Identity and image: a Miss America case study

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IDENTITY AND IMAGE: A MISS AMERICA CASE STUDY

by
Melissa C Connell

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division of Rowan University 1998

Approved by Professor

Date Approved August 27, 1998
ABSTRACT

Melissa C. Connell
IDENTITY AND IMAGE: A MISS AMERICA
CASE STUDY
1998
Dr. Suzanne Sparks
Master of Arts

Through brochure copy and other communication channels, such as the electronic media, organizations strive to effectively echo the company's beliefs, attitudes and values. Target audiences perceive the company in certain ways based on this media projection. Sometimes the image a company believes it has established is far different from the one the public sees.

As organizations aim to achieve this identity/image alliance, critics assert that the Miss America Organization has failed to meet the stated standards. In recent years, the Miss America Organization has received criticism from former contestants, politicians, feminist groups and some of its 80 million viewers for its failure to achieve a believable identity/image alliance.
The purpose of this study was to demonstrate why an organization's image should reflect its identity. It focused on the Miss America Pageant and the organization's inability to lose its "women on parade" image. The research presented in this study reflects the views of various authors. Secondary research was gathered through the use of textbooks, magazine articles, internet searches and other electronic media sources. An intercept survey, two focus panels, two in-depth interviews and a 200-person phone survey provided the primary data.

Relevant research supporting and mocking the Miss America Pageant exists. The author discovered articulated arguments for both sides.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Substantial research is devoted to helping organizations create the right image for themselves. This thesis examines a case study and explores image and its enormous impact on organizations. Public relations pioneer, Edward Bernays defines image as, "The way in which a person or thing is popularly perceived or regarded especially through the agency of the mass media." ¹

Feminist and author Naomi Wolf proposes various image techniques in her book *The Beauty Myth*. She briefly discusses why an organization's identity should equal its image. The dictionary defines identity as "The distinctive character belonging to an individual or group". ²

Organizations design plans to reach particular audiences. When an organization's target group fails to believe the organization's projected image, there is an identity/image conflict.

Through brochure copy and other communication channels, such as the electronic media, organizations strive to effectively echo the company's beliefs, attitudes and values. Wolf believes the target audience perceives the company in a certain way based on this media projection.


If an organization does not meet the image it has established, the audience will seek another outlet. An organization faces legal, ethical and financial problems when its personal view (identity) fails to match its image.³

Sometimes the image a company believes it has created is far different than the one the public sees. According to Stuart Elliot, advertising columnist of The New York Times, a company's image has little to do with what it actually produces.

"The public's opinion can shape the way in which a company operates. The public's perception of your image is your image, whether you want it to be or not."

To find out exactly how a company is perceived, many companies turn to the Roper Organization, a market and public opinion research firm in New York City. Kim Knepper, the Roper Organization's vice president believes that in some cases image is the net result of all the feelings and impressions a person has for a company.⁴

McDonald's, once criticized for its excessive packaging, undertook a campaign to buy recycled materials and set up recycling programs in its restaurants. While McDonald's viewed itself as an environmentally-conscience chain, the public did not see it that way.

Knepper also explains how Exxon's oil spill in the early 1990s, represents the tremendous impact public opinion can have on a company.

"Exxon sales decreased as a result of the Exxon Valdez incident, but there also were greater calls for legislation in terms of environment, leading to the formation of the Valdez principles."

In the early 90's the public brought the Pepsi Company to its knees. In the summer of 1993, a syringe was discovered in a Pepsi can.

As a result of public fear, the company lost $10 to $15 million in sales in just two weeks. According to Becky Madeira, vice president of public affairs, Pepsi Cola Company, a division of PepsiCo, Pepsi couldn't just walk away and forget about the incident.

We knew that there was no way a syringe could enter our manufacturing process and that it was mathematically unfathomable for all these incidents to happen simultaneously in different states since Pepsi products are made and distributed locally; nonetheless the public's fear was real. In order for Pepsi to survive, we had to restore the public's faith.\(^5\)

As the case with Pepsi, a company creates an image by turning a mirror on itself. In Management Review, William Horton of Terry College of Business explains:

"You can't just change your logo to change your image. You have to decide what image it is you want to portray. If your identity and image are not in sync, you can destroy your organization overnight."

Laurence Ackerman, principal of Anspah Grossman Portugal, an identity consulting firm in New York City, says a company's image is more than just good public relations and advertising.

"A company's image not only concerns good PR and advertising, but demonstrates appropriate ethical conduct and lives up to its reputation."\(^6\)

There is no consensus on the impact advertising has on shaping a corporate image. Critics agree that companies face turmoil when their image and identity greatly differ from one another. Knepper believes an organization's commitment to securing an identity/image alliance must serve as a company's top priority.

As organizations strive to achieve this identity/image alliance, critics assert one organization particularly fails to meet the stated standards. In her book, The Difference,

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\(^5\) "Pepsi Crisis," Public Relations Tactics, September 1994, 22.

\(^6\) Ackerman, Laurence. Management Review, November 1993, 10.
Washington Post columnist, Judy Mann explains why the Miss America Organization has not successfully changed its image from "hour-glass beauty queen" to "professional scholar." She discusses the pressure placed on young contestants to stay thin and the devastating consequences.

In findings published in the International Journal of Eating Disorders, researchers concluded that 60 percent of the Miss America contestants weighed at least 15 percent less than they should. The America Psychiatric Association has determined that maintaining a weight 15 percent below normal is one criterion for anorexia nervosa, the obsession with weight loss that has resulted in young women starving themselves to death.7

Mann argues that if the organization aims to seek academically inclined women, why do so many contestants develop eating disorders. Clearly she presents an identity/image conflict. Striving to achieve America's thinness obsession, does not represent a contestant's intelligence, but supports the "Barbie" ideal.

Author William Goldman writes about the history of the Miss America Pageant in Hype and Glory and discusses how the organization has worked at changing its "women on parade" image. His book details how the Pageant started, where it's been and where the Pageant is going as it prepares for the 21st Century. Many skeptics criticize the organization's intent.

The following quotes are derived from Women's Day Magazine and Marketing News regarding the Miss America Organization's image. They affirm the idea that an organization does not earn the trust of its target audience when its identity and image do not match.

According to Peggy Knudston, 1987 "Miss Wichita,"

The Miss America Organization has said in recent interviews that the Pageant is not appearance oriented. Perhaps Americans will begin to see

7 Mann, Judy. The Difference: Growing Up Female In America, 1994, 185.
Miss America as a role model to young women when someone in a wheelchair is voted into the top 10, or a contestant who is size 16 instead of size six saunters across the stage.\(^8\)

Journalist Chad Rubel agrees with Knudston.

The Miss America Pageant is still a distasteful show that exploits women as sex objects. The marketing of physical beauty has become a sea of unrealistic body ideals. The organization has presented these images to its public. Women reject the images being shown. They resent the Miss America Organization for saying it's something it's not.\(^9\)

In recent years the Miss America Organization has received criticism from former contestants, politicians, feminist groups and some of its 80 million viewers, for its failure to achieve a believable identity/image alliance.\(^10\)

Recently retired Pageant CEO, Leonard Horn, defends the organization's image. He explains that criticism usually comes from individuals or organizations that have not taken the time to familiarize themselves with the Pageant's benefits.\(^11\)

"What contestants know, and the general public sometimes fails to comprehend, is that the Miss America Pageant is not a beauty contest. It is a scholarship pageant system that makes available over $5 million in scholarship funds each year."

The organization's former speaker states that the Pageant is not based on one's physical beauty. Each year the newly crowned "Miss America" takes a victory walk down the 125-foot Atlantic City Convention Hall Runway, to this famous Bernie Wayne theme.

There She Is, Miss America
There She Is, your ideal.
The dreams of millions of girls,

\(^8\) Knudston, Peggy. "Shape Up Miss America, Woman's Day, 1994, 15.
Who are more than pretty
May come true in Atlantic City.
For she, may turn out to be,
The queen of femininity.

