

Two-Way Communication: A Win-Win Model for Facing Activist Pressure: A Case Study on McDonalds and Unilever's Responses to Greenpeace

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Introduction

Activists and consumers are increasingly demanding companies act in the best interests of the global society and the environment, therefore a corporation's environmental record is becoming an important factor in maintaining business success. This paper consists of two case studies which examine how Greenpeace, an independent global environmental campaigning organization, targeted major multi-national corporations, McDonalds and Unilever. This multiple case study will examine how these corporations responded to activist pressure and offer prescriptive insight on how corporations can avoid conflict and create mutually beneficial outcomes when responding to activist pressure. The author suggests that if public relations practitioners can create a dialogue with environmentalist publics through two-way communication the profession of public relations can be a guiding force for creating more sustainable business practices, fostering corporate social and environmental responsibility, and creating positive social change. This paper will discuss changing attitudes toward environmental issues, the credibility of corporate sustainability, and symmetrical communication. By studying the use of two-way dialogue in the practice of corporate communications with environmental activist organizations these case studies will help to test the real world validity of theoretical propositions about two-way symmetrical communication (L. Grunig 1992).

This paper will examine two cases in which Greenpeace highlighted the environmental practices of companies who were purchasing rapidly expanding agricultural commodities from parts of the developing world being deforested for agricultural expansion. Rather than directing its campaigns on the suppliers, Greenpeace chose to focus their efforts on McDonalds and Unilever, large highly visible international corporations using the raw materials in their supply chains (Greenpeace, 2006). Greenpeace called attention to the roles of these two companies in destructive environmental practices and asked them to take action (Greenpeace 2006, Howden 2006). By choosing to work with Greenpeace both companies were able to help create moratoriums on destructive practices causing deforestation and pressure suppliers and producers to change their environmental policies (Greenpeace 2008, Howden 2006). These case studies will demonstrate how two-way communication can be used to avoid conflict, foster mutually beneficial relationships between companies and activist publics, and converge seemingly conflicting ideologies. This research will also add to the scholarly understanding of how two-way communication and symmetrical communication works in a real world context.

Corporate Sustainability

News stories have often portrayed environmentalists and developmentalists as being engaged in an ideological battle that cannot be reconciled (Killingsworth and Palmer, 2002). In their book *Ecospeak* Killingsworth and Palmer (2002) argued that the mass media has created an oversimplified dichotomy of environmentalists, "who seek long-term protection regardless of short-term economic costs" and developmentalists "who seek long-term economic gain

regardless of short term economic costs” (9). Although the media may represent developmentalism and environmentalism as two opposing sides, that does not mean individuals make a value judgment and simply choose one side over the other. Survey research by Dunlap and Van Liere (1978) thirty years ago could not place individuals’ views in black and white terms and identified “a surprising degree of acceptance” of both the environmentalist, New Environmental Paradigm (NEP), as well as acceptance of the developmentalist, Dominant Social Paradigm by individuals among the general public (12). This study used a Likert-type scale to survey the general public and a group of known environmentalists about crucial aspects of what they identified as the NEP which addressed limits to growth, the balance of nature, and anti-anthropocentrism (Dunlap and Van Liere 1978, 12) Killingsworth and Palmer (1992) examined a wide range of perspectives regarding role of nature in society and identified a need for “a generally accessible narrative” to reconcile conflicting demands and bridge the knowledge gap to recondition the discussion of environmental issues to broader contexts and audiences (21, 277).

In recent years the award-winning documentary “An Inconvenient Truth” and rapidly rising gas prices have sparked the mainstream media’s awareness of environmental issues. Instead of becoming activists many people are showing their commitment to environmental issues with their checkbooks. A study of students and the general public in the United Kingdom by found that attitudes, rather than socio-demographic traits, behavior, or environmental knowledge, may be most consistent predictor of pro-environmental purchasing behavior (Schlegelmilch, Bohlen, and Diamantopoulos 1996, 49, 51). Market research has identified 68 percent of the U.S. population as “Light Greens,” who buy green products sometimes, and 12 percent of the U.S. population as “True Greens,” who regularly look for ‘green’ products (Hanas 2007, 3).

