

Communicating Community at Tesla Motors: Maintaining Corporate Values in
Blogging Communities

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Academic Abstract

Knowing how organizations engage employees can help researchers and practitioners better understand how to effectively communicate and engage employees to create an efficient and collaborative work environment. This research sought to discover if Tesla Motors strategically communicated values from its *Master Plan* through company blogs to create an imagined community. The theory of imagined communities provided the theoretical foundation. This research used a content analysis of words and phrases within Tesla's *Master Plan* and 2015 corporate blog. Although the blog provided some indication that it was communicating values, this study concluded that the *Master Plan* did not provide enough value information to support a strategic imagined community. This study does, however, imply that imagined communities can be used in public relations research.

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General Audience Abstract

Knowing how organizations engage employees can help researchers and practitioners better understand how to effectively communicate and engage employees to create an efficient and collaborative work environment. This research sought to discover if Tesla Motors intentionally communicated values from its *Master Plan* through company blog posts to create an imagined community. This research used a content analysis of words and phrases within Tesla's *Master Plan* and 2015 corporate blog. Although the blog communicated some values, this study concluded that the *Master Plan* did not provide enough information to support a strategic imagined community.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	3
Community	3
Community Participation	7
Organizational Community.....	9
Organizational Culture and Climate	9
Organizational Blogging.....	11
Chapter 3: Methods.....	15
Chapter 4: Results.....	19
Chapter 5: Discussion	20
Limitations and Future Research	25
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	27
References.....	29
Appendix.....	34
Table 1: Comparison of Values in Tesla Corporate Documents	34
Figure 1: McDonald and Gandz (1991) Value Definitions and Synonyms.....	35

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past 20 years, technology has changed the way humans communicate. Social media have allowed people from around the world to communicate and build relationships without ever having to meet in person (Kavoura, 2014). Social media have enabled people to virtually join groups from an almost limitless array of special interests. An automobile enthusiast, for example, would traditionally be limited to his surrounding geographical location to find other car enthusiasts. Social media, however, have allowed him to interact with others of similar interests around the world through networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram), blogging sites (WordPress or Blogger), or forums (Reddit). Members of these social media groups form a community of highly involved people who both consume and produce content within their communication networks (Marwick & Boyd, 2010).

Being active within a community has become an expectation in every aspect of life, including the workplace (Lee, Hwang, & Lee, 2006). To create a community within the workplace, organizations like Tesla Motors develop philosophy statements; these statements communicate the values an organization prioritizes (Ledford, Wendenhof, & Strahley, 1995). Tesla's main philosophy statement is its *Master Plan*. It was created by board chairman (now CEO) Elon Musk to share the company's vision for the company and encourage stakeholders to join its cause.

This study sought to discover if Tesla strategically communicated values from its *Master Plan* through company blog posts to create an imagined community. Because many of Tesla's

employees work around the world, communities are “imagined,” or as Anderson (1983) states, conceptual rather than location-based. This research explored if Tesla’s blogs provided employees information about company values through the repeated use of strategically placed words and if the intentional use of information constantly reminded employees of Tesla’s values.

As a military veteran, I learned that the “feeling” of belonging and participating within a community helps members think their participation is significant. The belonging and participation I learned in the U.S. Marine Corps inspired me to focus my research on how companies like Tesla create and maintain communities through community integration. Integrating, or joining, into a community requires its members to internalize the community’s values (Cohen, 1985). However, knowing what the community values is not enough for integration; the new member must internalize the value within his or her personal values. If an organization, for example, valued quality, the organization would want new members to value the quality of their work because to give quality to customers, the organization needs quality to be valued by employees in their own work. The strategic communication of values is what I intend to discover by looking at Tesla Motors.

Tesla Motors was founded in July 2003 by engineers Martin Eberhard and Marc Tarpenning. The company has since revolutionized automotive manufacturing by introducing the first fully electric motor vehicle that would compete with other high-end models such as the Lotus Elise. Tesla’s goal is to eliminate the need for gasoline for fully electric automobiles. To accomplish this goal, Tesla Motor’s then-chairman Elon Musk wrote in his 2006 *Master Plan*, found on the company’s website, that the company would first “build a sports car,” then, “use that money to build an affordable car,” and finally, “use that money to build an even more affordable car.” During the process, Musk claimed that Tesla would accomplish these goals

while keeping the vehicles fully electric. Since 2006, Tesla has both expanded its inventory and completed its first step of the *Master Plan*. As of July 2016, Musk, who is now Tesla's CEO, released "Part Deux" of the *Master Plan*. The second part elaborates on the company's push to speed up eliminating vehicle emissions through battery storage, a further expanded product line, and automated driving to make traveling safer.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review explores community, how the community concept does not require a location, and how individuals integrate into and participate in communities. The review will then apply the concept of "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) to the organizational context. Finally, the review will explore blogging and how the social media platform is used to build relationships and encourage community. Blogging offers a unique medium for organizations to directly or indirectly reach their employees (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Blogging also provides organizations the ability to build relationships with their readers by using more humanized, intimate language, which helps organizations create community.

Community

According to Cohen (1985), community is an easily understood concept among people in their everyday lives, but to social scientists, it is a more difficult concept to define. Scholars like Christensen and Livenson (2003) define community as something that is meant to be experienced and is at the core of being human. In contrast, Park (1929) states that, although communities transcend official boundaries, they are location-based. For example, a farmer would not technically live within a governing community, but he or she could be part of a community that has shared social ties and interests, such as churches or fraternal organizations. Scholars also define community as a group of people working together on shared concerns such as activism,

appealing to community leaders, or both (Stamm, Emig, & Hesse, 1997). While shared concerns, social ties, and interests may create a community, historically community was limited to face-to-face interactions and a geographic location (Christensen & Levinson, 2003; Park, 1929).