There She Is, Miss America,
There She Is, your ideal.
With so many beauties,
She took the town by storm,
With her All-American face and form-
And There She Is,
Walking on air, she is
Fairest of the fair, she is,
Miss America! 12

The song announces a winner with an "All-American face and form." The theme does not mention anything about a winner's academic abilities. Lawrence Wortzel, a professor of marketing at Boston University's School of Management believes when an organization does not live up to its promise, it faces controversy and often unpleasant publicity. Organizations must understand how misconstrued messages influence their credibility. Organizations who underestimate the power their image holds, do not recognize the repercussions their organization could encounter. When an organization fails to promote itself with a likeness to its identity, the audience is betrayed. 13

Analysis of Scope

The research presented in this study reflects the views of various authors. Secondary research was gathered through the use of textbooks, magazine articles, internet searches and other electronic media sources. An intercept survey, two focus panels, two in-depth interviews and a 200-person phone survey provided the primary data.

The public opinion uncovered in this study was based on individuals living in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Cherry Hill Township, a Delaware Valley suburb with approximately 70,000 residents, is located in Camden County, New Jersey. Cherry Hill's 25 square miles houses individuals with various ethnic backgrounds. The atmosphere provides for a diverse range of cultural, commercial and light industrial activities. Cherry Hill is approximately 20 minutes from Philadelphia, 90 minutes from New York City, one hour from Atlantic City and three hours from the nation's Capitol.

Survey instruments were implemented. An intercept study as well as two focus panels were conducted on identity/image conflicts to help gather data for a 200-person phone survey. The procedure used for the phone survey was random digit dialing with an error rate of plus or minus 7 percent. Two in-depth interviews with persons affiliated with either the Miss America Pageant or local and state pageants greatly contributed to the study.

Surveys were not conducted to seek anti-Pageant views. Surveys assisted in determining how the Cherry Hill community perceives the Pageant and whether or not its identity and image equal one another. Surveys also offered reasons why the Pageant and other organizations need to achieve an identity/image alliance and ways to execute such an endeavor.

**Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1:

The author expects respondents will not find the Miss America Pageant's image equal to its chosen new identity.

While various persuasive messages will cause individuals to believe the organization has reduced its "beauty queen" image, respondents will consider the Pageant's construction. The Miss America Organization claims to seek academically-
inclined young women. Former Spokesperson Leonard Horn repeatedly defends the organization's intentions. Respondents will see through this politically-correct facade.

Contestants can now sport two-piece bathing suits. Bathing suits count for 15 percent of the Pageant. Physical appearance still plays a winning role. This researcher expects respondents will disagree with Horn and explain why an organization's perception of who it thinks it is can differ from what the public believes or deems credible.

The study will solicit suggestions on how organizations can create an identity/image alliance.

Hypothesis 2:

This researcher predicts that honesty can remediate an image/identity crisis, particularly in the case of the Miss America Organization.

Research indicates that an organization's success revolves around integrity. It serves as the key component to achieving a positive corporate image. Madiera advises organizations to approach their business endeavors ethically. She believes company havoc and unrest result from dishonest behavior.

Findings will indicate why some companies' corporate images do not positively communicate with the public. Research will suggest that the reality of what a company is engaged in, as well as the perception of it in the eyes of the public, creates its image.

Focus group data combined with telephone survey results intend to show how the Pageant could lose its negative persona and gain credibility by exposing its true agenda. While not politically correct, respondents will explain why they prefer honesty over quiet passification.

Participants will define image. They'll discuss why organizations need to decide how they want people to relate to their products. They'll explain why organizations must approach their promotional endeavors with honesty. This researcher will explain how an organization's reputation is established through thousands of acts over a long period of
time. Respondents will suggest why companies who promote themselves with intelligent advertising and PR, reinforce their long-term perception. Finally, they'll explain why organizations need to decide what image they wish to portray. If they choose to depict something they're not, they can destroy their organization overnight.

Hypothesis 3:

**This study anticipates that negative public opinion toward the Miss America Pageant has emerged because the organization's audience prefers its former image.**

Public relations practitioner Bernard Hennessy says, "Public opinion is the complex of preferences expressed by a significant number of persons on an issue of general importance." It's a collective opinion of what voters, teenagers, senior citizens or audiences think. His research suggests organizations need to implement power, patronage and persuasion techniques to convince publics to act.

This researcher expects to find that public opinion depends very much on how issues are posed to audiences and on the circumstances in which they are asked to express themselves. When loyal Miss America audience members expect glitz and glamour from the 77-year-old Pageant and receive a "scholarship competition," they seek alternative entertainment sources. This researcher expects to find that the negativity surrounding the Miss America Pageant is largely based on the public's refusal to lose the former "beauty queen" image.

Primary and secondary data will expose the current identity/image dissimilarities apparent in the Miss America Pageant. Research will gauge image restoration techniques and suggest possible solutions.

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate why an organization's image should reflect its identity. It focused on the Miss America Pageant and the organization's failure to lose its "women on parade image."
It is possible that some examples cited throughout the study could cause the reader to question the ethical behavior of particular organizations. This thesis does not intend to justify any of the strategies practiced. The examples listed in this thesis are presented to the reader without bias.
Chapter 2

Related Literature Review

Relevant literature regarding the Miss America Pageant and an organization's need to attain an identity/image alliance was sought. The original search concentrated on five topic areas. The author examined image, identity, public opinion, persuasive messages and Miss America literature. Database searches, full-text periodicals, dictionaries, encyclopedias, statistical searches and electronic media searches greatly assisted the author. Chapter 3 discusses the specific procedures used to analyze both the secondary research and the primary data gathered for this thesis.

Image/Identity/Public Opinion

Bernays defines image as how a person or thing is popularly perceived. Identity concerns the personal character belonging to an individual or group. The saying goes, image is everything. When you meet a person, you form an immediate impression. It's similar to purchasing a product, using a service or tuning into a particular television program. Corporate America strives to create images that serve their consumers, suppliers, investors, analysts and regulators.14

According to Lawrence Wortzel, a company's image may have little to do with what it actually produces. For instance, when one thinks about Ben and Jerry's Homemade Inc., a high-quality ice cream isn't exactly the first thing that comes to someone's mind, but rather its social and environmental activism.\(^{15}\)

What exactly creates an organization's image? Is it a) public relations; b) advertising; c) ethical conduct; d) reputation; or e) all of the above? Although a loaded question, Ackerman says the obvious answer is all of the above. He believes that everything a company does affects its image.

"Once you recognize that, what affects image most dramatically is the interface between the producer and the outside world."

Critics estimate that 98 percent of the time discrepancies exist between the way a company views its image (identity) and the way the public perceives it. According to Archie B. Carrol, a professor of management at the University of Georgetown, both the reality of what a company is doing, as well as the perception of it in the eyes of the public creates its image. In order to create an image, companies must decide what they want people to think about when they think of their particular organization. The public's opinion can shape the way in which a company operates.

Public relations pioneer, Edward Bernays, coined the term *engineering of consent* to describe the objective of public relations. In 1922, he published *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. Bernays was one of the first to emphasize the importance of finding out what the public thought about an organization and then highlighting the positive aspects and probing the values and attitudes of publics to find out to what extent an organization conformed to those values and attitudes.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{16}\) Newson, Doug and Scott, Alan. *This Is PR*, 1985, 170.
In the 1940s sociologist Herbert Blumer and philosopher John Dewey defined publics in ways that still provide clarity and usefulness. According to Blumer, a public is a group of people who:

- Are confronted by an issue
- Are divided in their ideas as to how to meet the issue
- Engage in discussion over time

In their book, *This Is PR*, researchers Newsom and Scott believe public relations practitioners function in a climate of public opinion, one that often conditions responses significantly. They say that public opinion is not stable. They believe it can be changed by exposure to new information or events to such an extent that if these are not taken into consideration in research, an erroneous reading of the public's opinion can result.

To best explain public opinion, researchers Liang and Lang created the cracked egg theory. The theory breaks public opinion into eight sections. Initially mass sentiment exists. As in the case of the Miss America Organization, society feels a particular way towards the Pageant. This public sentiment evolves over time. Next, a controversial issue or incident occurs. For example, the Miss America Organization no longer promoting itself as a "beauty pageant" but as a "scholarship competition." The publics form both positive and negative opinions regarding the change. Time passes and publics decide whether they believe in the new projected image. They either favor, oppose or ignore the Pageant's chosen new identity. Publics may take social action, such as picketing or making phone calls to their local governments. Sometimes no social action is observed. Whether publics take action or not, they now weigh the incident's social value. They may compare

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the issue with similar subjects or view the organization differently. Perhaps in regards to Miss America, publics may now make a conscious effort to investigate how women are depicted in society. Liang and Lang's cracked egg theory eventually brings the publics back to mass sentiment.