Rather than viewing sustainability as contradictory to goals of corporations, sustainable development aims “to meet the needs and aspirations of both current and future societies” (Prexl and Signter 2006, 11). Prexl and Signtzer (2006) view corporate sustainability as “a new management concept which poses an alternative to the traditional models of wealth maximization” which is committed to “the planned and strategic management process of working towards a balance of economic, social and environmental values” (2).

John Paluszek (2007), Senior Counsel at Ketchum, said that corporate sustainability and corporate social responsibility are not only a defensive commitment but also an opportunity because cause related marketing and a commitment to corporate sustainability can give a business an edge over competitors. Overall the concept of corporate sustainability calls for a change in corporate attitudes which Crognale (1992) identified as the need for an integrated approach which combines “a sound environmental program; a skilled environmental manager to oversee this program; and a willingness of the corporation’s public relations department to divulge more about the company’s environmental program” (191). The concept of corporate sustainability suggests while making positive changes is good for the image and sales of a company, a lack of responsibility for environmental issues can be damaging to the company’s image and bottom line.

Prexl and Signitzer (2006) argued the public relations department is best suited to communicate about issues of sustainability and corporate sustainability communications can help a company work towards “a balance of economic, social and environmental values” by “enhancing trust and credibility amongst customers by positioning the company as a sustainable organization with sustainable products, using sustainable products to build relationships with customers through marketing, and can contribute to the general communication about the issues

of sustainable development by empowering the general public” (2, 6-7). Most importantly Prexl and Signitzer (2006) pointed out the role of the public relations practitioner as mediator, they cited the high conflict potential of corporate sustainability due to “various stakeholders having differing interests in the company’s sustainability performance,” such as investors interested in increased return rates and activists groups demanding environmental reform (16). In order to establish trust and credibility among stakeholders, advocacy groups, and skeptical ‘green’ consumers more companies and corporate communicators are looking beyond marketing and advertising and creating sustainability reports, engaging in stakeholder dialogues, and creating information campaigns (Bernhart and Slater 2007; Prexl and Signitzer 2006).

When addressing criticism from activists and NGOs issues of credibility should be a key concern, research from the Edelman Trust Barometer (2007) has indicated that the public believes NGOs are very credible sources of information and believe NGOs are more credible than big corporations (7). Both Carey and Arndt (2007) and Gettler (2007) discuss a new trend of businesses and NGOs creating alliances, as companies are beginning to view working with NGOs as a way to help their public image and boost their credibility as well as improve their bottom line. Businesses can adopt more socially responsible corporate images by working with activists who criticize them and inviting them in to help fix problems, employing activists and NGOs as consultants, and engaging in “corporate activism” which can help avoid conflict and increase a company’s credibility (Carey and Arndt 2007; Gettler 2007).

Creating a Dialogue

Numerous texts and articles in business, public relations, and marketing point to a need for and the importance of companies, and their public relations departments, creating a dialogue with environmental activists and citizens but there is little agreement as to what form this dialogue should take. Although creating a “meaningful dialogue” is often advocated, a 1992 study by L. Grunig, in which 34 in-depth case studies were conducted on public relations behavior regarding conflict with activist groups, found that creating a meaningful dialogue and balanced two-way symmetrical communication was the rarest approach used in dealing with activist pressure and has been a largely untested strategy (514). In less than half of the cases action was taken as direct result of activist pressure and that action was often directed a members of the public not associated with the activists or in the form of one-way communication, such as press releases (L. Grunig 1992). After examining various strategies organizations used when dealing with activist pressure L. Grunig (1992) and found all but the two-way symmetrical model to be ineffective (525). L. Grunig (1992) maintained “the research inherent in this model allows for the crucial proactive, rather than reactive, public relations” which “should eliminate any sustained, bitter social divisiveness” (514).

