

REPUTATION, IMAGE AND IDENTIFICATION: HOW POPE FRANCIS INFLUENCES VIEWS OF  
HIS CHURCH THROUGH MEDIA

by

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## Abstract

Culture, especially in large organizations, can be difficult to change. Entrenched practices, established power hierarchies and organizational structures, mission and vision statements, organizational narratives and myths that constitute part of the culture make it even more difficult to change an organization's culture. However, studies have shown that while changes are difficult and time consuming, making the necessary changes, including hiring the right persons or dismissing those who hinder the new culture, setting the right leadership tone and having a keen insight into the organization can aid in establishing a new culture.

A large, old and powerful organization such as the Roman Catholic Church, with all of the elements of entrenched organizational culture mentioned above provides an ideal case study. A key belief shared throughout the world and the Catholic Church is that actions speak louder than words (Siri, 1999). Pope Francis, who since his elevation to the papacy has made efforts to change the culture of the Catholic Church, is the focus of this research. I examine Pope Francis' activities through the lens of public relations in the Catholic Church. Specifically, I examine how his words and actions are reshaping the Catholic Church. As with any change agent, Pope Francis cannot start enforcing new policies or change doctrines until he changes the Catholic Church culture.

Knowledge of the history of the Catholic Church and the papacy are important in understanding how challenging and lengthy it would be for one to change such a large organization steeped in centuries-old tradition.

This research analyzes popular literature to identify key public relations principles that support Pope Francis' symbolic actions. I compare and contrast five magazines that put Pope Francis as their cover story. I also analyzed multiple websites run by the Vatican and Pope Francis. To evaluate what certainly seems to be public relations change in the Catholic Church, I research how management, cultures, and organizations change a culture. As Pope Francis embraces his identity as the "pope of the poor", he has gained worldwide attention from both Catholics and non-Catholics (Chua-Eoan, 2013). This project gave me insight about how Pope Francis may change one of the oldest and largest institutions in the world.

### Background

#### **Background of the Supreme Pontiff in the Roman Catholic Church**

The full history of the Roman Catholic Church is beyond the scope of this project, but within the last 50 years, there have been noteworthy high points that have shaped the Vatican for Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the birth name of Pope Francis. First, Pope John XXIII shocked not only the Catholic community but also the world when he announced the formation of the Second Vatican Council in January 1959 (Teicher, 2012). Called Vatican II, it sent "between 2,000 and 2,500 bishops and thousands of observers, auditors, sisters, laymen and laywomen to four sessions at St. Peter's Basilica between 1962 and 1965" (Teicher, 2012). This council reformed the foundation for the church after cultural changes emanating from World War II. The 16 documents from the Second Vatican Council called for, among other things, reconciliation and openness between other Christian denominations. With the theme of reconciliation, Vatican II made the Catholic Church more welcoming and

less secluded from the rest of the world (Teicher, 2012). After opening itself up to the world in the 1960s, the Catholic Church began a revolutionary period of being a participatory church, which gave the bishops, priests and even the laity a bigger role in Mass. It also encouraged friendly relations with other religions, which was progressive, because the first Vatican Council forbade Catholics to pray with other faiths. Georgetown University professor Rev. John O'Malley said Pope John XXIII was inspired by his experiences as a Vatican diplomat in Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece (Teicher, 2012).

Pope Paul VI, who took office after John XXIII, furthered the new openness of the Church. He continued the Second Vatican Council until it ended in 1965. Pope Paul VI's papacy called for a unity of all Christians; he showed this commitment to unite Christians by being the first pope to travel internationally (Granfield, 2003). Pope John Paul succeeded Pope Paul VI, but unfortunately was only in office for 33 days (Catechism for the Universal Church: An Overview, n.d.).

Pope John Paul II was the supreme pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church for 27 years and most observers think those years were marked with greatness. As the first non-Italian pope in 455 years, Pope John Paul II, who came to be called Pope John Paul the Great, became a "spiritual protagonist" by helping to end communism in Poland (Saint John Paul II, n.d.). He is known as initiating a new era of the public face of the Catholic Church by revolutionizing the office of the modern pope. He became a global figure by delivering his message through mass media. A 2005 Gallup Poll found that 67 percent of Catholics believed that Pope John Paul II is one of the greatest popes in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. Nine out of ten

Catholics consider Pope John Paul II as a “great” pope (Gallup, 2005). The legacy of Pope John Paul II as a truly global figure will last for decades, and possibly centuries, as a truly global figure.

John Paul II acted as an ambassador for the Catholic Church to show the world forgiveness and kindness. John Paul the Great’s actions inspired cardinals and bishops to act as ambassadors as well. Cardinals had to start thinking differently by having a more external perspective of the church. Whereas John XXIII focused on revolutionizing the church internally, John Paul II focused on revitalizing the church externally. However, John Paul II set the standards high for his successors and it seemed as though Pope Benedict XVI could not meet these expectations for many reasons (Smith, 2014).

Pope Benedict XVI succeeded John Paul II in 2005; and his short eight years of papacy were marked with conspiracies, distrust and scandals. Benedict XVI was a stern academic and traditionalist who kept his public contact to a minimum. During the fourth year of Pope Benedict’s papacy, a money laundering scandal was exposed at the Vatican Bank, which had \$8.2 billion in assets. This scandal marked the start of many years of scandals recorded in the Catholic Church, including that of corrupt priests. One of Pope Benedict’s butlers released classified documents that uncovered a gay smear campaign, suspicious gifts, runaway spending and missing cash. This document revelation was known as the *VatiLeaks* and exposed the unruly behavior of cardinals in the Vatican. A series of child sexual abuse scandals unfolded around the world and the public demanded a response from Pope Benedict (Binelli, 2014, pg. 43). The pope apologized for the child sex abuse by priests at 2008 World

Youth Day in Australia. Although these scandals occurred for years before Pope Benedict's reign, Binelli theorized that Pope Benedict could not uphold his position as the supreme pontiff in the wake of the scandals. He was the first pope to resign in over 700 years (Binelli, 2014, pg. 39).

The last 50 years of the Catholic Church have been momentous from John XIII's Second Vatican Council to John Paul II's ambassadorship to Benedict's resignation. Pope Francis began his papacy during a time of distrust of the Vatican. However, his humility and outgoing personality have been a breath of fresh air for the Catholic Church and the world. Whether he knows it or not, Pope Francis is using public relations to revolutionize the efforts of the Catholic Church and spread God's love throughout the world.

### **Background of Pope Francis**

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born December 17, 1936, in Flores, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Coming from a middle class family, Bergoglio's father moved his family from Italy during Benito Mussolini's fascist reign to South America in order to escape the radical authoritarian government system. Along with Bergoglio's parents, his paternal grandmother, Rosa Margarita Vasallo, taught Bergoglio about equality and inclusion. In Italy, Vasallo had been a leader of Catholic Action, a lay movement seeking to bring Christian morality to bear on social behavior during the time of fascism. Vasallo taught Bergoglio that judgment rested with God, not man, which became an undercurrent of Bergoglio's ministry (Sullivan, 2015, pg. 47). Vasallo was the first person in Bergoglio's life who began to shape him to the person he is today. From Vasallo's teachings, the theme of mercy and the judgment of God have

influenced Bergoglio to show forgiveness and compassion. Both Bergoglio's father and paternal grandmother taught Bergoglio to resist the evils of a corrupt government for the good of their Christian morals.

