, also chose to ignore or modify common public relations strategies related to media relations and crisis communication practices.

The intersection of religion and influencers is a key point to understand to fully grasp the reasons for the longevity and prominence of Scientology when compared to other new religious movements. Cashmore (2006) contended that fans may develop relationships with famous figures that often cause a transformation in the fan, which can result in the fan seeing the celebrity as a role model or embracing their behavior and beliefs. Although not all members of the public will adopt a celebrity's religion, the use of celebrity endorsers will generally result in more favorable attitudes from the public toward a brand (Till, 1998). The effects of celebrity endorsements, however, may be moderated by the level of credibility the public assigns to the celebrity, as well as overuse of the celebrity by a brand (Atkin & Block, 1983; Khong Kok & You Li, 2013). Additionally, Chung, Derdenger, and Srinivasan (2013) found that endorsements can actually cause consumers to switch brands. Though these findings are specific to products, their results can be interpreted in a religious context too, where the religion is the product being sold.

Though the idea that Hubbard targeted celebrities to join the Church of Scientology is not a new revelation, what is interesting is that this particular strategy fit into a larger public relations campaign that combined aspects of promotion, influencer seeding, internal communications, events, and aspects of crisis communication and issues management. From viewing internally distributed Scientology documents to examining Hubbard's (1964) notations within the *Effective Public Relations* book, it is clear that he viewed public relations strategy as important to the success of the Church. Later documents from Hubbard (1991) clearly indicate his emphasis on the importance of public relations, by saying "PR is essentially a matter of reaching minds … (and) it's a PR world" (pp. 620–621), however, he clearly finds a lot of faults with the discipline by saying PR has an unsavory history and that it lends itself to perpetuating questionable interests and causes.

Although he did not accept all aspects of public relations, Hubbard clearly accepted enough principles to effectively promote the Church and encourage its members to become familiar with the field's principles by reading reprints of *Effective Public Relations* (Hubbard, 1988). Hubbard's writings on public relations were also extensive enough to warrant the Church's eventual publication of a booklet called *Fundamentals of Public Relations*, which was culled from Hubbard's notes and policy letters and intended to bolster the creation and offering of Scientology-developed public relations training courses.

Though many scholars have employed revisionist approaches to studying historical religious figures and organizations and applied public relations concepts to their actions, the bigger implication for public relations scholarship resulting from this article is the fact that Hubbard's understanding and utilization of public relations strategies and tactics can be clearly documented in his own writing. The findings included in this article clearly cannot be generalized to all religious figures or movements, but they do provide insight into how public relations can be applied in a religious context. Hubbard's role as a religious leader who, regardless of his motivations, understood and employed public relations principles means there is very clear evidence that religious institutions and figures can use these principles as effectively as corporations to improve both their images and recruit followers.

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