Anderson (1983) changed that thinking. He proposed that community was a broader concept. It applies to the wider sense of public participation instead of a specific location or face-to-face interaction. Anderson explained that members of these “imagined” communities “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). In its smallest form, an imagined community consists of individuals who will never meet personally but share a common set of values with like-minded individuals.

Stamm (1988) agreed that communities no longer needed to be tied to specific locations. The Internet brought the ability to create virtual communities through social networks, websites, blogs, and forums. These communities were metaphorical rather than spatial (Graham, 1998; Kavoura, 2014). Because of this evolution of the community concept, I posit that community is a group of individuals who share values and work toward a shared goal (Christensen & Levinson, 2003; Park, 1929; Stamm et al., 1997).

Before governing bodies created official communities, communities existed through face-to-face interactions of shared values. Because community now reaches beyond an individual’s local environment into a virtual space, capturing the essence of community requires identifying its socially constructed boundaries and commonalities. These differentiate the community’s members from those who are not (Cohen, 1985; Hodgett, 2003). Cohen (1985) claims that, unless taught, boundaries are difficult for outsiders to understand. Because boundaries can be taught, researchers need to learn about a community’s boundaries to study that community

objectively. Hodgett (2003) complicates the study of boundaries by stating that the constant renegotiation of boundaries makes objectivity difficult. Cohen (1985) tries to ease this difficulty by declaring that symbols, such as the peace sign and the Christian cross, are a better means to recognize how a community may express itself. Symbols, although sometimes abstract, provide the researcher a manifestation of values.

Values are things an organization finds important or hold in high regard (“Value,” n.d.), or as Schneider et al. (1996) put it, the thing an organization worships. Values define an organizational culture and are expressed through rituals and stories. Sometimes the stories are held in symbols (Ledford et al., 1995). Christians, for example, see the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection in a cross. Resurrection is central to their faith. Another culture may see the cross as a method of torture. By shifting the research from analyzing boundaries to examining symbols, researchers can determine values assigned to them to gain a better perspective of the community’s boundaries.

McDonald and Gandz (1991) discovered 24 value dimensions (adaptability, aggressiveness, autonomy, broad-mindedness, cautiousness, consideration, cooperation, courtesy, creativity, development, diligence, economy, experimentation, fairness, forgiveness, formality, humor, initiative, logic, moral integrity, obedience, openness, orderliness, and social equality) within organizations. These dimensions are specific to each organization’s internal audience of employees. To find organizational values, McDonald and Gandz conducted 45 interviews with senior managers, management consultants, executive recruiters, and operating employees and then conducted a content analysis to merge the concepts stated in the interviews into values. McDonald and Gandz used four criteria:

(a) The concept had to be an enduring belief with the purpose of creating a specific conduct or outcome that was individually or organizationally desired.

(b) The concept must be important to employees and the organization.

(c) The concept needed to be specific enough to define an individual and universal enough to represent the whole organization.

(d) Words representing the concept needed to fit into a thesaurus. The thesaurus allowed McDonald and Gandz to identify similar concepts by using common synonyms. For example, words such as “forgiving” and “compassion” were considered to represent the root concept of “forgiveness.”

In today’s society, organizations are spread around the world, but the sense of community an organization creates and the individual feels is felt throughout the organization without community members ever meeting face-to-face. In Anderson’s (1983) thinking, the community is “imagined.”

Individuals in an imagined community may never actually talk or participate with each other, but if they share ideas, values, or both, the group is considered a community (Anderson, 1983). If, for instance, a man is reading a newspaper -- a private act -- in his living room, he is participating in a community of individuals who read the same newspaper and value the same information. Print media connect the imagined community through information presented from, and to, the community (Carey, 2016). Just as newspaper readership creates a community through its readership, bloggers can create imagined communal bond among their readers. While social media and imagined communities provide useful data for researchers, these concepts are relatively understudied in communication research (Kavoura, 2014).

Integration into a community requires an individual to internalize the values the community assigns to symbols used to communicate with the community. Internalizing the symbol is important because the symbol orients community members to the experiences and understanding that the community holds about each value (Cohen, 1985). Values conveyed through an organization's symbols create boundaries that separate one community from another. A community's values may overlap with another group's, but the symbols used by each community will likely never fully align.

Community Participation

Integration into a community is an important first step in creating community participation (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). Community integration is a process of communication that encourages new members to act in the best interests of the community while working for social change (McLeod et al., 1996). A community needs to maintain order while ensuring the community adapts to changing conditions. Stamm and Guest (1991) explain that while newcomers will seek information before or after moving into a community, individuals who wish to be active, or integrate, in the new community will seek information that helps them become part of the community. Integration into a community depends on how an individual uses mass media and his or her interpersonal relationships. The interaction with media outlets and neighbors will directly or indirectly contribute to individual involvement (Guest & Stamm, 1993; McLeod et al., 1996, 1999; Stamm, 1988; Stamm et al., 1997; Stamm & Guest, 1991). McLeod et al. (1996) mention that before their study, scholars assumed that integration was multidimensional but lacked empirical testing to support that assumption. McLeod et al. found that interest in local media supported community integration, while interpersonal networks provided further support to integration and participation. All media play a part in integration;

when one source does not provide enough information for participation, the newcomer will seek another source.

If people are well informed and properly motivated, community integration creates involvement. Community involvement is defined as the relationship between an individual and community (Stamm et al., 1997). If the local community does not provide opportunities for motivated individuals to participate, the individual will seek other forms of communication to discover participation opportunities. While community integration, participation, and media use are all interrelated, individuals will subscribe to different media for information (Finnegan & Viswanath, 1988; McLeod et al., 1999). McLeod et al. (1999) explain, “Through communication, citizens acquire information about issues and problems in the community and learn about opportunities and ways to participate” (p. 316). Individuals must be well informed and motivated to participate in a community, and communication is critical to creating motivated participants. Stamm et al. (1997) posit that four criteria are used to contribute to community involvement:

- (a) Relevance of community – Things that happen within the boundaries of a community should be important to the individual.
- (b) An available collectivity – The group is needed to take collective action.
- (c) Individual capability – An individual must do what is necessary to make a difference to the community’s objective.
- (d) Available time – The members need to make contributions to the group effort.