At 17, Bergoglio had an epiphany while walking past a church. "[It felt] like somebody grabbed me from inside and took me to the confessional," said Bergoglio, "While I was there I felt that I had to become a priest, and I didn't doubt it" (Binelli, 2014, p. 41). However, it was not until 1958 when Bergoglio was 21 that he decided to enter the Jesuit seminary, a brotherhood that places an emphasis on obedience and discipline. He taught literature at a Jesuit school and was appointed provincial superior of the Jesuits in Argentina at age 36. As the provincial superior, Bergoglio oversaw the activities of the Jesuit order throughout Argentina. People saw Bergoglio's exercise of authority as a conservative throwback clinging to pre-Vatican II tradition; and Bergoglio described his leadership style in the beginning as "authoritarianism" with many faults (Binelli, 2014, p. 42). Bergoglio's tenure as provincial superior ended and the Jesuit headquarters in Rome assigned him to a new post in Córdoba. Bergoglio returned to the capital in 1992 and six years later, he became archbishop of Buenos Aires (Binelli, 2014, p. 42). In 2001, Pope John Paul II appointed Bergoglio Cardinal of Buenos Aires. The same year Cardinal Bergoglio took office. When Pope Benedict resigned, Bergoglio flew to Rome for the papal elections (Binelli, 2014, p. 43). It seems as though everything Bergoglio did in his life anticipated the events forthcoming the papal elections.

Three themes dominate Pope Francis' ministry: mercy, simplicity and compassion (pope of the poor).



## **Theme #1: Mercy**

The theme of mercy is woven throughout Pope Francis' mission as he teaches everyone from high-ranking bishops to laymen on how to be more merciful. During the "Dirty War" from 1976 to 1983, Argentina was ruled by a right-wing dictatorship that ordered death squads to terrorize Argentina's streets (Hernandez, 2013). The dictatorial regime was outwardly Catholic and many church leaders collaborated with the government, but the religious leaders who spoke out against this junta were found dead shortly after their denunciations. Bergoglio was caught in a scandal that would forever shape his vocation. Orlando Yorio, a Jesuit priest, claimed Bergoglio helped the junta in the kidnapping of activist Jesuits including Yorio. Bergoglio was never criminally charged, but asked the Argentine community, the victims and their families for mercy (Hernandez, 2013). Now, mercy is the theme of Pope Francis' mission to spread the Lord's message.

Pope Francis announced the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy starting Dec. 8, 2015. A jubilee year is "a special year called by the church to receive blessing and pardon from God and remission of sin" (McElwee, 2015). Francis often speaks of mercy in his homilies and texts; he called Jesus "the living face of the mercy of the father" (McElwee, 2015). Pope Francis's actions truly speak louder than his words when he called the Church to show mercy on women who have resorted to abortion. He asked all priests to absolve the sins of those who have procured abortion and sought forgiveness for their actions. In a letter to the president of the Pontifical Council, Pope Francis asked the "the Church in this Jubilee Year to rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy" (Francis,

2015b). Pope Francis did not exclude anyone from participating in the Jubilee Year of Mercy, including the sick and the diseased. After the Argentine community showed Francis mercy, Francis has shown the world mercy and calls believers to do the same.

## **Theme #2: Simplicity**

In order to understand Pope Francis' daily life, it is important to recognize how his simple actions like living arrangements reflect on the public. As archbishop, Bergoglio rejected the princely trappings of his new office, using a bus for transportation and living in a simple flat where he cooked his own meals. This humble lifestyle foreshadowed his papal residency. When Bergoglio became Pope Francis, he diverted from papal practices and chose to live at Casa Santa Marta, a modest Vatican residence that houses the Vatican staff. By declining to live in the Apostolic Palace, Pope Francis becomes more relatable by living with ordinary Vatican staff members. He embodies the life of Jesus Christ by living a humble and simple lifestyle. Pope Francis used Twitter to explain his simple and modest lifestyle.



Pope Francis' theme of simplicity resonates worldwide. According to *Rolling Stone*, the attendance at papal events tripled to 6.6 million people after Pope Francis' first year of papacy. Living without gold and fancy garments allows Pope

Francis to concentrate on the necessities of the Catholic Church such as organizational management.

### **Theme #3: Pope of the Poor**

Bergoglio's residency as archbishop was focused around the dispossessed, which is how he became known as the pope of the poor. He went to hospice to kiss the feet of AIDS patients. He disguised himself in order to march in a slum procession. He roamed Buenos Aires' worst neighborhoods. He heard confessions from prostitutes on park benches (Binelli, 2014, p. 42). From the beginning of Bergoglio's Jesuit priesthood, he paid special attention to the economically disenfranchised. He joined the Society of Jesus, a Roman Catholic order of priests and brothers, "to find God in all things," which is a vision of the founder St. Ignatius Loyola. Members of the Jesuit order take a vow of poverty along with chastity and obedience (Jesuits.org). This vow of poverty has largely shaped him to become the "Pope for the Poor" (Chua-Eoan, 2013). The pope said, "I believe that, yes, the times talk to us of so much poverty in the world and this is a scandal. Poverty in the world is a scandal. In a world where there is so much wealth, so many resources to feed everyone, it is unfathomable that there are so many hungry children, that there are so many children without an education, so many poor persons. Poverty today is a cry" (Francis, 2013a).

## Literature Review

### **Use of Strategic Communication**

Multiple studies and articles illustrate that Pope Francis has an understanding of strategic communication. He is the face of an organization with over 1.2 billion followers. Whether intentional, or not, using strategic communications or not, Pope Francis uses strategic communication in order to communicate God's message effectively. Like public relations practitioners, he uses reputation management and media relations to advocate the goodwill of the Catholic Church. Pope Francis uses public relations principles to strength his relationship with both believers and non-believers.

Pope Francis can teach political and corporate communicators about effective public relations. In an article in *Public Relations Strategists*, Goodwin (2014) notes that Pope Francis successfully uses four concepts to connect with the public: names matter; actions speak louder than words; words matter when they are tied to policy; and the Internet is a "gift from God." Pope Francis is the first pope to choose the name associated with St. Francis of Assisi, a saint who helped the sick, poor and animals. The Pope's actions and gestures speak louder than his words especially when he rejected living in the Apostolic Palace. He shows that simple principles of heart are the basis of Jesus Christ's teachings. Additionally, Pope Francis made headlines around the world when he said, "Who am I to judge?" when asked about homosexuality (Binelli, 2014, pg. 40). These five powerful words echoed in countless news and media outlets. Pope Francis also shows how powerful words are by cold-calling people who have sent him letters. Finally, Pope Francis

uses modern communication technology to help the Church communicate (Goodwin, 2014). During the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, Pope Francis said, “Good communication helps us to grow closer, to know one another better, and ultimately, to grow in unity. The walls which divide us can be broken down if we are prepared to listen and learn from one another” (Francis, 2014).