Unlike one-way communication which disseminates information through monologue, two-way communication exchanges information through dialogue (Grunig and Grunig 1992). Bernays originated the asymmetrical approach which is characterized by “gathering information from target publics in order to devise effective message strategies” which may be used to persuade or manipulate publics (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig 1995, 41). While the unbalanced asymmetrical model attempts to change the public, the symmetrical model attempts to achieve balance by adjusting the relationship between organizations and publics by focusing on dispute resolution to negotiate mutually beneficial outcomes (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig 1995, 41; Grunig and Grunig 1992, 289). According to Grunig and Grunig (1992) the two-way symmetrical model is not only the most ethical approach to public relations, this ethical approach

is also the “model most effective in meeting organizational goals” (308). By creating channels of communication before controversy begins and keeping open channels of communication activists are more likely to trust the organization especially when a possibility of compromise is emphasized (L. Grunig 1992, 526). Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995) noted excellent communications departments use both the asymmetrical and symmetrical models, which they concluded make up a single mixed-motive model combining the “short-term use of asymmetrical practices within the context of a broad symmetrical philosophy” (51). Heath (2006) lends support for the mixed-motive model, he asserted that issues management is a management function which at its best promotes stewardship through dialogue and collaboration, for Heath when both parties on sides of a debate use persuasion, symmetry is “best defined by the ability of ideas to sustain themselves under public discourse” (93). Karlberg (1996) suggested that in order to truly achieve symmetry the resources of both sides of a debate must be equal and research should seek to discover “cost-effective symmetrical public relations opportunities and strategies” to be utilized by “resource-poor segments of the population trying to engage the media or enter into public discourse” (274).

Research Questions

It is the purpose of these case studies to show that the field of public relations has undergone many changes since 1992 when L. Grunig did a series of 32 case studies on corporations’ public relations behavior in responding to criticism from activists and found most Grunig companies did not respond to activist pressure or used only one-way approaches. Where L. Grunig (1992) found little evidence of public relations departments effectively using two-way responses to activist pressure, she believed that this would be the most effective method. Although the two-way symmetrical model often becomes more of a mixed-motive model in practice these two case studies will seek to demonstrate how positive outcomes can be achieved when companies create a two-way dialogue with activists (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig 1995). It is the view of the author that the practice of public relations is an evolving concept and the two-way symmetrical model is a teeter-totter that is slowly moving from being unequally balanced on the side of corporate and government interest and is moving toward a more balanced center. Therefore when L. Grunig (1992) found few instances of two-way communication when focusing on situations where practitioners were dealing with activist pressure these cases may suggest that the fruitfulness of two-way communication would be better understood if researchers examine cases of conflict being avoided through the uses of two-way communication.

Although Greenpeace was critical of both McDonalds and Unilever initially, they were quick to praise the companies when they came to the table to discuss the issues Greenpeace had with their suppliers and chose to help put pressure on suppliers and producers to change. These case studies will seek to understand how international NGOs like Greenpeace are learning to play on relationships in the interconnected global economy. Both case studies will demonstrate how working with activist groups who are criticizing the company and engaging in a dialogue can not only repair image damage but also garner good publicity and improve a company’s public image. By examining what happens when corporations move from not responding or using one-way communication with activists to a more two-way dialogue these case studies will offer prescriptive insight for corporations confronting activist pressure and allow the business and scholarly community develop best practices for dealing with activist criticism. This research is useful to both the business community and the scholarly community in public relations. It will

help the business community better understand how the mainstream public's changing environmental consciousness is affecting companies' business practices, communication strategies, and relationships with environmentalist organizations and help scholars better understand the real world applications of two-way symmetrical communications, on which there has been little research.