Stamm et al. (1997) explain that the four criteria are assessed through either a panel study or a series of surveys. A panel study allows researchers to obtain a group of individuals to measure media involvement over the period of the study. Surveys allow researchers to measure media use

of large groups of people once rather than the same individuals over time. By understanding how communities are maintained, organizations would be able to utilize the concept of imagined communities to more effectively see how values create engaged and motivated employees.

Organizational Community

Being part of a community helps members maintain a sense of belonging and allows participants to contribute to something larger than themselves (Ross, 2011). Within that larger perspective, Ross claims that organizational community was introduced to provide employees the encouragement to work together. That encouragement would lead to the organization's success and employee satisfaction. For instance, if Tesla encouraged its employees through incentives and other motivations to work toward the goal of lowering the price of technology for Tesla vehicles, the internal corporate community would actively work toward the goal while employees felt they were an important part of accomplishing that goal. This motivation helps employees feel important and satisfied as part of a community. With many different departments and multiple locations, an organization that collaborates beyond face-to-face contact would be considered an imagined (organizational) community. Because every organization is a community, organizations must establish what values guide the community. The guidelines are official statements organizations use to establish what the community will value (Ledford et al., 1995). The values expressed through the organizational statements shape the culture of an organization.

Organizational Culture and Climate

Culture is a collection of individuals conditioned to act within the social rules of the community. Culture distinguishes one community from another (Geert, Bond, & Luk, 1993). Arunchand & Hareesh (2013a) applied Geert's definition and said that organizational culture is a

set of shared norms a community creates. These norms help members cope with and resolve internal and external issues-as well as teach new members how to resolve similar issues. Ravasi & Schultz (2006) define organizational culture as “a set of shared mental assumptions that guide interpretation and action in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations” (p. 437). Because the definitions are similar, this research defines organizational culture as *a set of shared values that encourage employees to act in specific ways when issues arise within an organization* (Arunchand & Ramanathan, 2013a; Geert et al., 1993; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006).

While there are many different types of culture, I will use the above description for this research. Organizational cultures are used to guide behaviors and decisions of what “should be” and direct employees for a specific purpose (Ledford et al., 1995; O’Reilly, 1989). Organizations use physical statements to create, share, and maintain interpretation and action. Some examples of these statements would be an organization’s mission, vision, or value statements (Schneider et al., 1996). These stated values allow organizations to ensure employees make decisions that will lead to the organization’s success.

An organization’s cultural values, seen in an organization’s value statement, support a company’s strategy, but because the values are rooted in the philosophy of the founder, culture cannot be easily changed (Schneider et al., 1996). Creating an organizational culture helps companies maintain an identity that sets them apart from other businesses. While culture is the outward expression of the organization’s values, organizational climate represents the daily life within an organizational community. Organizational climate is the set of operating standards that organizations consistently communicate to employees. When new employees enter the community, they are encouraged to participate within the guidelines of the organizational

culture, but over time the new member will see how management conducts daily tasks and decisions creating the organization's climate.

While culture and climate exist separately, employee's values are influenced by management's involvement in the stated organizational culture and reflect the organization's climate (Ahmed, 1998; Schneider et al., 1996). If a company values making quality products in a "timely manner," does management encourage that quality or put quantity as a daily measurement? Regardless of the value statements an organization produces, if management constantly rewards certain behaviors, employees will surmise the rewarded behavior is the actual valued behavior (O'Reilly, 1989). The organizational climate must be consistent with the organizational culture to provide employees a reliable ideological community.

Organizational Blogging

The evolution of technology and the declining prices of data storage have allowed Internet users to participate in user-centered, user-generated virtual locations (cyberspace) called social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Obar & Wildman, 2015). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain that social media are Internet-based applications that allow the engagement and participation of User Generated Content (UGC). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2007) state that defining UGC is problematic because defining the criteria evolves over time. The OECD established three characteristics meant to create a spectrum to provide researchers a way to identify UGC:

- (a) The content must be published publicly or open to a specific audience on web-based or social networking site (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.).
- (b) The creator must use creative effort to create content.

- (c) The content must be unprofessional or less formal than the impersonal formal business writings.

Social media have brought people from all over the world together in such a manner that face-to-face interaction is no longer required (Kavoura, 2014). Individuals with similar ideologies and interests no longer need a physical location to participate within a community. Cyberspaces allow communities to share values without ever having to see any of their members. Kavoura explains that a community has come to exist through the stylistic and sacred use of the written word. Community members engage in discussion of common ideologies and interest.

Because social media are a growing method for connecting with stakeholders, companies find interest in operating within the online spaces their customers use (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The downside of this approach is that organizations that use social media have less control of information and its availability to the public (Kuikka & Akkinen, 2011). Although this lack of control presents a challenge, social media, especially blogging, provide consumers a convenient, specialized, and available place that helps them make faster purchasing decisions (Chiang & Hsieh, 2011). Blogs are web pages that serve as a personal journal accessible to the public (Blood, 2009; Herring Scheidt, L. A., Wright, E., & Bonus, S., 2005). Kelleher & Miller (2006) state that organizational blogs must meet three criteria:

- (a) They are maintained under some form of official capacity.
- (b) They are endorsed by the organization.
- (c) They are posted by a person or persons affiliated with the organization.

Lee, Hwang, and Lee (2006) posits that organizational blogs are websites that publish and manage blog content to attain a specific corporate goal. Blogs are a medium to actively engage employees, customers, or both. What makes blogging unique is that it offers

organizations the ability to communicate in a more humanizing, intimate way that encourages relationship building (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

Corporate blogging strategies help corporations control messages intended for specific audiences, and the success of an organization's blogging depends on the type of strategy used (Lee et al., 2006). Scholars have identified six strategies corporate bloggers use to reach their audience (Cox, Martinez, & Quinlan, 2008; Dearstyne, 2005; Lee et al., 2006; Osch, Steinfield, & Balogh, 2015):

(a) Company-wide (bottom-up) – This strategy allows employees to engage the blogging culture without close control over the content.