Pope Francis’ leadership makes him a global leader. Analyzing the Pope’s strategic communication efforts will provide successful communication lessons for not only public relations specialists, but also leaders of organizations.

### **Reputation Management**

How constituents perceive an organization is known as reputation; and reputation management is the influence and control of one’s reputation. When Pope Francis took the title of Supreme Pontiff, the Church was troubled by its reputation for handling scandals. In *PR Strategy and Application*, reputation management is described as corporate-centric and shows the valued outcomes and benefits connected with an organization’s positive reputation. Some benefits include, but are not limited to, attracting customers, motivating employees, and generating positive news media coverage. Intentional or not, Pope Francis has modified the principles of reputation management and applied it to the public relations efforts of the Roman Catholic Church. From the day he was elected, Pope Francis began reputation management for the Church.

By rejecting an elaborate lifestyle and being a warm, lovable and outgoing public figure, Pope Francis influenced the Church’s reputation without changing teachings or doctrines. Thomas Gensemer, chief strategy officer of the public

relations firm Burson Marsteller, said “He is changing the face of the Church without changing the product” (Thompson, 2014). Pope Francis uses reputation, an intangible asset, to gain attention from the world and spread God’s message. Pope Francis is attracting and strengthening believers, motivating priests to become greater disciples, and generating positive news from media around the world. Pope Francis’s words and deeds prove his desire for an identity-reputation alignment, when constituents “see” the organization the way the organization “sees” itself (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, pg. 175). For example, Pope Francis not only preaches about mercy and forgiveness, but also shows his teachings through his actions like declaring a Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Pope Francis has proved to the public that he truly is like St. Francis of Assisi by being the pope of the poor. From kissing lepers’ feet to traveling through dangerous slums, Francis successfully practices identity-reputation alignment. According to a study by Pew Research Center, it is evident that Pope Francis’ favorability is surpassing the favorability of Pope Benedict XVI. The study found that Pope Francis’ net favorability was 86 percent in June 2015, whereas Pope Benedict’s net favorability was 74 percent in February 2013 (Pew Research Center, 2015). Considering Pope Francis came into office when the Catholic Church was in turmoil, his global popularity is evidence of his successful reputation management.

### **Media Relations: Shaping the News**

In many ways, Pope Francis acts as a public relations specialist for the Catholic Church. The *Princeton Review* describes a public relations specialist as an image shaper. One of the jobs of image shapers is to generate positive publicity for

their client and enhance their reputation (Career, n.d.). Through social media and his humble ethos, Pope Francis is shedding light on the Catholic Church. This light is informative, illuminating, and progressive, something the Catholic Church has lacked in the past decade.

After Pope Benedict XVI, the public relations of the Catholic Church was negative. Pope Benedict resigned as pontiff, becoming the first pope to resign in over 700 years. Pope Francis became pope in the midst of the Catholic Church's decade of scandals—the 2009 money-laundering scandal in the Vatican Bank and the release of the VatiLeaks by Pope Benedict's butler (Binelli, 2014, pg. 39). These documents in the VatiLeaks included a gay smear campaign, missing cash, attempted tax evasion (which included the former Italian prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi), runaway spending (like a \$350,000 crèche) and suspicious gifts (Binelli, 2014, pg. 39). Other scandals like covering up for child-molesting priests put the Catholic Church in crisis mode. Pope Benedict XVI's personality was not strong enough to manage the Church's tarnished reputation. From his interactions with the general audience to his inner circle, many observers felt that Pope Benedict did not respond efficiently and effectively to the abuse victims' complaints. His secretary of state, Cardinal Tariciso Bertone was seen a scheming power player in the VatiLeaks documents. Pope Benedict did not like personal contact and kept the number of visitors to a minimum, unlike Pope Francis who flourishes with every type of person. According to Binelli, Pope Benedict's papacy is described as “disastrous” as he could not even smile to the Church's followers (Binelli, 2014, pg. 43). Pope

Francis has an ability to reach out to people and connect with them; through this and his humble personality, the papacy has a new ray of sunlight shining on it.

According to *PR Strategy and Application*, media relations involve how representatives of an organization work with representatives of the news media. Organizations use media relations to enhance sales and support a wide array of organizational objectives (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, pg. 108). In this case, Pope Francis uses media relations to enhance the reputation of the Catholic Church. Public relations firm, Burson-Marsteller, released the annual Twiplomancy, a study on the analysis of Twitter accounts, in which they found that Pope Francis is considered the most influential by the number of his retweeted messages. With 22 million followers on nine language accounts, Pope Francis was listed at the No. 4 spot on Forbes' *World's Most Powerful People* in 2015 (Forbes, 2015). Pope Francis uses his social media accounts to reach out to millions of people and touch their hearts through advocacy for social change. Pope Benedict did not directly handle his Twitter account and his Twitter was used as a wall of ideological isolation. Whereas Pope Francis uses his Twitter to spotlight social issues that must be addressed like his agendas on poverty, climate change and unchecked free-market capitalism (@Pontifex). The pontiff's Twitter is an exemplary catalyst for positive change.

*PR Strategy and Application* explains how organizations want the information they provide to be presented in a certain way. Because the way a story is presented will influence the audience's interpretations of events, organizations seek to influence the journalist's framing process (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, pg. 111). After releasing a 183-page encyclical on the topic of climate change and the environment,



Pope Francis tweeted about how the earth is our home and then compared its appearance to pile of trash (@Pontifex). Additionally, Pope Francis uses framing, the process of developing information selected for a story, to help his followers understand his message. Rather than waiting for his information to trickle down through the Church and media, Pope Francis reaches out to his 22-million followers via Twitter. By using Twitter to summarize his encyclical, Pope Francis is setting the tone of his beliefs and shaping the frame he wants his encyclical to have. With over 41,000 retweets, Pope Francis was able to illuminate his message instantly and place a spotlight on his agenda. Pope Francis tweeted over 50 times on June 18, 2015 and using #LaudatoSi, the name of his encyclical (@Pontifex). Using the same hashtag is important when the tweets are relevant to each other. The hashtag allows the tweets to have the same theme and lets Twitter users connect similar tweets. Pope Francis' Twitter etiquette of simplicity and hashtags is truly noteworthy for public relation practitioners.

### **Kenneth Burke's Rhetoric Definition**

Kenneth Burke, a literary theorist, defines rhetoric as "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991, pg. 173). Pope Francis uses rhetoric to not only shape the minds of Catholics but also any person who listens to his teachings. When analyzing Pope Francis' speeches and actions, there is evidence that he is able to stimulate certain thoughts and actions. For example, Pope Francis' encyclical, "Laudato Si'," urges swift climate-change action from governments. In this 184-page encyclical published May 2015, the Pope states,

The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity. Dialogue among the various sciences is likewise needed, since each can tend to become enclosed in its own language, while specialization leads to a certain isolation and the absolutization of its own field of knowledge. This prevents us from confronting environmental problems effectively. An open and respectful dialogue is also needed among the various ecological movements, among which ideological conflicts are not infrequently encountered. The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that “realities are greater than ideas” (Francis, 2015a).