McDonalds Case Study

Businesses in the global market are linked through the complex systems of interconnected relationships of conglomerate organizations, suppliers, manufacturers and retailers. Activist organizations like Greenpeace are learning to play on these relationships in order to get companies they believe are engaging in harmful environmental practices to change. In several campaigns Greenpeace has traced the supply chain of raw materials to manufacturers and retailers calling attention to their role in destructive practices and putting pressure on them to do something about it. In the summer of 2006 the world saw the effectiveness of this strategy when McDonald's partnered with Greenpeace after the organization's three year investigation showed that chicken McNuggets being sold in Europe had been fed on soy grown in deforested areas of the Amazon rainforest. This partnership led to a landmark moratorium on the purchase of Brazilian soy grown on newly deforested land.

Soy, corn, and many other export crops grown in the United States are genetically modified. Biotech foods are unpopular and have been banded in some countries in Europe which created a niche for non-modified soy that allowed Brazil to become the world's largest exporter of soy (Kaufman, 2007). As Brazilian growers and international soy traders seized this opportunity soy production quickly overtook logging and cattle ranching as the biggest source of deforestation in the Amazon (Greenpeace International, April 6, 2006, 21). Although carbon dioxide from rainforests is a vital check on greenhouse emissions, deforestation accounts for 20 percent of greenhouse gas emissions (Greenpeace, April 2, 2008, 1). Three quarters of the recent deforestation in the Amazon basin occurred illegally as state-owned reserves were infiltrated by loggers and ranchers and deforested then sold to soy farmers who intensively farmed the soil (Howden, July 17, 2006, 2). Not only did few of the farmers have legal titles to their land, Brazilian laws which require agricultural development be limited to 20 percent of a farmer's land leaving the remaining 80 percent as forest also were ignored (Greenpeace International April 6, 2006, 27; Lawrence and Vidal 2006, 1). Using satellite images, previously unreleased government documents, and undercover monitoring Greenpeace campaigners conducted a three year investigation into the Brazilian soy trade entitled "Eating Up the Amazon" which implicated Cargill and other multi-national soy export companies in illegal and unethical deforestation, land-grabbing, slavery, and violence in the Amazon Basin and traced their connections to major UK food companies. (Greenpeace April 6, 2006, 5, 27-35).

Despite ongoing criticism from locals, conservationists, and NGOs Cargill's responses remained defensive until they were pressured by suppliers. Through press releases and its spokeswoman Laurie Johnson, Cargill responded to criticism regarding its role in deforestation claiming the land in question had already deforested (Lawrence and Vidal 2006). Cargill has responded to all criticism by insisting they are essential to development and economic growth in this impoverished region of Brazil (Howden July 26, 2006). In May of 2006 Cargill published a five page report in which it agreed that the rainforest should be preserved, Brazilian law should be obeyed, and illegal practices should be eradicated but did not accept any responsibility for the allegations and critically fired back at Greenpeace. Cargill's response argued that they are

working with other NGOs toward insuring compliance with the Brazilian Forest Code, that deforestation in the region would be worse if Cargill was not there, and emphasized the companies' good works in the community of Santarem (Cargill 2006). Cargill claimed most of the soy going through the facility in Santarem was grown outside of the Amazon and that Greenpeace had no proof that they bought soy from farmers using slave labor (Cargill 2006). Cargill also accused Greenpeace of being hypocritical because the organization is critical of genetically modified (GM) soy and the soy operation in the Amazon region is dedicated to non-GM soy which is more labor intensive and less profitable for farmers to grow allowing the poor in the region to take over a niche others may not want (Cargill 2006).

It was not until Cargill and other multi-national soy exporters were under pressure from McDonald's and other major UK retailers that the industry's attitude toward the issue began to change. Cargill also owns British-based Sun Valley foods which supplies major clients such as McDonald's and Morrisons supermarkets with processed chicken products that are sold throughout the UK and Europe (Howden, July 17, 2006). Through their investigation Greenpeace traced Amazon grown soy into the supply chains of McDonalds, Morrisons, and other major companies in operating Europe including KFC, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, and Unilever (Greenpeace April 6, 2006).