(b) Executive (top-down) – Executives use this strategy as an informal communication tool to communicate with the major stakeholders.

(c) Individual (top-down) – Individuals are responsible for communicating on behalf of the company. These usually originate from inside a company-owned domain and focus on the authority of an organization within its specialized field. That authority, called thought leadership, does not provide a means to talk back to the corporation. Because of the one-way nature of the blog, readership tends to be relatively low.

(d) Group (top-down) – This strategy employs a team of employees to act as the organization's voice. The blogging content under this strategy is usually higher quality, and it minimizes the risks normally associated with individual blogging.

(e) Promotion (top-down) – This strategy allows the organization to advertise products and events. This strategy is controversial because it lacks an authentic human voice and sounds like a filtered advertisement.

(f) Newsletter (top-down) – These blogs cover company events and provide thought leadership on happenings throughout the enterprise.

Traditionally, corporations prefer a top-down blogging strategy to control thought leadership and the information the organization promotes (Lee et al., 2006). A top-down strategy is controversial because it conflicts with stakeholder communication preferences, which tend to favor a bottom-up strategy (Lee et al., 2006). A bottom-up strategy allows bloggers to respond to customers quicker and more efficiently and allows authors to convey original ideas and display honesty and passion for the company's values. Lee et al. (2006) claim that of the strategies used, individual blogs are the most successful because they provide a means to converse and build relationships with the author and a means for bloggers to communicate the values shared by their imagined community. The blogging strategies help show what the blog is trying to do so observers can understand the approach. The nature of social media and blogging has helped close the gap between a widely dispersed organization and its employees. Because organizations are spread across the world, social media have helped create an imagined community that does not require face-to-face contact (Kavoura, 2014).

In light of the scholarship discussed thus far, this study attempted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Of the 24 values stated by McDonald and Gandz's (1991), what corporate values do Tesla Motors communicate through its *Master Plan*?

RQ2: Of the 24 values stated by McDonald and Gandz's (1991), what values do Tesla Motors communicate through its blogs to employees?

RQ3: How closely do Tesla's values, communicated through corporate blogs, match its corporate values?

Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined community will provide the theoretical foundation for this study. Anderson describes communities as ideological rather than geographical, and shared values, often communicated through mass media, connect community members. This project applied Anderson's imagined community concept to corporate communication at Tesla Motors. The goal was to discover whether the theory explains what Tesla tried to accomplish through employee-communication blogs.

Chapter 3: Methods

To answer the three research questions, I conducted a content analysis to find the values Tesla communicates through its *Master Plan* and corporate blogs. Content analysis is defined as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952). Content analysis yields a numerical record of keywords and phrases used in texts being studied. Because content is assumed to be meaningful, an assessment of how and how often these keywords and phrases appear can lead to statistically based conclusions about what messages texts convey. Answering research questions about Tesla's blog can help determine what values are present and how they are communicated.

Because newcomers seek information from the mass media before or after moving into a community (McLeod et al., 1996; Stamm & Guest, 1991), I wanted to discover if Tesla communicated its values to employees and encouraged integration into its community through its corporate media. Because Tesla's corporate blog, intended for customers, is the only medium Tesla offers to the public, I used its corporate blog. I did not have analytical information from Tesla's blogging site. Therefore, I could not verify if—or how much—Tesla's employees read corporate blogs because it was intended for consumers. Nevertheless, blog posts were available to employees. Previous research indicated that employees did not rely solely on internal

communication channels for information about companies. Employees sought information from various sources, both internal and external, to discover community's values (Finnegan & Viswanath, 1988; McLeod et al., 1999).

The study used Tesla Motors' corporate blog posts ranging from January to December 2015. They can be found at <https://www.tesla.com/blog>. This blog meets Kelleher and Miller's (2006) three criteria for an organizational blog. The 11 blog posts chosen were all the blogs posted throughout the year and were selected because they were a full year's worth of blog content written by the company. Additionally, 2015 was the latest complete year when I chose the dataset. Posts were not consistent from month to month, and length varied per the information communicated.

RQ1 asked which of McDonald and Gandz's (1991) corporate values Tesla communicated. To answer this question, I analyzed Tesla's *Master Plan* to identify corporate values communicated by Elon Musk. I inserted the text from the document into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet cell, then inserted the spreadsheet into JMP 13, and use the Text Explorer analysis tool. The analysis provided a count of words and phrases the document used. I compared the results to words that McDonald and Gandz said represented 24 value dimensions (Figure 1). The goal was to discover what values the *Master Plan* communicated. To determine which words or phrases truly conveyed values, I ensured the words or phrases were intended to denote preferred actions or goals. If, for example, a post stated that Tesla prioritized consumer safety, the preferred goal of that statement would denote *cautiousness*. That concept needed to be specific enough for an individual to maintain while being broad enough to represent the whole company. Therefore, *cautiousness* needed to be specific enough to encourage employees to be cautious in their work and broad enough to describe Tesla as a cautious organization. I used the