Pope Francis preaches to a much larger community than the Catholic Church. His language is simple and direct. Burke describes association as consubstantial, as “two entities are united in substance through common ideas, attitudes or other properties” (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991, pg. 174).

Like Burke, Pope Francis identifies Catholics as consubstantial with the rest of the world through the environmental crisis. He explains that Catholic or not, as inhabitants of this world, we have a moral obligation to protect our planet; the United Nations agreed. In November 2015, the United Nations made a global commitment to reduce greenhouse emissions and deal with the climate change during the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Paris (Record: 177 parties signed the Paris Agreement, n.d.). Pope Francis’ rhetorical act was a creative strategy that directed a movement to unite different governments—and different faiths—to take on a greater cause.

### **Leader/ Face of an Organization**

Having leadership skills is necessary for being the supreme pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church. “Building Trust,” a book from the Arthur W. Page Society,

provides lessons and advice from 23 of the nation's leading chief executive officers. The Arthur W. Page Society's principles include, but are not limited to the following: telling the truth; proving it with action; listening to the customer; managing for tomorrow; and conducting public relations as if the whole company depended on it. In order to manage a successful organization, it is evident that you must prove your organization's "truth" with action (Page, 2004, pg. 7). A problem in today's corporate world is rhetoric that is sincere without organizational follow-through (Page, 2004, pg. 7). Pope Francis has admitted that some of the Church's actions have been inconsistent with its rhetoric in the past, but he calls for a church "sent in mission as a sign and instrument of God's mercy and justice" (Gaillardetz, 2015, pg. 116). As seen in numerous texts, Francis lives through Jesus Christ's example through humility, openness and forgiveness.

Listening to the customer is an important part of Page's principles as an organization translates institutional strengths into opportunities. When management understands what the consumers are experiencing and feeling, it can allow them to accommodate changes in the marketplace and respond to new opportunities (Page, 2004, pg. 9-12). According to the CEO and President of Siemens Co., management will create truly productive partnerships with their customers and see outstanding results through constructive dialogue with each customer (Kleinfeld, 2004, pg. 205). "When dialogue among the people and the bishops and the pope goes down this road and is genuine then it is assisted by the Holy Spirit," Pope Francis said (Gaillardetz, 2015, pg. 122). Pope Francis has made a commitment to honest dialogue, listening and even disagreement (Gaillardetz, 2015, pg. 122). It is

evident that the pope has parallel beliefs to the Siemens' CEO. There is an analogous relationship of pope and the 1.2 billion Catholics to CEO's and their customers. He demonstrates successful management by cold calling people either because the person wrote the pope a letter or because he has heard about the person's story or problem. Numerous news sources such as the *National Catholic Reporter* write about the Pope's signature communication through the telephone by calling him the "cold-call pope" (Allen, 2014). An Italian woman said her faith in the church was restored after Pope Francis called her about the mystery behind her daughter's body being found in an attic of a church in 2010. Many other people have similar encounters with the Pope (Allen, 2014). Cold calling the Church's members is one example of the numerous ways the Pope's public relations tactics execute operational excellence and restore public trust.

### **Tone of Persuasion**

Pope Francis uses tone to attract and motivate followers to act in the way of God. In homilies and public appearances, Pope Francis talks in a friendly manner that translates well to all audiences. During Pope Francis' homily at St. Patrick's Cathedral (2015), his tone including his voice, body language and eye contact embody a gentle and caring person. Pope Francis' welcoming and forgiving tone is persuasive because it reflects well to his followers and non-followers. Persuasion is viewed as a more complex and interactive process that links the persuader to the receiver with symbols, both verbal and nonverbal. Jowett and O'Donnell's book (2006) breaks persuasion into three categories: response shaping, response reinforcing and response changing. The tactic of response shaping teaches the

receiver to behave in a certain way and offers a positive reinforcement for learning. If people have positive attitudes already, the persuader uses response reinforcing to remind the receiver of positive attitudes on the subject and perhaps make them feel more strongly about the subject matter. The tactic of response changing is the most difficult to use as it involves the persuader to asking people to change their attitudes (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006, p. 25).

The Roman Catholic Church established the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide in 1622 “with the double aim of spreading Christianity in the areas where the Christian message had still not arrived and of defending the patrimony of faith in those places where heresy had caused the genuineness of the faith to be questioned” (Propaganda Fide, n.d.). In 1988, Pope John Paul II renamed this Department of Pontifical Administration, the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples (Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli: Profilo). This Congregation's purpose is to coordinate and guide all the Church's diverse missionary efforts and initiatives. The Congregation's official website lacks the successful persuasion Jowett and O'Donnell write about. The tone of the website is informative, intense and a little hostile—one out of the three tabs of the website is labeled “Missionaries Killed,” this tab is intended to be a realistic and honest look at the world of missionary life today (Fides News Agency, n.d.). It is evident that the current leaders of this congregation, an organization that made the term propaganda popular, lacks the appropriate finesse necessary to offer effective persuasion in today's world. Because the Congregation's website and social media

accounts (@FidesNewsAgency) only give out information and news, its online presence lacks the charisma needed to shape perceptions.

Unlike the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples, Pope Francis uses persuasion to resonate with persons inside and outside the Catholic Church and outside of it. He practices response shaping through verbal and physical ways. He stresses the importance of the youth in not only the Church but also in the world, especially before the Pope-led World Youth Day in 2013, when he preached to two million youths, urging them not to be ashamed of the Cross. He gave the attendees positive reinforcement by connecting their importance with the Church to their importance for the future of the world (It's Official: Pope Francis to Lead WYD, 2013). He advised the youth to “have courage to be happy” and “rebel against this culture that sees everything as temporary” (Vatican Radio, 2015). He connected with his young audience by participating in numerous selfies with them, hugging and kissing them. For the attendees with strong faith, Pope Francis’ warm actions acted as the propaganda tactic called response reinforcing. Through symbols, Pope Francis persuades his audience in a complex and interactive way.

Pope Francis fulfills the function of a charismatic leader for the Roman Catholic Church. His open-minded personality and warmth are true assets for a church that has often been perceived as isolated and cold. Pope Francis’ tone is a truly remarkable persuasion strategy. Given that Pope Francis is a more open-minded and forgiving pope, he is often seen as the light in a dark room. Although he has not changed any doctrines of the Catholic Church, Francis has set a tone of

mercy and humility through the scriptures and teachings. This tone gives a fresh life to centuries-old traditions.

*Propaganda and Persuasion* highlights the importance of successful persuasion with the structure of organization. The leader must develop a suitable style to attract and maintain members. This style requires a proper execution of the articulation of the specific messages and the selection of media (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006, p. 157). Successful persuasion has a common slogan of the four basic criteria: it must be seen, understood, remembered, and acted upon. "Messages that are supportive of commonly held views of people are more likely to be effective" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006, p. 163).