Newsom and Scott offer advice to practitioners:

> When an opinion is strongly held, you are probably wasting your time trying to win that person over to your view. All you can hope to do is to nullify whatever effects the person may have on the undecided or uncommitted. In particular, you should not waste time on recent converts to the opposition, for new converts react with more emotion than reason and are almost impossible to reach without factual materials, such as a less persuasive argument.¹⁸

Much research surrounding identity, image, and public opinion concerns an organization's commitment to honesty. Madeira warns organizations to approach business endeavors ethically. Once an organization gets caught in a lie, it's almost impossible to restore the public's faith. The advice Madeira offers really centers on integrity, a key component to achieving a positive corporate image. Identity consultant Ackerman suggests other tips. He believes image is not dependent of the essential character, strategy and culture of a company. The actions that a company or organization take on a day-to-day basis create its image.

Hal Warner, executive vice president of public relations firm Manning, Selvage & Lee, and 1993 president of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) agrees with Ackerman.

"Performance is the best PR; it isn't what you say, it's what you do."

To maintain a positive corporate image, Warner suggests organizations establish crisis teams to look at worst case scenarios and develop back-up plans. The crisis team

should comprise of representatives from the public relations, legal and financial
departments and, depending upon the business, the public policy, marketing or
manufacturing departments. Madeira believes, as in the case with Pepsi, that crisis
management proves essential in resurrecting the public's trust.

Joseph Vecchione, the vice president of public relations for the Prudential
Insurance Company of America, asserts his feelings regarding image and trust in
Management Review. He says the public's perception of a company is vital. If the public
feels it can trust a company, the public will do business with it.

To maintain that level of trust, Vecchione believes that companies must live by
four principles: keep the promises you make when you do business with the public,
guarantee that your actions are worthy of the public's trust, respect the public and provide
the products and services your organization promises.

Can an organization update an image to appeal to a broader audience? Warner
contends an organization may update its image by demonstrating positive corporate
citizenship and becoming more socially responsible. He explains how images hang on for a
long time, but if an organization intends to change, it must unfreeze the old image by
encouraging employees and managers to lose the original concept. The organization must
refreeze these changes and adhere to the new image.

Major organizations struggle daily to maintain a forthright reputation. In 1992
Dow Chemical Co. and Corning scrambled to rescue its image. The 50-year-old breast
implant giant lost public opinion when several skeptical headlines and incriminating
internal documents surfaced.19

A controversial public relations explosion arose over the safety of silicon-gel implants. The company moved to contain the damage before it turned worse. Dow Corning replaced it chief executive, released 800 pages of internal memos and adopted a conciliatory tone. Whether the strategy amounted to more than aggressive spin control isn't apparent, but the controversy illustrates what happens when an organization starts losing in the court of public opinion. According to Houston plaintiff lawyer Richard Laminack, Dow Corning needed a fireman, not a president anymore.

Weeks after discussion, Dow chief executive Frank Popoff and Corning chairman James Houghton realized that a take-no prisoners approach would only generate more antagonism among the public and the Food and Drug Administration. According to Reibstein, the situation endangered the firm's image and bottom line.

Dow Corning chief executive, Keith McKennon asserts his opinion regarding the controversy.

"Here's a company that built a terrific reputation in about 50 years and we're not going to let it lose that reputation in 50 days."

To help remedy the organization's image battle, executives initiated various steps.

The literature suggests that an identify/image alliance proves vital. Previous work pertaining to image and identity stress an organization's need to achieve credibility.

Authors agree that the public must believe in an organization to support it. A portion of this thesis intends to explain why the Miss America Pageant's lack of credibility affects its overall perception. The secondary data collected indicates that to attain success an organization must achieve an identity/image alliance.
Persuasive Messages

According to Bernays, persuading the public concerns influencing or causing someone to do or to believe something by reasoning.

A primary purpose behind the communication process is trying to change attitudes and opinions through the use of persuasive messages. School public relations consultant, Donald R. Gallagher provides an example from his book, The School and Community Relations:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has considerable experience at getting new ideas accepted. It took the department 13 years to convince American farmers to adopt hybrid seed corn in their planting programs. From this long experience, agricultural scientists have found that acceptance of an idea involves five stages. Gallagher explains the steps.20

Awareness: This stage introduces a person to a new idea, practice or product. Little or nothing is known about it other than general information.

Interest: This is sometimes known as the information stage and is one in which an individual becomes interested in learning more about an idea, practice or product.

Evaluation: An individual weighs the merits of the idea, practice or product and attempts to determine if it is good for him or her.

Trial: The person tries the product, idea or practice a little.

Adoption: Here the individual decides that the idea, product or practice is good enough for full-scale use.

The mass media, whether radio, television or printed materials serve to inform the public and to make people aware of a situation or an idea. The Miss America Pageant lends itself to such interpretation.

Research suggests that Miss America's viewers are persuaded to support particular "beauty pageant" contestants based on the organization's marketing and persuasion strategies.

Former CEO for the Pageant, Leonard Horn rejects referring to Miss America as a "beauty pageant" but as a "scholarship competition." Author Toni Morrison explains his views.

This program despite its attempt in recent years to modernize its frightfully antique quality of "women on parade," a kind of maddeningly barbarous example of the persistent hard, crass urge to sell: from the plugs for the sponsor that are made a part of the script (that being an antique fifties and sixties television; the show does not remember its history as much as it seems bent on repeating it) to the contestant references to the success of some of the previous contestants and the reminders that this is some sort of scholarship competition; the program has all the cheap earnestness of a social uplift project being played as a musical revue in Las Vegas.21

Persuasion research indicates that persuasion techniques fall flat when an organization fails to achieve credibility. Authors stress how vital it is for organizations to present a unified identity/image alliance. Wortzel reiterates that what persuades individuals to support an organization is its honesty. She says if the Miss America organization hopes to convince the public that it is scholarship oriented and not searching for bathing beauties, it needs to re-construct the entire Pageant process. Wortzel feels people don't believe the organization, just look at what the contestants wear and how they're built.

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Research studies have turned up a series of findings about group influence on the receiver's acceptance or rejection of a message. According to sociologist Leon Festinger, a message is more likely to stimulate a favorable response if the content of it relates clearly to a group's values and beliefs.\textsuperscript{22}

Anthony J. Fulginiti, public relations editor of \textit{Communication Briefings}, says, influence works like gravity. He believes that persuasion, like gravity, doesn't actually touch others at a meeting or through advertising copy. It can not force one to think or feel a certain way. Fulginiti suggests that when one presents an idea or writes a message, he or she "curves the space." He believes people actually persuade themselves. Individuals follow the influenced space one has produced because they feel they have to. Fulginiti continues his persuasion theory:\textsuperscript{23}

People will always act in what they think are their best interests. Talented communicators use the right combination of benefits, freedom from constraints and road maps to curve the space of their audiences and start them on the road to persuading themselves. One can suggest, motivate, even prod. But you can't demand. It's more like planting a seed, watering it, facing it to the sun and hoping it decides to become something else.

Gallagher asserts that the persuasiveness of a communication is greater when the communicator's related experiences and professional reputation are known.

He says this is usually the case if the sender has gained a reputation for being honest and direct, is a highly respected person among associates, is thought to be well informed on the subject of the message, or shares a common background or set of experiences with his or her listeners.

Some additional research findings are interesting with regard to source credibility.

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\textsuperscript{22} Newson, Earl & Scott, Alan. \textit{This Is PR}, 1985, 182.
\textsuperscript{23} Fulginiti, Anthony, J. \textit{101 Ways To Influence People On the Job}, 1998, 1.
Some researchers define source credibility as expertness and claim that it is related more to attitude change than similarity to the intended audience. Stuart Oskamp, author of *Attitudes and Opinions*, believes that special conditions are needed: (1) the area of expertise must be related to the issue or topic being presented and (2) before the message is to be delivered the expertise must be made known to the audience.