Oxford Dictionary's (n.d.) thesaurus to create a codebook. I located additional words that were synonymous with McDonald and Gandz's value words (Figure 1). Almost all words could have different meanings in different contexts, so I created stipulations. They required terms and phrases to portray corporate values accurately. First, terms had to describe human interactions. Words and phrases needed to be specific enough to "define the unique nature of an individual and universal enough to represent an aggregation of individuals" (McDonald & Gandz, 1991, p. 224). The value *adaptability*, for example, would have to be specific enough to encourage individuals to be flexible in individual situations and broad enough to describe an organization that could adapt to any situation. To apply the stipulations, I determined the synonyms by choosing the definition that addressed human interaction. *Economy*, for example, has two definitions in the Oxford Dictionary (n.d.): (1) "The state of a country or region in terms of the production and consumption of goods and services and the supply of money," and (2) "Careful management of available resources" *Economy* in the first definition does not address human interactions but addresses state-specific matters. The second definition, however, is specific enough that an individual could act upon and broad enough for an organization to be considered economical. Eliminating definitions that were not related to human interactions allowed me to focus my codebook on properly defined values. Similarly, when I reviewed words discovered in the Text Explorer of the *Master Plan*, I read each sentence mentioning the value to ensure the context communicated the proper definition. To reuse the last example, *economy* must have been communicated as the management of resources and not the trading of goods. Second, when a value's synonym was identified within the *Master Plan*, I read the sentence contextually to ensure the value word was used positively. Tesla had to be able to tout the words and phrases as preferred actions for employees and the organization. If the word was not contextually positive, I

removed it from the analysis. Words denoting a specific value needed to appear at least three times because, as Krugman (1972) explains, information is absorbed after three exposures to a message: During the first exposure consumers react by asking, “What *is* it?” The second exposure prompts them to ask, “What *of* it?” Once these questions have been analyzed by the consumer, the third exposure becomes the first true reminder. Krugman points out that continued exposure after the initial reminder are repeats of the third exposure.

RQ2 asked what values Tesla Motors communicated to employees through its corporate blog posts. To answer this question, I replicated the method from RQ1 to determine how many value words were identified in the 11 blog posts. I first placed every blog post into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. I then identified three variables: date, author, article. The date variable recorded when the article was published and allowed me to discover if values were communicated more during specific periods than others. The author variable recorded who wrote each post. Knowing the author allowed me to analyze if specific writers emphasized company values. If an author was not apparent, the variable was recorded as “unknown” and not included in the author analysis. The article variable recorded the entire article. I imported the spreadsheet into JMP 13 and conducted a Text Exploration to conduct a frequency analysis. Just as I did in RQ1, I used the codebook to discover which words or phrases connoted the 24 values.

RQ3 asked how closely the values communicated through corporate blog matched corporate values found in the *Master Plan*. To answer RQ3, I ranked the values found in RQ1 and RQ2 according to the number of times the values appeared in corporate documents and blog posts. I then correlated the two rankings to see how closely Tesla communicated its corporate values to its employees.

Chapter 4: Results

The *Master Plan*, authored by Elon Musk, contained 446 words, which included three phrases (*energy positive*, *efficiency*, and *fast as possible*) that communicated two values (*initiative* and *efficient*). The 11 blog posts contained 1,069 words and four synonyms (*network*, *safety*, *cost*, and *free*) for three values (*cooperation*, *cautious*, and *economy*). These value words occurred 24 times in 2015 blog posts. These blog posts helped me further explore each research question.

RQ1 attempted to discover the values Tesla Motors communicated through its *Master Plan*. The Text Explorer analysis identified two values: *efficient* (four instances) and *initiative* (two instances). Initially, only *efficiency* was discovered as a synonym for the *efficient* value, but after further analysis, I identified the phrase *fast as possible* as a contextual synonym for *efficiency*. Both *efficiency* references occurred twice. *Fast as possible* referred to the need for employees and the company to strive toward efficiency as they worked toward the company's goal of making affordable family vehicles. Elon Musk said Tesla needed to be *energy positive* by taking the *initiative* to create zero-emission, sustainable vehicles.

RQ2 attempted to discover the values Tesla Motors communicated through its corporate blog. The Text Explorer analysis identified three values: *economy* with 10 instances, *cooperation* with seven instances, and *cautious* with seven instances. Further analysis of contextual word usage—words that could be defined as values and that were not listed as synonyms for McDonalds and Gandz (1991) 24 values (Figure 1)—identified four additional values: *network* (cooperation), *safety* (cautious), *cost* (economy), and *free* (economy). An analysis of dates and authors was done to check possible reasons for communicating value words at any given time.

The *network* Tesla presented within the blog posts was its recharging stations. They were a part of a product network associated with vehicles. *Network* appeared in three different posts by the Tesla team, once in February and twice in March. *Network* emerged when the team discussed Tesla's Superchargers. The organization described its Superchargers as a *network*. Using the value of network emphasizes the interconnection of the Tesla products versus communicating the generic idea of the organization's products.

Safety was used to describe security officers and the purchaser's personal safety. Adding safety for purchasers as a value was easy to understand. "Safety manager" was used in place of security officer to emphasize the value of safety versus communicating the generic idea of security. *Safety* seemed to be a concern in October when, according to the company, it rolled out its autopilot technology.

Cost references emphasized Tesla vehicles' economic value as a zero-emissions car that required no gas or other traditional transportation maintenance fees. The *cost* value was communicated through three blogs.

The *free* value was an economy-driven term. Every post described free use of Tesla's Superchargers. The Tesla Team compared the free charging to the price of gasoline needed to refill other vehicles on longer drives.

To answer **RQ3**, I ranked the number of times each value was communicated in the *Master Plan* and in blog posts. Table 1 shows results. The list of values from the *Master Plan* do not correlate to values in the 11 blogs.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Results of this study raise more questions than they answer. The findings are unclear about what kind of community Tesla wants to create. Differences in the value agendas between

the *Master Plan* and blog posts suggest that neither form of communication reflects Tesla's true character. Elon Musk's *Master Plan* communicates a set of values that the blog posts do not. Musk seems to point toward an efficient, initiative-driven company. The Tesla Team, which writes blog content, focuses on communicating a safe, cooperative, and economical product.