One of the reasons Pope Francis is so popular today is because he adapts perfectly to the social climate. Pope Francis' style of leadership includes reformation, simplicity and humility. He has taken controversial initiatives to reform the Vatican Bank and College of Cardinals. For the first time in history, Pope Francis is bringing international accounting standards to audit the Vatican Bank (Kahn, 2015). Pope Francis is not only financially reforming the church; he is bringing in a more diverse group of Cardinals. He named 16 new cardinals who come from 12 countries. By bringing in Cardinals from different continents, Pope Francis is continuing the trend established by Pope John Paul II, who named many cardinals from around the world and not just Italy and/or Europe (Vatican Radio, 2014).

Although the world sees Pope Francis as liberal, he has not changed any of the Church's doctrines. This shows that he is not meeting the criteria of successful

persuasion because he may not be properly understood. Pope Francis is a traditional Catholic but what differentiates him from his predecessor is his critique of himself and his church. Pope Francis' transparency and honesty is what draws in people who have not listened to Catholic teachings for a while. One of the most common examples of misconception is Pope Francis' famous response to the questions about homosexuality "Who am I to judge?" (Francis, 2013b). This statement made headlines around the world and has been talked about in many articles written about the Pope. This phrase does not change the belief on homosexuality in the Catholic Church unlike popular beliefs that he changed a Catholic doctrine, Pope Francis said, "Who am I to judge?" (2013b) to show the world that only God can judge.

Unfortunately, his nonreligious audience does not always correctly understand Pope Francis' tone of persuasion. Those who do not understand the core beliefs of Catholicism often assume that the Pope's tone is revolutionary. Many news sources have portrayed Pope Francis as a charming rebel, liberal, or worse. Because he is portrayed in this way, non-Catholics feel as though Pope Francis is modernizing the Catholic Church. The Pope's merciful and nonjudgmental tone can be to blame for this miscommunication. Although the Pope succeeds in executing many parts of an effective persuasion, he sometimes lacks clarity in his messages. Whether that is his point or not, the Pope is gaining the attention of a population that exceeds the large Catholic base.



## Method

### **Procedure**

For this research, I conducted a process case study utilizing the qualitative content analysis method, assisted by a topic guide. I chose five popular culture magazines that in 2014-2015 featured Pope Francis on their cover as their main story.

I first analyzed secondary sources and research findings about the history of the Catholic Church; the history of Pope Benedict XVI (Pope Francis' predecessor); and Pope Francis. I also examined the use of rhetoric and key public relations topics like reputation management, media relations, leadership and tone, in order to determine themes to utilize in developing my research questions and themes. This work is found in the literature review, background and situation analysis of my paper. My topic and question guide is available in the Appendix.

I identified multiple magazines with stories about Pope Francis and narrowed down my list to the five magazines that featured Pope Francis as their cover story. I chose magazines from different genres from music/entertainment to news and gossip magazines. I analyzed the backgrounds of the magazines to determine their target demographics and reach. I examined the themes and narratives used to cover Pope Francis. From those themes, I determined the patterns the magazines used to frame Pope Francis for their specific audience. Lastly, I utilized the data from my research and content analysis in a discussion of public relations framework rooted in Burke's theory of identification, which will be later mentioned in the "findings" part of the thesis.

I also analyzed four websites that were related to Pope Francis' mission: his Instagram account, the Vatican homepage, the Official Vatican Network site, and the Fides News Agency website. I surveyed how many times the theme of mercy came up in his Instagram posts. I examined how the Vatican uses its website to promote the Church and its mission. I compared and contrasted the Official Vatican Network and the Fides News Agency because they are both news sources run by the Vatican.

### Measurement

I coded content in four categories related to my research: physical actions, verbal communication, media relations and "change." I used four different colored highlighters to mark places the content mentioned the category or where the category fit into a process or point. I used different colors to visually see how the categories fit together in content. Table 3 below outlines the coding process.

<b>Table 1: Coding Process</b>		
<b>Code Theme</b>	<b>Color</b>	<b>Description</b>
Physical Actions	Orange	Gestures, facial expressions, non- verbal communications
Verbal Communication	Pink	Quotes, messages, script, voice
Public Relations	Blue	Social media, journalists, interviews, agendas, politics, branded, critics
Change	Yellow	Reorienting, revolutionary, reform, shift, transform, inspire, transformation, ever more, more than, new relations, rebel, remake, reduce, restore

## **Selection of Magazines**

I searched via Google “magazines with Pope Francis.” I found over 20 magazines with Pope Francis as the cover story. I chose *People Magazine*, *Life Books*, *National Geographic*, *Rolling Stone* and *Time*. I selected these five magazines because they were sold nationally and well-known brands. I selected magazines from multiple genres in order to understand how different audiences might be influenced to perceive Pope Francis.

## **Description of Magazines**

### *People*

*People Magazine* published “Pope Francis: Inside His Private World” by Sandra Westfall on Sept. 28, 2015. *People Magazine* is owned by Time, Inc. Unlike the other magazines, 70 percent of the readers are female with a median age of 38 according to the People Media Kit.

### *Life Books*

*Time Inc. Specials* published “Pope Francis in America” by Robert Sullivan in *Life* in 2015. According to the Time Media Kit, there are 16.3 million U.S. readers. The median age for the readers is 50 years and 52 percent of the readers are male.

### *National Geographic*

“Pope Francis Remakes the Vatican” by Robert Draper was published in the *Official Journal of the National Geographic Society* in August 2015. According to the National Geographic Media kit, the magazine reaches 29.4 million people. The median age for National Geographic readers is 48 years and 55 percent of the readers are male.

## *Rolling Stone*

“Pope Francis: The Times They Are A-Changin’” by Mark Binelli was published in *Rolling Stone Magazine* in February 2014. According to the Rolling Stone Media Kit, the magazine reaches 11.9 million people. The median age for Rolling Stone is 35 and 61.7 percent of the readers are male.

## *Time*

*Time Magazine* published “Pope Francis Meets America” by Nancy Gibbs and Elizabeth Dias on Oct. 5, 2015. This magazine is sold internationally. According to the Time Media Kit, there are 16.3 million U.S. readers. The median age for the readers is 50 years and 52 percent of the readers are male.

## Situation Analysis

### **Overview**

The Vatican has suffered a number of scandals that have diminished its reputation around the world. The Vatican struggles to gain control of its once respected image because it lacked transparency during these times of trouble. Pope Francis, the 266<sup>th</sup> leader of the Catholic Church, brings a positive public image to the Vatican. He is known as an open-minded, progressive pope who is less judgmental than previous popes (Binelli, 2014, pg. 37).

### **Mission**

Pope Francis outlined his mission in his first encyclical, “*Evangelii Gaudium*.” “I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come,” Pope Francis said (Francis, 2013, pg. 204). “My mission

of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an “extra” or just another moment in my life... I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world” (Francis, 2013, pg. 204).

### **Key Audiences**

Pope Francis’ audience includes the 1.2 billion Catholics, Christians and news organizations. As an individual, the pope has a profound impact on society today. Given that Pope Francis is considered more liberal than the previous two popes, his actions and speeches are newsworthy. News organizations as different as Fox News, CNN and BBC that report on Pope Francis reach millions of people both religious and non-religious.