After Greenpeace's report was released in early April 2006 Greenpeace volunteers in chicken suits protested at several of McDonald's restaurants in the UK. The fast food giants immediately took action, met with members of Greenpeace, and agreed to get Amazon soy out of its chicken feed. The company quickly formed an alliance with other UK retailers to put pressure on the soy suppliers to stop sourcing soy from the Amazon (Greenpeace International, July 25, 2006; Howden, July 26, 2006). On McDonald's UK website the company thanked Greenpeace for bringing attention to what the company called "a social responsibility issue for our supply chain" and asked to meet with them. Karen Van Bergen, McDonald's UK vice president told *The Guardian*, "McDonald's has had a long-standing policy not to source beef from recently deforested areas in the Amazon rainforest, so it was important to us to bring soy sourcing in line with this policy" (Lawrence and Vidal 2006, 2).

As a result of the alliance with Greenpeace, McDonald's and leading UK supermarkets put pressure on their multinational soy suppliers who signed two year moratorium on buying soy from newly deforested areas of the rainforest on July 24 of 2006, not quite three months after the investigation was published (Greenpeace International 2008; Howden July 26, 2006, McDonalds UK 2008). Under the terms of the moratorium the soy exporting multinationals agreed to work with government agencies and NGOs to set up a monitoring system to insure that soy is not coming from newly deforested land and to insure that Brazilian law is being complied with (Cargill 2006, Greenpeace International 2008, Howden July 26, 2006).

Greenpeace and the UK and national news media praised McDonalds for playing a very positive role in the campaign and gave the organization a lot of credit for the moratorium (Greenpeace International, July 25, 2006; Howden July 26, 2006 Kaufman 2007; Lawrence and Vidal; Sauven 2006). According to Greenpeace's website the purpose of the moratorium was to stop the destruction until a working group of soy traders, producers, NGOs, and government officials could create an action plan to insure legality, governance, and long term protection of the Amazon rainforest (2008). Greenpeace's website calls the moratorium a "historic deal that impacts far beyond the golden arches" and sent a message to suppliers that whether or not they have an excuse or no raw material that causes embarrassment will not be tolerated" (Greenpeace International July 25, 2006, Lawrence and Vidal 2006, 1). In an August 2, 2006 article he wrote

for *The Guardian*, John Sauven, campaigns director for Greenpeace wrote that the moratorium demonstrated, “the influence consumers can have on events thousands of miles away, and the power that can be brought to bear when business is willing to apply it’s might to the greatest problems faced by our species and our world” (2).

Since the moratorium, Cargill farmers in two Amazon municipalities can only sell to Cargill if they promise to plant trees on deforested land (Downie 2007). Cargill is paying the Nature Conservancy, and international NGO, \$390,000 to oversee the Responsible Soy Project, a sustainable soy development program which seeks to find solutions to bringing farms in compliance with Brazil’s 80/20 Forest Code (Downie 2007). Conservationists hope that if this program is successful it could become a model of sustainable development all over Brazil (Downie 2007). According to an April 2, 2008 Greenpeace press release the moratorium is holding well and monitoring of the area has shown that no soy produced last year came from deforested areas (Greenpeace International 2008).

Although the reaction Cargill issued in May took little responsibility for the allegations in Greenpeace’s report when the moratorium was announced Lori Johnson Cargill’s vice president told *The Independent*, “This is critical first step but there is much more to be done” (Howden July 26, 2006, 2). Shortly after the moratorium in August of 2006 Cargill released a feature article in *Cargill News* about the controversy and the moratorium. The article attempts to illustrate how the company is dedicated to developing the local community and helping farmers become more sustainable and claims the company had already been working toward sustainability goals with NGOs before the July 2006 moratorium (Dienhart 2006). The article also claims that Greenpeace and other conservationists in the developed world don’t care about economic development for the many people living in Amazon and that soy production is not the biggest cause of deforestation in the Amazon (Dienhart 2006). Although Cargill never admitted to any wrong doing and refuted many of the claims in the 2006 report Johnson’s comments in a 2007 *Washington Post* article indicated a positive attitude toward the moratorium stating, “We really didn’t see an immediate problem with the soy farmers, but we could see how it could grow into a big problem in the future. The moratorium will give everyone time to plan how to better control the farming and protect the forest” (Kaufman, 2).