In general, researchers suggest that people will often accept or reject message conclusions based on source credibility without paying much attention to the supporting arguments. In certain unusual situations, researchers have discovered an interesting relation between source credibility and the passage of time. They found that receivers remember the context of a message from a noncredible communicator, think about it, and sometimes later accept the message after they have forgotten where it came from. This phenomenon is known as the sleeper effect. In brief, then, the tie between the source of a message and the context of a message is not the same in perception as in memory.

Much research has been done on attitude change when the receiver of a communication is exposed to a message that agrees or disagrees with his or her point of view. Gallagher points out the most important findings in his book, *The School And Community Relations*:

- People tend to read, watch and listen to communications that are in agreement with their own beliefs and interests.

- When they receive a message containing a point of view or information that casts doubt on their position, they either disregard or distort the message in order to confirm existing attitudes and opinions. Actually, they only hear or read what they expect to hear or read, not what the message says.

- In some instances, exposure to such material leads to restructuring the message by receivers so that the context agrees with their predisposition or at least so that it is made tolerable. They end up, in other words, perceiving the message as though it reflected their own point of view.
In an area where few opinions have been formed, the chances are rather good
that a well-devised communication will accomplish its goal. In an area, however,
where opinions are fixed and strongly defended, the chance of achieving attitude
change is only slight. Where this is the case, it is better to take existing attitudes
and try to remediate them slightly.

In his book, *101 Ways To Influence People On The Job*, Fulginiti suggests that the
most effective influencers follow researcher Earl Newsom's advice: Be familiar, be similar,
be trustworthy, be clear and be bold. Fulginiti discusses some major needs people want
fulfilled when they look for someone to lead them:

- Credibility: Showing a personality people can believe in.
- Confidence: Showing a personality people can rely on. Saying and doing the
  same, never deceiving, being consistent and evenhanded.
- Convincing: Using both left and right brain functions. Appealing to "hot buttons,"
  pre-thinking options, being practical.

Fulginiti says the message menu is a pie divided into thirds. One third is
knowledge. Another third is attitudes. The final third is behavior. To succeed at
influencing, one must first decide which of the three, or which combination of the three
works best for the intended audience. An undeniable agreement concerning persuasion and
its impact on credibility exists in the field.

**Miss America**

Seventy-seven years ago on Sep. 8, 1921, Margaret Gorman, 16, of Washington,
D.C., won "the Miss Inter-City Beauty Contest"---the Atlantic City publicity event that
became today's Miss America Pageant. As the former "beauty pageant" now "scholarship
competition" creeps towards the 21st Century, critics and viewers are still expressing their diversified opinions regarding the American tradition.

Internet searches yielded various related articles pertaining to the Pageant. The author discovered both positive and negative writings. Some research concerned the Pageant's construction, while other literature focused on credibility and persuasion issues.

The author discovered substantial research concerning the organization's attempt to lose its "women on parade" image.

For the first time since 1947, this year's Miss America contestants were permitted to wear bikinis in the swimsuit competition. Horn explains.

"The decision is about choice, individuality and allowing 17-to 24-year-old women be who they really are, and is not a ploy to boost ratings. The organization's decision, does not in any way support that Miss America is a beauty pageant."

The national office distributed the following list of word substitutions to local organizers for the 1997 Pageant.24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use Instead:</th>
<th>Phrases To Avoid:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beauty contest</td>
<td>scholarship program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reign</td>
<td>year of tenure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>queen</td>
<td>state or local representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>charm or poise</td>
<td>ambition, leadership or self-confidence</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The literature review found that several viewers regard the Pageant as a yearly reminder of what can be achieved by self-improvement. New York writer Sharon King Hoge explains her family tradition.

"It's the underlying substance, I think, that has held our attention. Styles of beauty may evolve, but the Pageant shows that accomplishment endures. Only one of us actually wears the crown, a real-life glass slipper, but all of us can benefit by honoring our potential."

Some research suggests individuals tune into the yearly event because they identify with the young hopefuls. Hoge says her family loves the contestants because they're all outstanding but also somehow ordinary. She believes that most of them are public stars for only a year, and after that touch of magic, they go back home to become ordinary good moms and citizens. Hoge identifies with the contestants growing older, thickening in the middle, and turning gray.

Literature explains how the Pageant has attempted to alter its "beauty queen" image. Miss America 1995, Heather Whitestone, a hearing-impaired young woman was the first person with a disability to win the Miss America title. Washington Post writer, Roxanne Roberts praises Whitestone and the Pageant. She believes that Whitestone brings unprecedented attention and credibility to the Pageant.

In recent years, in a nod to modernity and political correctness, the Pageant has emphasized the contestant's dedication to social betterment. Each contestant is now required to speak on behalf of a worthwhile organization such as youth-violence intervention, underage drinking, organ-tissue donation or sexual abstinence.

Leonard Horn thinks the Pageant is fine as is.

"I'm sick and tired of people not understanding the value of this program. In a world that has nothing but troubles, this is something pretty darn good."

Over the past 77 years, critics have attacked the organization for continuing to include the swimsuit competition. In 1995, the Miss America Organization ran two 900 numbers during a special hour-long countdown just before the Pageant. Viewers received the opportunity to call in and voice their opinions regarding the swimsuit competition.
Seventy-nine percent of the viewers voted to keep the bathing-suit portion.

Kimberly Aiken, Miss America 1994 comments:

"If I don't want to compete in a swimsuit, I won't be Miss America. If I don't want to take the SAT's, then I won't go to college."

Former Organizer Leonard Horn doesn't understand the public's reaction. He says he cannot rationalize the decision. He explains how the scholarship program gives more than $24 million a year to contestants and views the response as a tacky relic of Miss America's past.

Significant research indicates that not everyone agrees with the Pageant's past traditions. Miss America 1955, recalls her agony in a one-piece swimsuit.

"I was dying a thousands deaths. I've never had so many people stare at me like that, and with binocularars. I'd be thrilled if they got rid of it."

Amanda Granrude, 1995's Miss Montana agrees.

"We shouldn't have women in veiled strip shows."

*Marketing News* staff writer Chad Rubel discusses the 1995 Pageant's swimsuit 900 numbers and how the Miss America Organization has passed the buck to the public.

"The Miss America Organization had a tough decision about whether to keep or drop the swimsuits. They now get the best of both worlds. Win or lose MAO can say that it is only serving the public. The implication is that the MAO knows the vote will be to keep the swimsuits, but it doesn't want to be held accountable."

In Wolf's book *The Beauty Myth* she describes how the Miss America Pageant has not lived up to its public promises. She explains how it's claiming to present a "scholarship competition," yet continues to produce a "beauty pageant." Wolf discusses how organizations like the Miss America Pageant perpetuate unrealistic ideals.

"The truth is, society holds outer beauty on a higher pedestal than it deserves."
Peggy Knudston, 1987 Miss Wichita asserts her feelings:

"The problem with the Pageant isn't limited to the underlying philosophy, which teaches that only thin women are beautiful. There is also the depressing reality that the contestants are so uniformly trained that any one of the 50 of them could be plucked from the ranks and perform the Miss America duties like a pro."

In 1995, Philadelphia Inquirer writer, David Johnston wrote an article focusing on a young Miss America contestant right around the time the organization was trying to re-package its image. The story discusses the various beauty make-overs the young woman endured including two dangerous chemical peels and breast implants. Some research suggests that the young contestant's support the "beauty" aspect by focusing more time and energy on their faces and figures than their books.

Relevant research supporting and mocking the Miss America Pageant exists. The author discovered articulated arguments for both sides. Credibility and persuasion factors greatly contributed to the research concerning Miss America and all organizations striving to attain a positive image/identity alliance.
Chapter 3
Procedures

Sample

Database searches concerning a company's chosen identity and its perceived image initiated thesis procedures. Searches on the Miss America Pageant's identity and image discord were also conducted.

The author needed reliable sources to confirm why a company's identity and image should echo one another. Information connected with image creation and its impact on the public relations industry was sought. Attitude and behavior data categories narrowed the study. Various research methods were implemented.