### **SWOT Analysis**

Pope Francis is one of the Vatican’s strongest assets. His strengths include his well-liked persona, charisma and modest lifestyle. He is a personable leader and interacts well with crowds. His weaknesses are his old age, soft voice and health. Pope Francis’ threats are the negative perceptions of the Catholic Church, non-believers and the corruptions within the church. Pope Francis’ opportunities are that he is the leader of one of the largest organizations with a billion loyal followers; that he is able to reach billions of people; that he can improve the Catholic Church’s image; and that he can strengthen the church’s relationship with its followers.

## Findings

### **Burke's Identification Theory**

Burke explains identification as a process that is fundamental to being human and to communicating. He argues that the need to identify arises out of division; humans are born and exist as biologically separate beings and, therefore, seek to identify through communication in order to overcome separateness. Burke claims we are aware of this biological separation, and we recognize additional types of separation based on social class or position. We experience the ambiguity of being separate yet being identified with others at the same time: we are "both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (Burke, 1969, p. 21). Pope Francis personifies the identity of himself and his church, in the way that's written and shown in the cover stories in the five magazines. These cover stories capture Pope Francis in a positive light. The stories illustrate Pope Francis' physical actions as friendly, warm and lovable. For example, Pope Francis ate with immigrant schoolchildren in Harlem (Gibbs & Dias, 2014, p. 40). While a few of the magazine articles mention some of the Catholic Church's past scandals, there are many quotes and messages from Pope Francis and others that focus Pope Francis' humility and non-judgmental attitude. Overall, Pope Francis is viewed positively in all of the magazines. This positive light shed on Pope Francis in the articles links the Catholic Church with the rest of the world and begins to lessen the separateness in Burke's identification theory.

## Content Analysis of Magazines

The common theme throughout the five magazines was Pope Francis' revolutionary ways. The magazines credit his words, actions and media relations to how he is reforming the papal traditions; yet, the each magazine notes that the Pope has not made any doctrinal changes. A study by professors at Colorado State University (1996) found that credibility and belief change is influenced by message evaluation and source attributes. This study is used to understand how Pope Francis is perceived in each magazine and how these perceptions translate to each magazine's target audience.

One of the hypotheses of this study was "Message quality evaluation should (a) predict belief change (even when source expertise assessment prior to message exposure is controlled) and (b) partially mediate (i.e., attenuate but not eliminate) the relationship between initial source expertise assessments and belief change" (Slater, 1996, p. 978). This hypothesis explains how the cover articles in the magazines influence the target audiences and can predict and partially mediate belief change based on their message quality. The study found strong and consistent support that message factors predicted belief change. Message quality evaluation was an important contributor to this finding. Data (1996) supported that source credibility predicted belief change only in the case of social group messages. This study directly relates to the evaluations of the magazines because it is important to understand how the media cover him and what the Pope does to get their attention.

First, *People Magazine* was the only pure entertainment magazine studied. Because this magazine is known as a celebrity gossip magazine, the message quality

of this article has low source credibility. Although *People Magazine* has low source credibility, it reaches a large female audience. This female audience is both religious and nonreligious. Because Pope Francis was described as a man of the people, the message quality is favorable. The cover of the magazine is a picture of Pope Francis chuckling. Under the title, the description reads, “He loves soccer and selfies, dances the tango and eats more pasta than he should. An up-close look at the charming rebel who’s changing the world” (Westfall, 2015). The cover of the magazine describes the Pope’s physical actions that resonate with a large group. The article fails to note any rebellious acts, but does mention how he has transformed the Church’s tone on gay marriage. The article itself is not as text heavy unlike the other magazines, but portrays Pope Francis as a “reluctant celebrity” with a “modest lifestyle” and a “common touch” (Westfall, 2015, pg. 55). *People Magazine* explains that he is a reluctant celebrity because he auctions all gifts he receives from companies, celebrities, and others. *People Magazine* is a great example on how Pope Francis’ loveable personality resonates with the media.

*Life Books* dedicated a 2015 special commemorative issue to Pope Francis in America. The subtitle reads “The Spirit of His Revolutionary Mission.” Once again, the cover of the magazine mentions the idea of the Pope changing the Catholic Church. *Life Books* includes information on the “Pope at Home”, “Life at the Vatican”, the “Church in Latin America”, and the “Pope in America”. There are six sections of the magazine that solely discuss Pope Francis: “The Travels of Francis”, “Jorge Mario Bergoglio”, “A Prelate on the Rise”, “Pope Francis”, and “Here He Comes”. The source credibility for *Life Books* is high because the message is well presented and plausible



with convincing specific examples. Because the Colorado State University study found that source credibility predicted belief change only in the case of social group messages, *Life Books* has the potential to affect millions of international readers both female and male.

The message in *Life Books* contrasts Pope Francis with earlier popes such as Benedict XVI and pre-Vatican II popes. It references the corruptions and fallings in the history of the Catholic Church, while showing how Pope Francis is using his leadership role to shape a better future for the Church. *Life Books* discusses how the pope became the “Pope of the Poor”. It exemplifies Pope Francis’ normalcy by recounting the times he was a janitor and a bouncer. In “A Prelate on the Rise,” *Life Books* assured readers that Pope Francis is a “fundamentalist” on current Catholic doctrines—abortion and homosexuality—but is favored by many American Catholics for his socially liberal attitudes (Sullivan, 2015, pg. 58-60). The personality and leadership technique of Pope Francis that *Life Books* portrays is very favorable. The book uses examples of his actions while traveling and his homilies to demonstrate how the pope is freshening the look of the Catholic Church. For example, *Life Books* writes about Pope Francis’ constructive actions with gay couples, U.S. nuns, the mafia and the homeless. Overall, *Life Books* presents Pope Francis as a missionary modernizing the Catholic Church, a church that has been under a lot of criticism in the recent past.

*National Geographic* has a lengthy text and picture-heavy article about how Pope Francis is remaking the Vatican. This article describes how Pope Francis has already “changed seemingly everything.” With a list of the firsts (such as first Latin

American pope, first Jesuit pope, etc.), *National Geographic* explains how Pope Francis wants to “start making changes right now” (Draper, 2015, p. 37). *National Geographic* like *Life Books* has high source credibility because the way the magazine presents its messages—knowledgeable and authoritative. As it reaches an audience of approximately 29 million people, the message quality has the potential effect of belief change. The article relies heavily on quotes from Pope Francis and other Vatican officials to increase the source credibility. *National Geographic* uses Pope Francis’ actions to exemplify his quotes and beliefs. *National Geographic* also uses pull-quotes, a display element to attract readers and break up long texts, to further the magazine’s theme of Pope Francis’ remaking the Vatican. “God is not afraid of new things! That is why he continually surprising us, opening our hearts, and guiding us in unexpected ways,” Pope Francis said at a homily at the beautification of Pope Paul VI in October 2014 (Draper, 2015, p. 39). This quote is used to tie in Pope Francis’ beliefs with God in a non-religious magazine. The usage of this pull-quote is effective because it reaffirms Pope Francis’ mission and relates its back to the fundamental belief of the Catholic Church—which is God’s unconditional love. *National Geographic* also gives a timeline of “Saints and Sinners” referencing the papal line of the Catholic Church. The context of the history of the Catholic Church is used to increase the credibility of *National Geographic’s* argument. This argument focuses on the past corruptions of the Church and how Pope Francis’ papal mission is to bring the Catholic Church back to a positive light.