Greenpeace knew it would be difficult to successfully pressure Cargill and other soy-multinationals into action by focusing the exporters alone. Changing tactics and implicating the soy producer’s clients in Europe and focusing on awareness and acceptance of their position among European news media and consumers proved to be a successful strategy. Greenpeace achieved their goal of ending deforestation by getting clients to pressure Cargill and other soy multi-nationals into adopting more sound environmental and social responsibility principles. Although in this case McDonald’s response to Greenpeace was more reactive than pro-active McDonald’s turned what could have been a reputation damaging situation into an opportunity to improve its image regarding its corporate environmental and social responsibility. After receiving praise for their role in the Amazon soy moratorium McDonald’s in the UK have continued to seize this reputation building opportunity by taking more steps toward creating a “greener” company. McDonald’s in the UK are now using organic milk and free-range eggs sourced from UK farmers, switching to Rainforest Alliance Certified coffee, and using biodiesel from its own cooking oil for its delivery fleets (McDonald’s UK, July 27, 2007). This case is one example of how the short term goals of economic prosperity and long term goals of sustaining the planet for future generations can come together when industry makes a commitment to

environmental principals and corporate sustainability by creating a dialogue with environmentalist publics through two-way communication.

Unilever Case Study

In April of 2008 Greenpeace revisited the strategies used in their Brazilian Soya campaign in a similar campaign which targeted palm oil production in Indonesia. Greenpeace's campaign goal was to stop the destruction of valuable rainforests and peatlands in Indonesia which their report "Burning up Borneo" claimed to be damaging to the local economy, endangered orangutans, and the global climate (Greenpeace, April 21, 2008, 2). Instead of directing their campaign at the palm oil suppliers they chose to target one of the largest users of palm oil in the world, Unilever, the company behind international brands like Dove, Lipton, Knorr, Blue Band, and Suave (Greenpeace April 22, 2008; Unilever). On April 21, 2008 Greenpeace activists occupied the production lines of a Unilever factory near Liverpool and activists dressed as orangutans hung banners and passed out flyers at Unilever headquarters in London, the Netherlands, and Rome (Greenpeace April 21, 2008). Greenpeace also sent activists in orangutan costumes to three public relations and marketing firms that work with Unilever (Magee 2008, 1). The protest actions coincided with the release of the Greenpeace report "Burning up Borneo" and also included a viral video called "Dove Onslaught(er)" and billboards and flyers mimicking the Dove campaign for real beauty with photos of orangutans and generated a lot of media attention and tens of thousands of protest emails to Unilever from around the world (Greenpeace International April 21, 2008, 1-2; Greenpeace International).

On May 9, 2008, just two weeks after the campaign began, Greenpeace campaigners were invited to meet with senior executives at Unilever headquarters and the company agreed to support an immediate moratorium on deforestation for palm oil in South East Asia, aggressively lobby other major palm oil purchasers like Kraft, Nestle, and Cadburys as well as the Indonesian government to support the moratorium. Greenpeace initially wanted Unilever to stop doing business with their suppliers who were deforesting rainforest and peatlands but the company and Greenpeace reached an agreement that Unilever would put pressure on these companies to change their practices, support the moratorium, and adopt new sustainability certification through the Roundtable on Responsible Palm Oil (RSPO) (Greenpeace International; Unilever Global Site). Unilever's website and a video the company released shortly after the launch of the Greenpeace campaign said the company had gone beyond what Greenpeace had asked them to do and will begin sourcing 100% certified sustainable palm oil by 2015 (Unilever Global Site).