Data Collection

Database searches at Rowan University, the Cherry Hill Free Public Library and Margate City Library included CD ROM Newsbank, a full-text news resource containing comprehensive coverage of current issues and events from over 500 U.S. and Canadian newspapers and domestic and international newswires. Key words included "image," "identity," "public relations," "credibility," "public opinion," "persuasion," and "Miss America." Additionally, the author searched a Full-Text Periodicals database, which contained current (updated monthly) full-text articles from the most popular magazines. These searches yielded many related articles and books. Dictionaries and encyclopedias served as general references. Bibliographies, abstracts and guides to the literature assisted with the research. The author also incorporated speeches, print and electronic media collections and statistical searches.
Instrument Design

In addition to obtaining secondary research like textbooks, databases and periodical articles, the author gathered primary data by conducting surveys, focus panels and interviews. The two research techniques helped to focus on major identity/image conflicts within a company.

An intercept survey administered at the Cherry Hill Mall, a popular New Jersey shopping center, assisted the author in creating the survey instrument, a 200-person phone questionnaire. The three-question intercept survey asked 100 respondents about the 1997 Miss America Pageant. Sixty women and 40 men answered questions regarding the Miss America Organization's recent attempt to alter its "beauty queen image." Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the intercept survey's findings.

The data collected through the intercept survey at the Cherry Hill Mall led to two focus panels. Because the women competing in the Miss America Pageant fall between the ages of 17 and 24, the author deemed it appropriate to conduct a focus panel with young American women. Eight women, ages 17-24 engaged in a one-hour focus group. Additionally, the author conducted a focus panel with Miss America's target audience. Seven women ages 35-55 participated in the study. Both panels offered opinions regarding the Pageant and its attempt to lose its "women on parade image." Focus panel members explained which persuasive messages the organization could implement to gain credibility. They introduced ways to alter the Pageant's current construction. The participants also discussed what it would take for them to believe the organization's new chosen identity and suggested techniques to attract them to the program.
The focus panels further examined what creates and sustains a company's image. Members determined how a company's attitude and behavior, in connection with its image, affect credibility. Respondents detailed viable persuasive messages the Miss America organization and other companies seeking image restoration could initiate.

The focus groups yielded the necessary data to create the survey instrument. A phone survey occurred. Random digit dialing with an error rate of plus or minus 7 percent was the chosen method. The 200 phone participants responded to an 11-question survey regarding the Miss America Pageant and how a company's identity/image alliance impacts credibility.

After thoroughly reviewing all primary data generated from the research, the author then conducted two in-person, in-depth interviews. The author contacted individuals affiliated with either the Miss America Organization or local and state pageants to further investigate why an organization's identity should reflect its image.

Nick Dana, a Haddonfield, N.J. native and a Miss New Jersey judge from 1987-1994, detailed how local and state pageants selected finalists for the Miss America Pageant. He discussed content and the portion of scores used to tabulate composite attributes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composite Attributes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>preliminary interview (10.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>top five interview (15.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fitness in swimsuit (15.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on-stage personality (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talent (40.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dana further explained the Pageant's recent attempt to lose its "beauty queen" image and analyzed how the Cherry Hill community now perceives the "scholarship competition."
The author needed Dana to verify how the young women were chosen and elaborate on the current identity/image discord found in the Pageant.

Miss Teen New Jersey 1997, Nicole Golas asserted her beliefs regarding the Miss America Pageant in an in-depth, in-person interview. Golas commented on the organization's new identity and how she feels people are interpreting the changes. The author also posed credibility and image questions. The study required a contestant's viewpoints on the pageant process. The author not only sought Golas's attitudes regarding the "scholarship competition," but the beliefs of those individuals she's met who are not affiliated with the pageants. How the community perceives Golas and their reactions to her, assists the study in proving why an organization's identity must equal its image.

**Summary**

To analyze the data generated throughout the thesis process, the author engaged in percentage comparisons. The results explained the degree to which a variable can change within a given change in another variable as well as significant relationships between data groups.

Chapter 4 discloses the study's results. Chapter 5 offers a summary and interpretation, as well as the study's contributions and practical influence on the public relations industry. The following chapters discuss why a company's image should echo its identity and how to incorporate such an alliance.
Chapter Four
Data Analysis

General Summary

The following chapter discusses why an organization's image should reflect its identity. While it focuses on the Miss America Pageant and the organization's failure to lose its "beauty queen" image, it also presents relevant data pertaining to any organization seeking image restoration. This chapter summarizes findings from each researched data section.

After reviewing data collected through intercept surveys, two focus panels, two in-depth personal interviews and a 200-person phone survey, the author discovered great image/identity discrepancies with regard to the Miss America Pageant. Intercept survey findings indicated that the majority of Cherry Hill residents over age 18 do not view the Miss America Pageant as a "scholarship competition." Those participants who regularly tune into watch the 77-year-old September event, enjoy viewing the 50 "beauty queens." The research suggests most viewers do not consider the contestants academic backgrounds.

The 200-person phone survey revealed dissimilarities among men and women and conflicting opinions within certain age groups. Most men in all age groups preferred the former "beauty queen" image, while the majority of women in various age groups liked the idea of a scholarship, non-beauty competition. Findings indicate that the older the respondent the more he or she deemed the current Pageant as academic in nature. The telephone survey implied that most men are satisfied with how the Miss America Organization represents young American women. Research shows, however, that the
younger the woman, the less satisfied she is with how she's being represented in the Pageant.

Almost all men and women telephone participants strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that a company loses credibility when its image fails to match its identity. In addition, the majority felt that for an organization to positively communicate with its public, it must approach all promotional campaigns and business dealings honestly.

To enhance quantitative data, the author conducted two focus panels. The first was comprised of women between the ages of 17-24, the second group concerned women ages 35-55. Focus panels examined identity, image, the Miss America Pageant, public opinion and credibility. Research revealed that different perceptions exist between younger women and older women. In addition, women within the same demographic debated the Pageant's construction and modern-day stereotypes. Many participants in focus group #1, dismissed the Pageant's efforts to update its former image and explained the organization's inability to approach its campaigns honestly. They presented specific examples and provided several image restoration tactics. The older women acted in a less hostile manner towards the Miss America Pageant, yet most group members did not believe the organization's image was equal to its chosen new identity.

Two in-depth interviews with pageant affiliates offered insight. Nick Dana, an acting teacher and former Miss New Jersey judge, expressed disgust towards the entire pageant system. Dana discussed Pageant politics and what judges actually search for in contestants. While he believes state representatives should display self-confidence, intelligence, charisma and personality, he asserts that the public desires physically fit, attractive contestants. He strongly disagrees with the notion that the Miss America Pageant's image is equal to its new identity. He feels many organizations, including Miss America, may remediate their image through honesty.
The author also engaged in an in-depth in-person interview with Nicole Golas, Miss Teen N.J. 1997. To receive a first-hand account of what it's like to compete in a pageant, this researcher needed to speak with a young pageant representative. Golas, a 16-year-old 11th grader at Deptford High School, discussed the struggles and triumphs related with a state title. The author questioned her about the Pageant's identity/image alliance and presented credibility issues. Golas firmly believes that the Pageant is scholarship oriented and dismissed the former "beauty queen" image. She also mentioned society's failure to embrace an academic competition. In addition, Golas analyzed America's obsession with beauty and why she feels pageants receive a bad wrap. She believes the Miss America Organization strives to positively communicate with its publics and attempts to approach all its promotional campaigns and business dealings honestly.

Hypothesis 1:

The author expects respondents will not find the Miss America Pageant's image equal to its chosen new identity.

Results

The author conducted a one-day intercept survey at the Cherry Hill Mall with 60 women and 40 men over age 18. The researcher asked participants whether or not they watched the 1997 Miss America Pageant. Out of 100 respondents, 70 percent of the women viewed this year's Pageant and 52 percent of the men claimed they watched at least part of the 1997 competition. When questioned about whether they perceived the event as a "scholarship" or "beauty" Pageant, 87 percent of women and 75 percent of
men, considered it a "beauty queen" contest. Over 90 percent did not find the Miss America Pageant's image equal to its chosen new identity.

When this researcher asked respondents what it would take for them to see the Miss America Pageant as a "scholarship competition," several answers surfaced. More than 83 percent of women suggested eliminating the swimsuit portion. Several other women, comprising 62 percent, said more time needed to be allotted to the question and answer session at the end and less time to physical attractiveness in an evening gown or swimsuit. Forty-five percent of women also expressed the desire to view non-theater talent pieces, like sports or painting. They wondered why the talent portion seemed limited to vocal, musical and dance performances.