Originally, I anticipated that Tesla's *Master Plan* would effectively communicate values that help establish the corporate culture. The document conveys the most information available to the public about CEO Elon Musk's purpose for Tesla. I expected Tesla's blog posts to reinforce the organization's operating standards and help maintain the community's climate. Corporate culture is a set of shared values that encourage employees to act in specific ways when issues arise within an organization (Arunchand & Ramanathan, 2013a; Geert et al., 1993; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). The culture is based on the founder's philosophy and is not easily changed. Corporate climate is the set of operating standards that organizations consistently communicate to employees. Climate operating standards are more available to employees. When the culture and climate conflict, employees will look to the consistent operating standards as the organization's actual values (O'Reilly, 1989). I hoped blog posts during 2015 would communicate enough values to conclude that Tesla's blog was strategically trying to create an imagined community among employees by reinforcing Musk's values from the *Master Plan*. While values do not need to be communicated to create an imagined community (Anderson, 1983), organizations need to be strategic in maintaining a community that encourages employee collaboration (Ross, 2011). I was unable to identify any of my expected findings.

Results for RQ1 did not detect values from Tesla's CEO. Musk's *Master Plan* was not rich in communicated values. Tesla's Master Plan communicated a vision that could communicate values, but there was no evidence that the organization used the vision to

communicate values. Corporate communities are supposed to rely on the culture created by their founders to guide employees on how to resolve issues that arise within the organization (Arunchand & Ramanathan, 2013b; Geert et al., 1993; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Using one document to discover Tesla's foundational values proved insufficient. If Tesla used the *Master Plan* alone, community members would not have adequate information to resolve issues. Musk communicated only one value (*efficient*). He reiterated that value three times. Krugman (1972) says information takes three exposures to register with most readers and the information after the third exposure serves as a continued reminder. One significant value is not enough to establish a culture. Community members would have to seek information elsewhere to expand their knowledge of the community's cultural values (McLeod et al., 1996). This finding suggests that Tesla does not have an adequate values foundation in Musk's *Master Plan* to strategically establish a community culture. Therefore, employees cannot use this document to infer a standard of values or the community's culture.

Without an explicit set of values, internal documents that convey values, or a clear sense of culture from Musk, Tesla's community members might be less motivated to be involved in the community (Ross, 2011). Although imagined communities do not require a set of cultural values, values that motivate employees to work toward a specific goal can encourage them to participate in an imagined community. The current study was not able to show that the *Master Plan* communicated cultural values. Not enough value information was disseminated from the *Master Plan* to apply the theory of imagined communities as expected.

Results for RQ2 and RQ3 show Tesla's corporate blog advanced a different values agenda from Musk's *Master Plan*. But that agenda was not strongly reinforced because blog posts did not communicate many values. Krugman (1972) maintains that individuals need to be

exposed to a message three times before the information is absorbed. Of McDonald and Gandz (1991) 24 values, only three met Krugman's minimum standard. Because the Tesla Team communicated these values across at least three blog posts, community members might notice them. Nevertheless, this study could generate no evidence of such attention.

Blog posts were intended for an external audience. Nevertheless, internal community members could read them. Employees do not rely on internal communication channels alone (Finnegan & Viswanath, 1988; McLeod et al., 1999). Community members seek information from a multitude of sources, both internal and external, to discover community's values. Results of this study suggest that blog posts might be trying to create an imagined community. Employees could look to Tesla's corporate blog for cultural values. But no information suggests the organization used the blog strategically to communicate values internally to create an imagined community. Tesla's blog might be a better source for investigating Tesla's corporate culture than the *Master Plan*. However, such an approach would contradict previous scholarship that claims cultural values are rooted in the philosophy of the founder (Schneider et al. 1996).

The distinct values agenda in the 2015 blog posts, when compared with the *Master Plan*, signals that Tesla did not use the *Master Plan* as the foundation for its culture. This finding means that an overall strategic imagined community among employees is not possible. O'Reilly (1989) says that the organizational culture and climate must be consistent to provide an ideological community.

The value dissemination was not affected by Tesla's blogging strategy. All the blog posts used the top-down blogging strategy. Of the six blogging strategies, Tesla used four to communicate values. Tesla used the group strategy six times by communicating through the Tesla Team. The executive strategy was used twice, one post authored by Elon Musk and the

other by JB Straubel, Tesla's chief technology officer. All blog posts used the newsletter or promotional strategy. Tesla used the newsletter strategy to communicate new programs, milestones, and events. Many posts used the promotional strategy, along with the newsletter strategy, to encourage the public to "experience" or "explore" Tesla's products. Although top-down strategies are generally less popular with readers than bottom-up strategies (Lee et al., 2006), either approach could be used to communicate values.

Community members look for community information that helps members engage in discussion about the community (Kavoura, 2014). Although blogs are maintained by the company in some official capacity, blogs allow the organization to communicate with readers in an informal medium. The informal medium allows authors of blog posts to be creative and share content to encourage discussion within other social media sites (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Because the organization's control of content on social media is lessened, organizations should be more attentive to their blogging strategy to ensure content is reliably communicating community values. While communicating values for a strategic community requires the culture and climate to be reliable (O'Reilly, 1989), the consistent values displayed by the blog posts suggests that Tesla's blog is applying the theory of imagined communities.

Imagined community theory would predict that a community's members do not need to be aware of the community itself to be considered part of that community. The concept relies on values that transcend the consciousness of members (Anderson, 1983). In the earlier example on Page 9, a man reading a newspaper did not need to be aware of the community of others reading the same newspaper to be part of the readership community. Community relies on shared ideological values, not participation. When a community is not maintained through strategic value dissemination, however, it has no method for community integration or participation

(McLeod et al., 1996). Although community does not require participation, within the work environment, employees are more efficient and dedicated when they feel a sense of community (Ross, 2011). To effectively engage employees, Tesla should strategically use all internal and external communication media available to the organization to encourage community members, regardless of geographical location, to share the organization's values and work toward the community's goal (Christensen & Levinson, 2003; Park, 1929; Stamm et al., 1997). The sharing of values would create an imagined community of likeminded individuals (Anderson, 1983).