The *Rolling Stones’* cover specifically argues how the times are changing and the Pope’s revolution in the title. The article written by Mark Binelli takes up a good

portion of the magazine. The beginning of the article reports how attendance at the papal events tripled to 6.6 million. Although there is no credible source to the increase in attendance, Binelli uses statistics as a method of persuasion for credibility. The message quality is appealing to both Catholics and non-Catholics because it is an easy-to-read narrative.

The *Rolling Stones'* article presents Pope Francis in a favorable light as it mentions his non-judgmental attitude about sin. Binelli contrasts Pope Francis with Pope Benedict's "disastrous papacy" and the "plenty of truly terrible popes" (Binelli, 2014, pg. 38). Binelli points out this contradiction among certain past popes and Pope Francis to show his audience that the Pope is bringing a fresh face to an ancient institution. Unlike the other magazines, Binelli (2014) directly addresses how the secular media is misinterpreting Pope Francis' rhetoric. Binelli said, "The pope's tonal changes don't necessarily signal a wild swing from tradition" (Binelli, 2014, pg. 40). The article explains that if one takes the time to fully understand the Pope's context, whether that is through reading the full transcript or watching the whole video, the readers would recognize the Pope's strict doctrinal beliefs. Through the use of quotes, statistics and historical facts, Binelli has a strong message quality that has the potential of resulting in belief change in the minds of the *Rolling Stones'* readers.

*Time Magazine* is the only magazine with a cover story that does not focus on Pope Francis changing the Church. The cover article by Nancy Gibbs and Elizabeth Dias is titled "Pope Francis Meets America." Gibbs and Dias write that America highly values power and faith but keeps the church and state separate. This article

illustrates Pope Francis' political agenda when coming to the United States. Pope Francis is recognized for knowing the art of employing an image when he traveled around the U.S. in a small Fiat. The authors show how the Pope uses gestures like a room-brightening smile to connect with his audience. The article mentions how the Pope is reorienting the Vatican by diversifying elite bishops (Gibbs & Dias, 2015, p. 40). The article also uses statistics to increase the quality of the message. The authors reference the fact that there are "roughly 3 million fewer Catholic adults in the U.S. now than there were around the time of Benedict XVI's visit in 2008" (Gibbs & Dias, 2015, p. 40). Whether this decrease in numbers is due to Benedict or Francis' papacy is unclear. This article describes the Pope as a charismatic leader and a strategic player. While using the power of the Holy Spirit, Pope Francis goes off script to prove his authenticity. This article is not as long as the articles in *Life Books*, *Rolling Stones* or *National Geographic*, but is factual enough to have high source credibility. Gibbs and Dias cite the Pew Research Center to support evidence. The *Time Magazine* article shows both skepticism and positivity in Pope Francis' mission.

Overall, the magazines present Pope Francis in a similar light, which is positive and transformative. The authors use examples of Pope Francis's words and actions to demonstrate how he is living his mission. Although most articles do not paint the Catholic Church in the most favorable way, the authors seem to believe that Pope Francis is bringing the Church back to its true purpose, which is spreading God's love. Because the magazines are not scholarly, there are obvious biases in their writings. The authors use statistics and quotes to decrease the bias and

increase the expertise in their cover articles. Each magazine targets social groups, such as portraying Pope Francis as a celebrity in *People Magazine*. The Colorado State University study shows how the quality of the message has the potential to mediate belief change in the social groups. Figure 2 in the appendix gives a model that shows how expertise, beliefs and bias relate to message evaluation and discrepancy. Each magazine has the possibility of shaping the beliefs of their readers, which means that the Pope is successfully shaping the media.

### **Content Analysis of Online Presence**

Analyzing Pope Francis' online presence is vital to understanding his brand image. His verbal communication and physical actions have strong, common tones of friendliness, understanding, forgiveness and welcoming. Four webpages were studied in order to understand if Pope Francis' tone translates effectively throughout his online presence. Pope Francis created an account on Instagram, @franciscus, at the end of March 2016 and has 2.2 million followers. His biography on his Instagram reads, "I want to walk with you along the way of God' mercy and tenderness" (@franciscus, 2016). The Pope's Instagram homepage already mentions his theme of mercy. Five out of 32 posts include the word "mercy" in its caption. In his other posts, he talks about forgiveness and tender love. Because he puts his captions in six different languages, Pope Francis is able to reach a larger audience. Although Pope Francis is new to Instagram (his account was three weeks old at the time of this paper), he has done a successful job of demonstrating his brand image. He posts pictures and videos of himself with followers and at mass with captions

about love, mercy and forgiveness in six different languages. Pope Francis' tone and messages are consistent with his papacy.

The Vatican's main website is an informative site that includes speeches, letters, prayers, hearings and daily meditations, among others. The homepage has 20 tabs where one can find information about the Church or Pope Francis. There is a picture of Pope Francis smiling and waving with his Twitter feed running at the bottom of the homepage. The fact that the Pope is the only picture on the homepage shows that the Vatican uses Pope Francis' friendliness as an asset. The Vatican website is clear and informative as it has many tabs to choose from. The calendar and Twitter feed on the homepage give quick information to the website viewers (The Holy See, n.d.). Overall, the Vatican's website is more informative and less persuasive than Pope Francis' Instagram account.

The Official Vatican Network is the Vatican's main online news site. On the home page, there are six tabs: Fides New Agency, L'Osservatore Romano, Press Office, Vatican Radio, CTV and From the Pope. There are rotating pictures of Pope Francis giving homilies and hugging followers with different Vatican events. There is even an announcement for the new Pope App available in the App Store. The pictures are fun and exciting. There is the Official Vatican Network's Twitter feed running underneath; and at the bottom there is the latest news. The various news articles are about Pope Francis appealing for peace in Syria, Pope Francis sends Easter greetings, Pope Francis addressing regenerative medicine, and among other articles. The articles have an enlightening tone that match the overall theme of the website. The website is formatted nicely with not too many lengthy wording and

links available to read more. The vibrant colors, entertaining pictures and well-organized information are consistent with Pope Francis' mission.

In contrast, the Fides News Agency, which is the official page of the Pontifical Mission Societies, has a more serious tone. The website has three tabs: Home, Missionaries Killed and Statistics. There are four rotating news stories and on eof the stories includes a picture of a gun and a caption that reads, "Priest assaulted and hand handcuffed" (Fides News Agency, n.d.). The other pictures are of priests and members with somber faces. This website lacks the welcoming and friendly tone like the other websites I analyzed. All of the other news articles that are presented on the homepage are about churches getting destroyed or about Catholic martyrs. The format of the website is confusing as the articles are classified by continent and country. The Fides News Agency never mentions Pope Francis or his mission. It is evident that this website lacks the coherent tone of the Official Vatican Network, the Vatican's homepage and Pope Francis' Instagram (Fides News Agency, n.d). When an organization wants to have a strong online presence, it is important to have a consistent tone across all platforms. Pope Francis has made great strides to shed light onto one of the oldest religious institutions, but needs to show his strength on every platform including the Fides News Agency.