More than 85 percent of men who volunteered in the intercept survey, did not see anything wrong with a "beauty pageant." When asked what the organization would have to do for them to consider the Pageant academic in nature, 89 percent said to abolish the swimsuit competition. Over 53 percent recommended the organization make a concerted effort to seek less attractive and well-built women. Over 40 percent said they found it difficult to concentrate on the contestants community development platforms and scholastic accomplishments, when the young women spend a great deal of the evening "parading" around in dresses and swimsuits. This non-scientific, somewhat unreliable research method, helped the author to create a 200-person random digit dialing telephone survey.

This researcher and four trained assistants phoned over 380 Cherry Hill residents over a two-week period to complete 200 surveys. To better categorize the survey's findings, the author separated results by age and gender. Interviewers questioned 118 women and 82 men. The results proved diverse.
When asked whether or not the Pageant’s image is equal to its chosen new identity, men responded in the following way:

![Bar graph showing responses from men aged 18-25 years old.]

Results from males ages 26-35, varied somewhat from the above age group. While 46 percent strongly agreed and 8 percent somewhat agreed, 41 percent somewhat disagreed and 5 percent strongly disagreed. Over 60 percent of men in age groups 36-45 and over age 55 somewhat disagreed that the Pageant achieved an appropriate identity/image alliance. About 41 percent of men ages 46-55 somewhat disagreed.

The women perceived the Miss America Pageant differently than the men. Interviewers surveyed 24 women ages 18-25.

![Bar graph showing responses from women.]

Pageant Equal To Identity
Women ages 26-35 and 36-45 responded similarly. Approximately 30 percent of women between ages 26-35 somewhat disagreed and 40 percent strongly disagreed, while 55 percent of women ages 36-45 somewhat disagreed, 27 percent strongly disagreed. More than 50 percent of women ages 46-55 somewhat agreed and 25 percent somewhat disagreed. Respondents over age 55 responded in a like manner. About 46 percent somewhat agreed and 31 percent somewhat disagreed with the Miss America identity/image partnership.

When asked to rate the Miss America Pageant on a scale of one to 10, one being a "beauty pageant" and 10 serving as a "scholarship competition," males and females in all age groups responded similarly.

While 80 percent in most demographic categories viewed the Pageant as a "beauty competition," about 40 percent of women 46-55 and women over age 55 considered the Pageant a "scholarship competition." Research indicates that the Cherry Hill community's perceptions concerning the Miss America Pageant's image are split somewhat down the middle. The study suggests that younger women and older men somewhat disagree that the Miss America Pageant's image equals its chosen new identity, while older women and younger men somewhat agree.
During an in-depth in-person interview with Nick Dana, an acting coach and former Miss New Jersey judge, he stated that he does not believe the Miss America Pageant's image is equal to its chosen new identity. Dana believes the Pageant itself has modernized its focus and provides wonderful scholarship opportunities for qualified young women. He does, however, fault the organization for promoting itself as something it's not. Dana explains.

I applaud the Miss America Organization for creating academic standards. Contestants should demonstrate intelligence. But I do not believe the organization can toss aside its beauty focus. That's really why we tune in. How can it claim its judges base their decisions on one's personality, platform and academic rigor, when we never see an overweight or acne-faced woman competing. It's still a beauty Pageant!

Miss Teen N.J. 1997, Nicole Golas, disagreed with Dana. She firmly believes the Miss America Organization has successfully altered its image. She feels the contestants represent young American women well. Golas feels it's obvious the Miss America Organization focuses more on intelligence than attractiveness. She pointed out how different Miss America and Miss USA, a yearly competition, run their pageants.

The Miss America Organization makes available thousands of dollars to help young women pursue their professional goals. If any pageant misrepresents women it's the Miss USA Pageant. It clearly seeks beautiful, buxom, thin women. The Miss USA Organization doesn't seemed concerned with real social issues or a contestant's academic endeavors. The Miss America Pageant judges select young women who not only keep fit, but who care about current events and have the ability to effectively communicate with diversified audiences.

Focus group #1, eight young women ages 17-24 unanimously mocked the organization's attempt at changing its image. They felt the academic premise was a scam.
to produce politically correct programming. The members stated that in order for them to
deed the Miss America Organization as credible, several things would have to change.
The group decided the swimsuit competition perpetuates sexist stereotypes and should be
eliminated. One woman asked why only thin and attractive women compete in the
Pageant. Other group members agreed. They questioned why the top five interview
portion and the swimsuit competition both equalled 15 percent. One young woman asked
how she's supposed to take the Miss America Organization's scholarship attempt seriously,
when it believes that one's physical fitness in a bathing suit equals one's ability to answer a
question intelligently.

Many brought up the commercials shown during the Pageant. They felt the
sponsors supported the beauty element by promoting makeup, hair care products and
perfume. They believed the advertising confirmed the "beauty queen" stereotype. The
group discussed which persuasive messages the Miss America Organization could initiate
to achieve credibility. One group member suggested that bookstores or worthy
organizations such as Women Against Rape or the United Way advertise during the
Pageant to support the academic environment. In addition, they discussed society's desire
for a "beauty" pageant.

Focus group #1 also discussed the Pageant's hosts and judges. Typically these men
and women come from the entertainment industry. Panel members wanted to know why, if
the Miss America Organization hopes to be viewed as a "scholarship competition," it
doesn't select lawyers, doctors, salespeople and educators as hosts and judges. They
collectively felt the decision boiled down to money. Members believed that the American
public was not ready for a true "scholarship competition." Group members insinuated that
because the public places beauty on a pedestal, the Miss America Organization would lose
its audience and money if it solely centered on educational aspirations and community
platforms, but would not lose its audience if it stated it was a "beauty" pageant.
Focus group #2, comprised of seven women between the ages of 35-55, engaged in a different type of conversation. Four members felt the Pageant's image did not equal its chosen new identity. These women discussed the organization's need to "parade" women around on a stage. They wondered how the young contestants honestly believed they represented the modern American woman. They, like focus group #1 members, thought the swimsuit portion, whether the young women wore one-piece, or two-piece suits, needed to be removed. They said it was still a distasteful show which exploits all women.

Three members felt the Pageant had come a long way in terms of portraying women, and believed the Miss America Pageant's image is equal to its chosen new identity. These women remembered watching the Pageant in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They felt the earlier contestants misrepresented the average American woman. They discussed how years ago only one's face and figure mattered and how the swimsuit portion counted more. Today's Pageant, the three women claimed, present well-rounded women, who not only work out their bodies but their brains.

Summary

While quantitative and qualitative research indicates that most respondents do not believe the Miss America Pageant's image is equal to its chosen new identity, a certain percentage of overall participants do agree. The author believes age, gender and Pageant affiliation affected opinions.

Hypothesis 2:

This researcher predicts that honesty can remediate an image/identity crisis, particularly in the case of the Miss America Pageant.
The 200-person Cherry Hill survey indicates that over 95 percent of the respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that for an organization to positively communicate with its public, it must approach all promotional campaigns and business dealings honestly.

Both panel members from focus group #1 and #2 believed that organizations who suffer from identity/image disputes may restore their images by openly communicating with their publics. They suggested that publics respond well to directness and despise organization double-talk.

The groups pondered why an organization, such as Miss America, thought it could "pull the wool" over the audiences' eyes. The women reverted to the old adage, "actions speak louder than words." They suggested that organizations, whether restaurants, insurance companies or hospitals who experience identity/image conflicts, must admit their wrongdoings and make every effort to correct the situation. The women explained how publics sympathize with companies who immediately accept blame for their mistakes and move on. They questioned organizations who hide their financial upsets, political entanglements and moral dilemmas. One women believed organizations who assume they won't get caught are only fooling themselves. She suggested that once the public discovers an organization in a lie, the public is then reluctant to trust the organization. Three women discussed restoring public confidence through diversified actions. If a once popular pizza parlor now receives negative feedback from its customers ever since a prominent figure found a roach in his sandwich, it must engage in open communication with its unsatisfied clientele. The women offered four imperative steps. First, the pizza parlor must have the restaurant exterminated. Next, the owners need to invite the Board of Health to inspect its kitchen and eating area. Then they suggest, contacting a local reporter so he or she can write a positive feature article concerning the restaurant and its commitment to health.
Finally, the women said the restaurant owners should offer tours and give out gift certificates.