Limitations and Future Research

This study had three clear weaknesses: (a) Philosophy statements describing corporate values and internal communication channels were unobtainable for this research. (b) The number of blog posts limited the ability to gain a rich data set. (c) The value synonyms from Table 1 limited the identification of values.

I tried multiple times to gain access to Tesla philosophy statements and internal communication channels, but eventually I decided to study the channels available to me. The inability to obtain a corporate value statement limited my research to a list of values discovered within a document that communicated only a few values. Future research should try to obtain internal documents such as the corporate values statement.

I was limited to using communications channels intended for external publics (Tesla's corporate blog to consumers) to research value communication. This blog was available to employees, but I could not document how much—or if—employees read the blog. If I had gained access to internal communications, I could have compared the values in the *Master Plan* to those in an internal communication medium. Using internal media would have allowed me to assess communication specifically for employees. Furthermore, future studies should use

multiple years' worth of Tesla's blog posts. This study was unable to obtain an abundance of data because of the limited blog posts. Researchers should use multiple years to ensure an abundance of data.

The initial analysis of the 447 synonyms for all 24 values was too narrow to identify all the values and limited my value discovery to words in Table 1. Tesla used words not originally part of Table 1 synonyms in ways intended to convey one of the 24 values. For example, throughout multiple blogs, the Tesla Team manipulated "network" to describe the coverage of Supercharges for vehicles. The manipulation of "network" allowed employees to infer that Tesla valued cooperation among its products and conceivably employees. The Tesla Team referred to security officers as safety managers. Describing security officers as safety managers could help the reader infer that Tesla valued safety. The meaning manipulations were beyond what McDonald and Gandz (1991) considered. The synonyms in Table 1 required the communicator to use specific words to convey values and did not allow context or phrase choice to creatively describe a value. Kelleher & Miller (2006) point out that creativity is a requirement for User Generated Content, and such creativity is imperative to the less formal nature of blogs. Because I could not know the authors' intent, I inferred the value manipulation from how sentences used words or phrases.

For future research, public relations scholars may continue to elaborate on Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined community. That work may expand employee management research and lead to studies of how organizational communities improve employer-employee relations. Improving these relationships could enhance morale and lead to higher work efficiency (Arunchand & Ramanathan, 2013). Practitioners must ensure that all communication is purposeful in building and maintaining a consistent corporate culture and climate. Future

research could overcome limitations of this study by elaborating on Tesla's value dissemination practices and expanding knowledge of how value discovery affects the organizational community. Continued reinforcement of organizational climate could evolve into its culture. My findings could not show that Tesla used its *Master Plan* as its foundation for corporate culture or the blog as a channel to shape climate. My findings do suggest, however, that Tesla could create an imagined community based on the values it communicates through its blog posts.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate that the theory of imagined communities could be used in public relations and organizational culture research and that measuring values is an effective method for studying community. Imagine communities explain how communities are formed by means of ideology alone, regardless of distance. Counting the number of times organizations use specific words or phrases that communicate values allows researchers to measure beliefs that encourage a shared perspective. Researchers can begin to measure the strategy organizations use to communicate values and encourage an imagined community. Future scholarship could use the methods from this study to gauge cultural and climate values of other organizations to understand if and how those organizations build and maintain an imagined community. By building on this scholarship, researchers could use Anderson's imagined communities to expand public relations and organizational culture theory by analyzing organizations as imagined communities.

Imagined communities are created by ideology, or values, and are not restricted by geography. Organizations should use imagined communities to share the organization's values and help community members work toward an efficient, collaborative work environment. This study was unable to obtain a clear understanding of Tesla's culture by analyzing the *Master*

Plan. Analysis of the blog did, however, showed that the Tesla Team communicated climate operating standards. With no statements that communicate Tesla's cultural values, the climate standards communicated through consistent blog messages might be able to turn the climate into the organization's culture. Nevertheless, Schneider et al. (1996) maintains that culture comes from the founder's philosophy.

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Appendix

Table 1: Comparison of Values in Tesla Corporate Documents

Master Plan Values	QTY	11 Blog Posts Value	QTY
Efficient	4	Cooperation	7
Initiative	2	Cautious	7
		Economy	5