In 2007 Greenpeace detailed the destruction of the world's deepest peat beds located in the province of Riau in Sumatra, which contain an estimated 14.6 billion tons of carbon (18). The report claimed the increasing clearing, draining, and burning of peatland resulted in 1.8 billion tons of carbon dioxide being released annually causing four percent of all annual global greenhouse gas emissions, which has given Indonesia the third highest man made climate emissions in the world (17, 23). Greenpeace's 2007 report "Cooking the Climate" also detailed how deforestation is exacerbated by the palm oil trading and processing methods commodities companies who are members of the RSPO and supplying the biggest food manufactures in the world such as Unilever, Nestle, Kraft, and Procter and Gamble (44). In the report the RSPO acknowledged to Greenpeace that RSPO members such as Cargil, ADM, Sinar Mars, and Golden Hope's trading and refining processes which indiscriminately purchase and blend oil making traceability impossible (Greenpeace Nov. 8, 2007, 44). Unilever is head of the RSPO and purchases three percent of the total world palm oil production mainly from suppliers like Cargil,

ADM, Sinar Mars, and Golden Hope (Greenpeace Nov. 8, 2007, 42). Palm oil is also a major source of biodiesel, along with soy and rapeseed oil, which has been driving the expansion of palm oil plantations in Indonesia, and companies like Cargill and Sinar Mars are expanding their trade and buying more palm oil to be refined into biodiesel (58). The reports suggested a temporary ban for forest clearance and peatland degradation and for a global funding mechanism for avoiding deforestation to be part of the post-2012 phase of the Kyoto protocol and urged the Indonesian government and palm oil suppliers and purchasers to support a moratorium on deforestation of rainforests and peatlands (Greenpeace Nov. 8, 2007, 63-65).

When the “Cooking our Climate” report came out in 2007 Unilever responded to the news media saying they were “looking for a sustainable solution” and said the company “attempted to ensure oil was grown in an environmentally responsible way,” but those efforts had “been made harder by the rush to biofuels” (Forbes 2007, 1; The Toronto Star 2007, 1). A year later little action had been taken by the RSPO and the Indonesian government. Greenpeace then narrowed the focus of their campaign for ending deforestation from palm oil on to Unilever.

In their second report, “Burning up Borneo,” Greenpeace provided new evidence that “it is Unilever’s own palm oil traders and producers (themselves RSPO members) who are leading ‘aggressive expansion’ of the sector that results in the devastation of the last remaining orangutan rainforest and peatland habitat in Borneo” (Greenpeace April 21, 2008, 2). The report claimed half of Unilever’s palm oil supply came from Indonesia and criticized the company for failing to lead the palm oil industry toward sustainable practices through its purchasing power or through its leadership role in the RSPO (Greenpeace April 21, 2008, 2). An April 21, 2008 press release on the Greenpeace International website about why Unilever was being targeted by their campaign called the RSPO “little more than a greenwashing operation” and said although Unilever’s website paints the company as both environmentally and socially responsible “when it comes to palm oil the reality is very different” (1).

Shortly after the protest Unilever put a video on its website discussing the problem of deforestation as well as the problem of conversion of land for biofuels and asserted that the company is on the same side as Greenpeace and was happy to support the moratorium on deforestation in Indonesia and was committed to go above the NGOs expectations and commit to sourcing 100 percent certified sustainable palm oil by 2015. The video asserted that the company believes 80 percent of the palm oil they were using came from sustainable plantations that had not yet been certified. The video stated a desire for Greenpeace to continue to keep tabs on Unilever’s suppliers, to get support from government organizations, and to sort out the certification process to guarantee sustainable palm oil.