In regards to the Miss America Pageant, panel members once again expressed anger over the swimsuit competition. They felt the organization deceived its public by claiming it was something it wasn't. They questioned the Pageant's motives. The women felt as though the organization insulted their intelligence. Panel members discussed how academic competitions do not require tiaras and sashes. The group felt such accessories personified the former image. While they understood society's lust for physical attractiveness, they blamed the organization for not coming out and admitting it was a "beauty contest." Most hinted they would watch the "beauty queen pageant" as long as the organization presented it as such and didn't attempt to hide its sexist contest.

Dana, in an in-depth personal interview, explained why he felt organizations could remediate an identity/image crisis through honesty. He discussed how publics struggle to forgive organizations, once they get caught covering up a scandalous situation. Dana believes that the Miss America Organization has lost viewers because it's failed to admit its actual agenda. He thinks the organization attempted to "sugar coat" its purpose in the politically correct 1990s. Dana believes that if the organization continues to present false images to its audience, eventually the audience will stop tuning in. He encouraged the Miss America Organization to expose its beauty agenda by promoting itself honestly. Dana considers ethical public relations as straightforward and from the heart. While not politically correct to host a "beauty pageant" in 1998, Dana feels the American public will respond favorably to integrity as opposed to quiet passification.

Dana also discussed the organization's hypocritical scoring techniques. He suggested that if the organization wishes for the public to associate the Pageant with credibility, it must re-configure its current percentages. He pointed out that the interview
portion and the swimsuit competition each equal 15 percent. While Dana agreed that
talent should remain at 40 percent, he felt that if the Miss America Organization really
wants to be considered a "scholarship competition," it must eliminate the swimsuit
competition and the 20 percent allotted to "on stage personality." In addition, he said the
organization needs to make the top-five interview portion much more difficult and should
count it as 40 percent.

Summary

Research findings suggest that honesty can remediate an image/identity crisis,
particularly in the case of the Miss America Organization. Focus group members,
telephone respondents and interview subjects advise organizations to openly communicate
with their publics. When faced with an image crisis, they suggest organizations admit their
mistakes and restore the public's faith by quickly mending controversial situations. In
regards to the Miss America Pageant, participants greatly encourage the organization to
expose its hidden agenda. While volunteers may not agree with the idea of a "beauty
contest" in 1998, they may now watch and support a credible television program.

Hypothesis 3:

This study anticipates that negative public opinion toward the Miss America
Pageant has emerged because the organization's audience prefers the former image.

Telephone surveys suggest that women in all age groups strongly disagreed. The
results indicate that the younger the woman the more she disagrees. Forty-two percent of
women ages 18-25 strongly disagreed and 34 percent somewhat disagreed. Coincidentally,
25 percent of women ages 46-55 somewhat agreed with the statement. More than 50
percent of men ages 18-55 strongly agreed, while 33 percent of men over age 55 agreed.
In an in-depth interview Miss Teen N.J. 1997, Nicole Golas somewhat agreed that negative public opinion has erupted because the organization's audience prefers the former image. She explained her uncomfortable predicament as a contestant and state representative.

I enrolled in pageants to increase my self-esteem, receive money for college/professional career and to meet new people. Unfortunately, society forgets this vital aspect of most credible pageants. The public desires a beauty pageant and it refuses to accept anything that contradicts the former "women on parade" image. I feel as though I'm between a rock and a hard place. The more the Pageant attempts to focus on academics, the less enthusiastic the public acts.

While Golas admires the Pageant for its successful image change, she worries about its future. The Deptford 11th grader fears that if the Pageant places all its focus on scholastic achievements, eventually no one will tune in. Golas doesn't claim to understand the public's obsession with attractiveness but recognizes the need to appease them. She says money talks and the Pageant continues to make money off the "beauty" aspect. Golas believes the organization needs to remember why people initially began tuning in. If the public expects a "beauty contest" and receives an academic competition, then she feels negative opinions emerge about the organization.

Former Miss New Jersey judge, Nick Dana agreed with Golas. He, like the high school student, expressed concern for the Pageant's future. Dana gives credit to the organization for attempting to modernize its image, but feels the public just refuses to listen. He explained how the feminists argue that the Pageant objectifies women and creates unrealistic ideals for young women to aspire to, while others enjoy viewing the somewhat sexy Hollywood review. Dana discussed that in his experiences as a Miss New Jersey judge and entertainer, the public adores a spectacular performance, no matter how outdated and tacky the program might appear. He suggests that people somehow escape...
their daily professional and personal pressures through a light and fluffy media outlet, such as the Pageant.

Both focus groups clearly disagreed with the former image and how it represented women. The panel members asserted that unfortunately the public adores watching "women on parade," and the organization successfully appeases them with its yearly Miss America Pageant. The women discussed the need to achieve strong ratings and to satisfy an audience who routinely seeks escape from reality through sexy provocative programs like the popular television show "Baywatch." The participants did not necessarily blame the organization for negatively depicting women, but faulted it for covering up its actual "beauty queen" purpose. While most members reject the current and former Miss America image, they somewhat agree that negative public opinion has emerged because the general population longs for a pure unadulterated "beauty pageant."

They unanimously believed that the Pageant's faithful viewers face difficulty accepting today's modern American woman. They claim the media dictates that for a woman to attain success, she must first keep in shape and maintain a clear complexion, and then if she's ambitious, develop her intellect. The group feels the media, in conjunction with the Pageant, has helped to perpetuate outdated and inappropriate female stereotypes. Although the 14 volunteers wished the Pageant would end its beauty focus and solely concentrate on women's academic and professional endeavors, they understand the Pageant's need to compete in the ever-alluring media.

**Summary**

Quantitative data gathered through the 200-person telephone survey suggests that women in all age groups strongly disagreed that negative public opinion toward the Miss America Pageant has emerged because the organization's audience prefers the former image. On the other hand, almost 50 percent of male telephone respondents in all age groups strongly agreed.
Golas and Dana both agreed. They believe society expects and desires a "beauty pageant," and will always find ways to satisfy its craving.
Chapter 5

Evaluation

This thesis researcher expected great controversy over Miss America's recent attempt at altering its image. The secondary data gathered indicates that former contestants, media critics and some of the Pageant's 80 million viewers seem torn between the Pageant's righteous efforts to present a "scholarship competition" and its unethical identity/image alliance. Some loathe the Pageant's poor attempt to represent today's modern American women, while many others praise the Pageant for successfully presenting well-rounded contestants. Prior research also suggests that several Pageant audience members desire an attractive and well-built state delegate, while a number reject this sexist objectification. Author Toni Morrison refers to the program as a musical Las Vegas revue and Peggy Knudston, 1987's "Miss Wichita," believes the organization will become a full-fledged "scholarship competition" when physically challenged and overweight women are voted into the top 10.

Numerous women understand the public's desire for a "beauty pageant," and keep that goal in perspective. Kimberly Aiken, Miss America 1994, stated that if she didn't compete in a swimsuit she would never win the Miss America crown and if she refused to take the SAT's she would not attend college. Several others contend the organization should not promote "veiled strip shows." Large debates still exist in the field. Many critics argue the organization had made huge strides to appease the public, yet has modernized its former image, others blast the Miss America Organization for attempting to "sugar coat" its actual "beauty" agenda.
Almost all primary research indicates that in order for an organization to positively communicate with its public, it must engage in ethical and open communication.

Maderia warns organizations to approach their business dealings honestly. Most critics agree that organizations destroy their reputations overnight by failing to disclose company problems, whether financial, moral or legal. They assert that an identity/image alliance proves vital. Ackerman believes that organizations face turmoil when their image and identity greatly differ from one another. Most communication specialists, maintain that an organization's commitment to securing an identity/image alliance must serve as its top priority. Kneeper says once an organization greets an image crisis, it may remediate the situation through honesty. Former research indicates that agreement exists in the field pertaining to an equal identity/image partnership.