Figure 1: McDonald and Gandz (1991) Value Definitions and Synonyms

Value	Definition	Synonyms
Adaptability	The quality of being able to adjust to new conditions.	Accommodating, adjustable, amenable, conformable, Compliant, Cooperative, Easy-going, Flexible, Malleable, Multi-skilled, Obliging, Pliant, Resilient, Versatile.
Aggressiveness	Hostile or violent behaviour.	Assertive, Audacious, Bold, Competitive, Driving, Dynamic, Energetic, Enterprising, Forceful, go-ahead, Insistent, Pushing, Vigorous, zealous
Autonomy	The right or condition of self-government.	Autarchy, Freedom, Home rule, Independence, Individualism, self-determination, self-government, self-rule, self-sufficiency, sovereignty
Broad-Mindedness	Tolerant or liberal in one's views and reactions; not easily offended.	Catholic, dispassionate, Fair, Forbearing, Freethinking, Impartial, Indulgent, Liberal, Libertarian, open-minded, Permissive, Progressive, Receptive, Tolerant, Unbiased, Unbigoted, Undogmatic, Unprejudiced, unshockble
Cautiousness	careful to avoid potential problems or dangers.	Alert, Attentive, Aware, Cagey, Careful, Chary, Circumspect, Guarded, Heedful, Mindful, on one's guard, Prudent, Vigilant, Wary, Watchful
Consideration	Careful thought, typically over a period of time.	Attentiveness, Benevolence, Charity, Compassion, Concern, Considerate, Discretion, Friendliness, Generosity, Kind, Kindly, Mindful, Sensitivity, Solicitous, Solicitude, Sympathy, Thoughtful, Understanding, Unselfish,
Cooperation	The action or process of working together to the same end.	Accord, Association, Collaboration, combined effort, Compromise, Concord, Concurrence, Coopetition, Coordination, Dealings, give and take, joint action, Liaison, mutual support, Partnership, Relations, Synergy, Teamwork, Unity, work together
Courtesy	The showing of politeness in one's attitude and behaviour towards others.	Affability, Chivalry, Civility, Consideration, Cordiality, Courteous, Courtly, Decorous, Diplomacy, Gallantry, Geniality, Gentility, good breeding, good manners, Graciousness, Kindness, Polish, Polite, Refinement, Respect, Respectful, Tact, Thought, Urbanity
Creativity	The use of imagination or original ideas to create something; inventiveness.	Artistry, creative gift, creative power, creative skill, creative talent, Enterprise, Expressiveness, Imagination, Imaginative, Individuality, Ingenuity, Innovation, Inspiration, vision
Development	The process of developing or being developed.	Blooming, Blossoming, Buildout, Burgeoning, Enlargement, Evolution, Expansion, Growth, Headway, Maturing, Progress, Spread, Success
Diligence	Careful and persistent work or effort.	Application, Assiduity, Assiduous, Attention, Attentive, Commitment, Concentration, Conscientiousness, Constancy, Dedication, Doggedness, Earnest, Effort, hard work, Indefatigability, Industrious, Industry, Intent, Perseverance, Persistence, Pertinacity, Punctilious, Rigorous, Rigor, Sedulous, Studious, Tenacity, Thorough, Tireless,
Economy	Careful management of available resources	Abstemiousness, Canniness, Care, Carefulness, Economizing, Frugality, fuel-saving , good husbandry, good management, Providence, Prudence, Restraint, Saving, scrimping and saving, Thrift, Thrifty,
Experimentation	The process of performing a scientific procedure, especially in a laboratory, to determine something.	Analysis, Experimentation, Observation, Testing, trial and error
Fairness	Impartial and just treatment or behaviour without favouritism or discrimination.	above board, anti-discrimination, Detached, Disinterested, Dispassionate, Equitable, even-handed, fair-minded, Good, Just, Lawful, Legal, Legitimate, Neutral, non-discriminatory, non-partisan, Objective, Proper, Unbiased, Upright
Forgiveness	The action or process of forgiving or being forgiven.	Absolution, Acquittal, Amnesty, Clearing, Clemency, Condonation, Condoning, Delivery, Discharge, Dispensation, Exculpation, Exoneration, Indulgence, Lenience, Leniency, Mercy, Pardon, Pardoning, Pity, Purgation, Quarter, Remission, Reprieve, Tolerance, Vindication
Formality	The rigid observance of convention or etiquette.	Ceremonious, Ceremony, Conventionality, Courtliness, Decorum, Etiquette, Protocol, red tape, Ritual, Solemnity, stateliness
Humor	The quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech.	Absurd, Absurdity, Badinage, Banter, bon mots, Comedy, comic side, comical aspect, double entendres, Droll, Drollery, Facetiousness, Funniness, funny remarks, funny side, Hilarity, Irony, Jesting, Jests, Jocularly, Jocularly, Jokes, Joking, Ludicrous, Puns, Quips, Raillery, Repartee, Satire, Waggishness, Wit, Witticisms, Wittiness, witty remarks
Initiative	1) The ability to assess and initiate things independently. 2) The power or opportunity to act or take charge before others do. 3) An act or strategy intended to resolve a difficulty or improve a situation; a fresh approach to something.	Ambitious, Ambition, Capability, Creativity, Dash, Drive, Dynamism, Energy, Inventiveness, Leadership, Motivation, Originality, Resourcefulness, Spirit, Verve, Vigor, Vitality
Logic	Reasoning conducted or assessed according to strict principles of validity.	Cognition, Coherence, common sense, good sense, Inference, Judgement, logical thought, Rationale, Rationality, Reason, Relevance, Sagacity, Sanity, Sense, sound judgement, syllogistic reasoning, Wisdom
Moral Integrity	1) The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles 2) The state of being whole and undivided.	Decency, Ethics, Fairness, good character, high-mindedness, Honesty, Honor, Honorable, Morality, Morals, noble-minded, Nobility, Principle, Probity, Rectitude, right-mindedness, Righteousness, Scrupulous, Sincerity, Trustworthy, Truthful, Uprightness, Upstanding, virtue
Obedience	Compliance with an order, request, or law or submission to another's authority.	Acquiescence, Amenability, Biddableness, Compliance, Conformability, Conformance, Conformity, Deference, Discipline, Docility, Duteousness, Dutiful, Duty, Malleability, Meekness, Obsequiousness, observance of the law, observance of the rules, Passiveness, Passivity, Pliability, Respectable, Servility, Submission, Submissiveness, Subservience, Tameness, Tractability, Tractable,
Openness	1) Lack of restriction; accessibility. 2) Lack of secrecy or concealment; frankness.	Artless, Blunt, Candid, Communicative, Direct, Downright, Forthcoming, Forthright, Frank, free-spoken, Genuine, Guileless, Honest, Ingenuous, Innocent, not afraid to call a spade a spade, Outspoken, plain-spoken, Simple, Straightforward, Transparent, Uninhibited, Unreserved
Orderliness	Neatly and methodically arranged.	Businesslike, Civilized, Coherent, Controlled, Courteous, Disciplined, Efficient, law abiding, Logical, Methodical, Meticulousness, non-violent, Organized, Peaceable, Peaceful, Restrained, Structured, Systematized, Systematic, well behaved, well mannered, well organized, well planned, well regulated
Social Equality	being equal, especially in status, rights, or opportunities.	Equalitarianism, Emancipation, equal opportunities, equal rights, Equitability, Fairness, Impartiality, Justice, Justness, non-discrimination

Figure 1. Values from McDonald and Gandz (1991). Definitions and synonyms found in Oxford Dictionary