### Discussion

After analyzing various theories, studies, five magazines and websites, I have found that Pope Francis is shaping the way the media positively perceive the Roman Catholic Church in a positive light through the theme of mercy. Pope Francis uses reputation management, persuasion, and strong leadership to shape the media. He

uses the common theme of mercy throughout all of his messages. Whether it is in his book or on his Instagram account, Pope Francis is stressing the importance of mercy through every outlet he can. By using a consistent theme throughout his papacy, Pope Francis is gaining the attention of many.

At the onset of this project, I assumed that the secular media painted Pope Francis in a light that was not aligned with the Catholic Church's views. I analyzed five popular magazines in order to better understand if the media portrayed Pope Francis in a false light. I found that the magazines' themes were consistent with the pope's theme of mercy. Each magazine mentioned the past failures of the Church, but showed how Pope Francis is fixing these problems. I believe that Pope Francis is using public relations techniques successfully, whether he knows it or not. It is evident in various popular magazines that Pope Francis' mission is resonating with not only Catholics but also non-Catholics because he is genuinely living through his words and actions.

The websites that were centered on Pope Francis such as his Instagram, the Vatican homepage and the Official Vatican Network had a more positive tone overall. I think it is important for a brand image to be consistent on all platforms including online. The Fides News Agency website had a more serious tone that did not translate well compared to the other websites. Brands must present a strong image across all platforms and the Fides News Agency does not have welcoming and merciful messages.

Since I was young, I have been taught about the symbols of the Catholic Church. Pope Francis demonstrates his humble and loving character though



symbolic actions. Whether he is kissing an inmate's foot or discussing climate change with the United States president, Pope Francis is always spreading God's love. I believe that symbolic actions are important for Pope Francis' public relations efforts, because they translate effectively to the media. Given that Pope Francis follows a specific pattern of humility and caring actions, he exemplifies a consistent message across all platforms.

### Conclusion

Pope Francis shows the world how to effectively communicate through words and actions. He sets a great example for public relations professionals through reputation management, media relations and persuasion. Organizational leaders can follow Pope Francis' methods by building trust and having constructive dialogue with the audience. Pope Francis initiates constructive dialogues with political leaders like President Barrack Obama and President Fidel Castro and with laymen by cold calling victims of abuse.

Because the pope talks about relevant topics such as climate change and homosexuality as opposed to solely talking about religion, more people are listening. According to *Propaganda and Persuasion* (2006), an opinion leader must understand and adapt to the social climate to effectively communicate. It is evident that his word is reaching a large secular audience because the Pope has made the cover of multiple non-religious magazines.

Pope Francis has some weaknesses such as his old age and misinterpretation by the secular media. He is not a perfect pope, but his imperfections are what make him relatable. I believe that Pope Francis and the officials in the Vatican need to

strive to have a consistent brand across all platforms in order to effectively reach their followers and those interested in Catholicism. I am honored to study and live in a time of Pope Francis' teachings. I plan on sending my thesis to Pope Francis in hopes of receiving a cold call.

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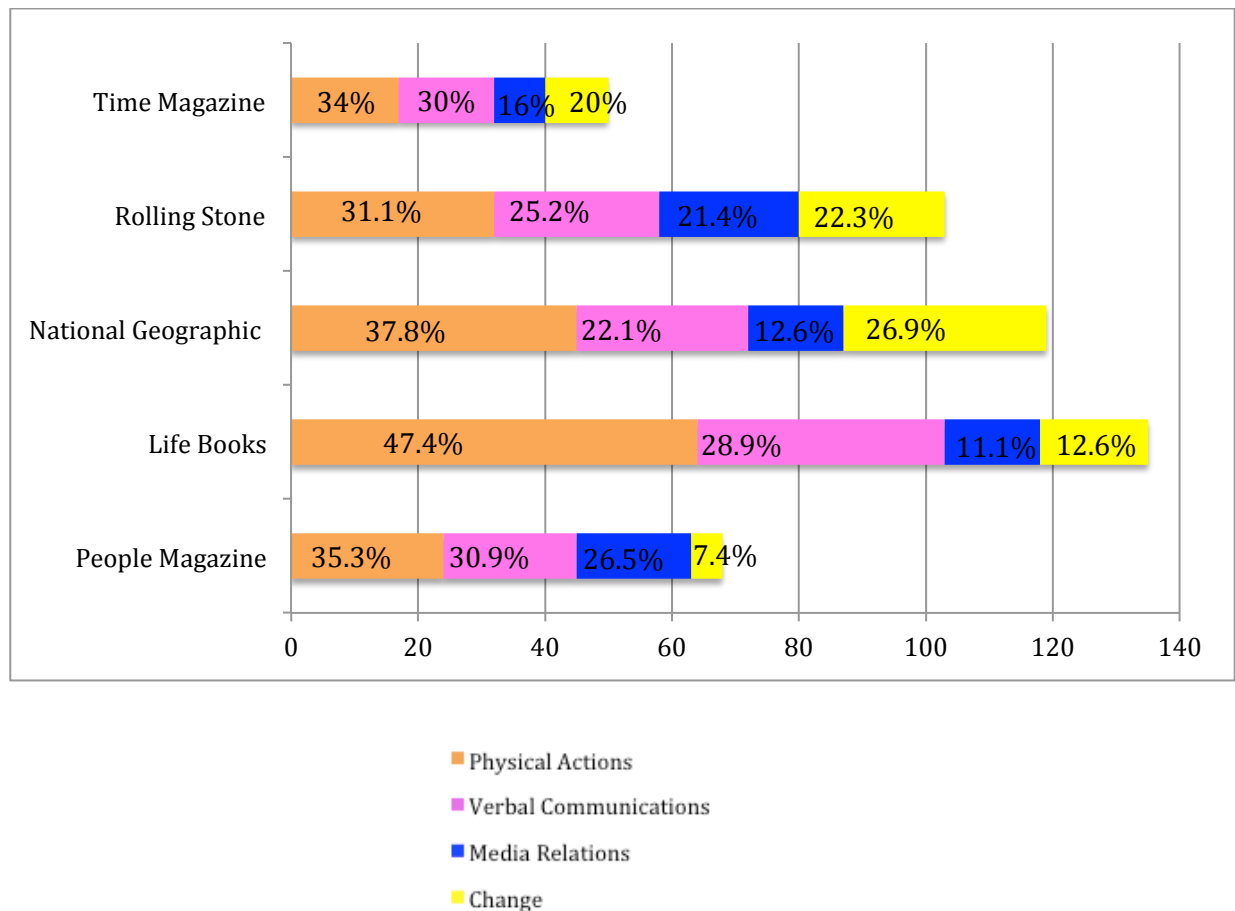


## APPENDIX

### **Research Question**

How are the selected magazines using examples of Pope Francis' physical actions, verbal communications, and media relations to relate to a change in the Roman Catholic Church?

**Figure 1**



### **Pope Francis' social media accounts**

Instagram: @franciscus

Twitter: @Pontifex

**Figure 2**