Some secondary research shows that while many individuals adore the Miss America "beauty queen" image, others strongly disagree. New York writer, Sharon Hoge somehow relates with the young contestants. She discussed how she and her family enjoyed the glitz and glamour. Hoge recognized how ordinary yet special the young women appeared. Several viewers and critics do not support the beauty ideal and feel it's still a distasteful show that exploits all women. While many disregard any notion that the Miss America Pageant has actually transformed itself into a "scholarship competition," most recognize the need to compete with other media choices.

Primary qualitative and quantitative data suggests that most participants dismiss the Pageant's credibility, yet sympathize with its predicament. While most women volunteers despise the organization's failed attempt at attaining a politically correct program, many feel the general public still demands a "beauty pageant." Many surveyed do not agree that Miss America Pageant's image is equal to its chosen new identity. More than 60 percent of men and women believed that the organization still produces a "beauty pageant" despite its efforts to promote its Pageant as a "scholarship competition."
Almost all participants strongly agreed that an organization may remediate its image through honesty. They felt only through this ethical and appropriate behavior could an organization possibly tackle image restoration. Most condemned organizations who lied or hid vital consumer information. Participants believed that all organizations eventually get caught. They claimed the public sympathized with the organization more if it initially engaged in honest straightforward discussions.

With regards to negative public opinion emerging because the Miss America audience prefers the former image, results proved diverse. Female respondents in most age groups did not appreciate nor support the former "beauty queen" image. They did however, feel that the general public still anticipates a Pageant focusing on one's physical attributes. The women felt this misconstrued idea, would never alter. Most did not fault the Pageant for attempting to please its public, after all in 1995 its viewers did vote to keep the swimsuit portion. Female respondents recognized the pressure placed on the organization to perpetuate old stereotypes and present women as sex objects. The women reluctantly admitted that sex sells. They stated that the Pageant's ratings had dropped over the last few years because the Miss America Organization has attempted to re-package its image. Unfortunately, the women asserted that modern television audiences view the Pageant as an escape from everyday life pressures and responsibilities. The women suggested that Americans enjoy engaging in such mindless entertainment. Focus panel results, however indicated that the women worried about the sneaky semantic strategies the organization implemented to gain credibility. While the Pageant in recent years has adapted academic requirements, it continues to seek attractive well-built young women. Most women believed the Pageant negatively influenced America's teenagers. They believed the Pageant still exploited women and communicated inappropriate messages. In addition, they felt such representation only damaged young girls self-esteem and
contributed to eating disorders. While most women participants claimed they refused to watch the yearly event, those who did said they tuned in for curiosity sake. They considered their behavior habitual.

Most male participants longed for the former image. Most did not see anything wrong with a "beauty pageant" in 1998 as long as it was promoted in such a manner. The men suggested the ratings would increase if the Pageant concentrated more on beauty and less on the scholarship aspect. The majority did not view the Pageant as exploitative but as a yearly celebration of womanhood. They felt that the Pageant successfully combined intellectual ability with beauty, charm and personality. The men believed the organization put forth well-rounded women to represent the states.

**Interpretation**

The author believes that television in its quest to entertain and present unrealistic images of women, illicits an almost numbing effect in its viewers. Research data suggests that these sexist and unfair reflections create standards which many women feel threatened and offended by. If the Miss America Organization genuinely wishes to elevate women and highlight their academic achievements, why must contestants starve themselves and sometimes engage in risky plastic surgery. While the organization may not outwardly admit to encouraging its contestants to undergo such damaging activities, it has established a beauty perquisite which continues to dominate the contest even as it approaches the next millennium. As expected the author discovered that women, more so than men, believed the organization was not equal to its chosen new identity. Women desire equality not quiet passification. Research shows that most women would at least
deem the organization credible if it admitted to producing a "beauty pageant," and not a "scholarship competition." The author also proposes that if a program depicted men in the same manner as the Miss America Pageant, including physical fitness in a swimsuit, women would perhaps feel as though justice had finally been served.

If the Pageant completely reverted back to its original "beauty" focus, this author found that it may satisfy those Americans most perturbed by the organization's unethical packaging but may also initiate feminist unrest. Such an action could spiral out of control.

Research does indicate that for an organization's public relations endeavors to succeed, strategies and tactics must be pursued in a straightforward and ethical manner. Madeira encourages organizations to incorporate common sense when developing campaign advertisements or promotional vehicles. In addition, she says, "your reputation is your trademark; it can be your biggest asset and your biggest liability." In public relations effective communication is key. James Grunig asserts that practitioners must learn to successfully communicate their organization's beliefs, attitudes and values and in return express the public's feelings, desires and opinions to the organization. Only through this two-way symmetric PR model based on mutual understanding and trust may organizations meet their audiences expectations.

**Limitations**

This thesis researcher experienced some data limitations. While focus panel results helped enrich quantitative data, the two groups only included college educated women between the ages of 18-50. In addition, focus panels consisted of 6 to 8 participants per group. All respondents in the 200-person phone survey and most of the intercept and
focus panel volunteers resided in Cherry Hill, N.J. While approximately 70,000 people live in Cherry Hill, qualitative results were generalized to prove the study's intended hypotheses.

**Areas For Further Research**

The author believes more research is needed to determine how women wish to be projected in the Miss America Pageant. Perhaps a pageant is not the best way to express today's modern American woman's career goals, educational philosophies and family plans. Mann suggests more studies focusing on how women view themselves are deemed necessary.

Another area which requires greater research is how and why American's watch the Miss America Pageant. Research could discover why viewers tune into the yearly Pageant. Also, whether or not the Pageant's overall ratings would drop significantly if it eliminated the beauty aspect and solely focused on contestant's character and academic abilities.
References

Ackerman, Laurence. *Management Review*, November 1993: 10-12


Morrision, Toni. "Life With Daughters: Watching The Miss America Pageant."


Miss America Pageant
Phone Survey

Interviewers:

Hi, my name is ---------- and I'm a public relations graduate student at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. I'm currently writing a thesis concerning identity, image and the Miss America Pageant. I wanted to take no more than ten minutes of your time to ask you a few questions regarding the Pageant. This survey is completely voluntary and confidential.

Q1 Did you watch this year's Miss America Pageant?

Yes...............................................................1
No......................................................................2
Unsure............................................................88
Refused To Answer.........................................99

Q2 How many times have you watched the Miss America Pageant in the last five years?

Never............................................................1
Once..................................................................2
Twice..............................................................3
Three..............................................................4
Four................................................................5
Five................................................................6
Unsure............................................................88
Refused To Answer.........................................99

Q3 How satisfied are you with how the Miss America Organization represents young American women?

1. Very Satisfied
2. Somewhat Satisfied
3. Somewhat Dissatisfied
4. Very Dissatisfied

Q4 In recent years the Miss America Organization has attempted to alter its beauty queen image. The organization now promotes itself as a scholarship competition. It seeks academically inclined young women. On a scale of one to 10, one being a beauty pageant and 10 being a scholarship competition how do you rate the Miss America Pageant?

One...................................................................1
Two..................................................................2
Three..............................................................3
Q5 Do you believe the Miss America Pageant exploits women?

1. Strongly Agree
2. Somewhat Agree
3. Neither Agree Or Disagree
4. Somewhat Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

Q6 Would the Miss America Organization's ratings increase if it solely focused on beauty and eliminated its academic requirements?

1. Strongly Agree
2. Somewhat Agree
3. Neither Agree Or Disagree
4. Somewhat Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

All organizations, including Miss America, view themselves one way or another. This represents an organization's identity. All organizations also project images to their target audiences. This causes the public to form an opinion about the organization. It's regarded as the company's public perception or image.

Q7 Does a company lose credibility when its identity fails to match its image?

1. Strongly Agree
2. Somewhat Agree
3. Neither Agree Or Disagree
4. Somewhat Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree
Now I just wish to ask you a few follow-up questions:

Q8 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

1. No Formal Education
2. Some Grade School
3. Completed Grade School
4. Some High School
5. Completed High School
6. Some College
7. Completed College
8. Some Graduate Work
9. A Graduate Degree
10. Refused To Answer

Q9 Which bracket represents your age?

1. 18-25
2. 26-35
3. 36-45
4. 46-55
5. Over 55
6. Refused To Answer

Interviewer:

Q10 If you're not sure whether the individual is male or female ask this question:

I'm sorry, but I'm unable to detect over the phone whether you are a male or a female.

1. Male
2. Female
3. Refused To Answer