Currently Unilever’s website features information about ‘certified sustainable palm oil’ prominently and discusses sustainable palm oil certification, the Greenpeace protest, and how the company has agreed to take action (Unilever Global Site, 2). The website also discussed the November 2008 celebration of the delivery of the first batch of certified sustainable palm oil, however the site also admitted that on the same day as the celebration Greenpeace issued a report on how the same supplier, United Plantations, had violated RSPO sustainability standards elsewhere (Unilever Global Site, 4). Unilever’s Director for Sustainable Agriculture, Jan Kees Vis, and President of the RSPO was quoted on reacting positively to the criticism saying, “It is vital that organizations like Greenpeace can challenge the process at all stages” (Unilever Global Site, 4). Unilever’s Global Site also contains a lot of information about the RSPO and features information about the company’s sustainable palm oil plantations in Ghana as well information

about the company's commitment to sourcing other sustainable and animal friendly agricultural products such as fish, eggs, tomatoes, soy, and Rainforest Alliance certified Lipton tea.

The announcement of Unilever's decision to drastically alter their businesses practices in response to Greenpeace sparked a lot of media coverage as well as articles discussing Unilever and Greenpeace in regard Corporate Social Responsibility in marketing claims as well as how companies should respond to activist criticism in the public relations an advertising trade media. In an article for *Advertising Age* Jack Neff discussed how companies in the forefront of ethical marketing like Unilever, who were at the top of ethical and sustainability indexes in 2007, and Procter and Gamble Co. with its Children's Safe Drinking Water program, have become popular targets for Greenpeace and discusses how one ethical claim can cause consumers and activists to criticize a company on other fronts (1-2). The May 2, 2008 issue of PR Week discussed the tactics Greenpeace used by dressing as orangutans and ambushing Ogilvy, Jackie Cooper, and Lexus PR, three communications agencies that work for Unilever, to urge the agencies to put pressure on their client (Magee 2008, 1). In Magee's (2008) article Lexus CEO Margo Raggett was critical of Greenpeace for showing up unannounced calling the protest action "inappropriate and, to a large degree, pointless" saying people would pay more attention to the tactics used than the issue and that Greenpeace activists could have made an appointment to discuss concerns (1).

Although Greenpeace's attention getting tactics may not seem conducive to creating a dialogue with big corporations, their tactics were very successful in getting the companys to come to the table and discuss the issues. Greenpeace's attention getting tactics put highly visible pressure on the Unilever, and the public relations and marketing firms they hire to manage their image, and sent them a message that their ethics and accountability will be publicly judged. Although their tactics got a lot of attention they were successful in calling attention to the issue as well. Rather than using one way communication in the form of a statement blaming the biofuels industry for their inability to ensure that the palm oil they were buying was not linked to destructive environmental practices, Unilever might have been able to avoid Greenpeace's attention getting protests by inviting members of theNGO to their headquarters and beginning a dialogue with them after their first report implicated them in deforestation in 2007.

Discussion

It may not be realistic for NGOs to ask communication agencies to put pressure on their clients to have more social responsible business practices, although it should be necessary for any company, especially any company that is trying to promote a socially responsible image, to ask its public relations department to be pro-active in identifying critics and potential critics and help them to respond to those critics. Although Unilever should have done more to address concerns about their role in deforestation sooner, they were able to use Greenpeace's campaign as an opportunity to reassert themselves as a leader in the solution to the problem and affirm their commitment to sustainability. If Unilever chose not engage with Greenpeace two-way communication and chose to respond with one-way communication or not respond at all it is very likely they would have suffered much more damage to their reputation. As long as Unilever can make good on their promises and continue to work toward sustainability in all of their brands Unilever's public images as a socially and environmentally responsible company should continue to grow.

Both McDonalds and Unilever were able to turn criticism which could have been damaging to their image and their bottom line into an opportunity to assert their commitment to sustainable businesses practices by engaging their critics in a dialogue and taking action. As

Unilever had positioned their company as socially and environmentally responsible before coming under criticism it is arguable that Unilever had more at stake and therefore less of a choice about engaging Unilever in a two-way communication and taking action than McDonalds. Both cases provide examples of L. Grunig's (1992) theory that two-way symmetrical communication is the best way to create a win-win situation when responding activist publics in practice and also demonstrates how now, more than ever before, activist groups have the ability to make an impact on organizations with far greater resources.

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