

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION: A WIN-WIN MODEL FOR FACING ACTIVISTS  
PRESSURE; A CASE STUDY ON MCDONALD'S AND UNILEVER'S RESPONSES TO  
GREENPEACE

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

Activists and consumers are increasingly demanding companies act in the best interests of the global society and the environment, therefore a corporation's environmental record is becoming an important factor in achieving and maintaining business success. This paper consists of two case studies which examine how Greenpeace, an independent global environmental campaigning organization, targeted two major multi-national corporations, McDonald's and Unilever, in order to change destructive agricultural processes in the developing world. This research examines how these two corporations responded to activist pressure from Greenpeace and offers prescriptive insight on how corporations can avoid conflict and create mutually beneficial outcomes when responding to activist pressure. This research examines the outcome of both McDonald's and Unilever's dialogue with Greenpeace.

This paper examined recent literature on changing attitudes toward environmental issues, the credibility of corporate sustainability, and symmetrical communication. This paper begins by discussing the growing importance of companies making a commitment to environmental issues and why two-way communication, which will be defined as face-to-face communication for the purposes of this paper, is an important component to this commitment. By studying the use of two-way dialogue in the practice of corporate communications with environmental activist organizations, these case studies will help to test the real world validity of theoretical propositions about symmetrical communication (L. Grunig 1992).

This research examined two cases in which Greenpeace targeted the environmental practices of Cargill, a privately held, multinational corporation which purchases, processes, and distributes agricultural commodities and other agricultural supplies. When Greenpeace released negative reports criticizing Cargill and other agricultural suppliers' business practices in the developing world, Cargill responded using defensive one-way communication. Rather than directing its campaigns toward Cargill and other agriculture suppliers, Greenpeace chose to focus their efforts on McDonald's and Unilever, two large highly visible international corporations using their products. Greenpeace called attention to the roles of these two companies in destructive environmental practices and asked them to take action.

In the first case demand for non-genetically modified soy prompted Cargill to set up a soy exportation port in Santerem, a riverside community deep in Brazil's Amazon basin which provides one-third of the UK's soy imports (Howden July 17 2006). After a three-year investigation Greenpeace released a report which implicated Cargill and other companies in illegal and unethical deforestation, land-grabbing, slavery, and violence and traced their connection to UK food companies, including McDonald's (Greenpeace International April 6, 2006; Howden July 17 2006, and July 26 2006; Sauven 2006).

In the second case Greenpeace investigated the destruction of rainforest and peatlands in Indonesia for the production of palm oil and linked this destruction to several suppliers who supply many European companies with palm oil, half of which comes from Indonesia (Greenpeace UK April 2008; Greenpeace International April 2008) Unilever is the one of the world's biggest buyers of palm oil, which goes into many of their products

such as Dove and Suave beauty products (Greenpeace UK April 2008; Greenpeace International April 2008),

Both companies chose to work with Greenpeace, pressured their suppliers to change their environmental policies, and worked toward creating moratoriums to end deforestation. These case studies demonstrate how two-way communication can be used to avoid conflict, foster mutually beneficial relationships between companies and activist publics, and converge seemingly conflicting ideologies. This research will also add to the scholarly understanding of how this form of communication works in a real world context.

## **Chapter II: Review of the Literature**

### **Changing Attitudes Toward Environmental Issues**

News stories have often portrayed environmentalists and developmentalists as being engaged in an ideological battle that cannot be reconciled (Killingsworth and Palmer 2002). In their book *Ecospeak* Killingsworth and Palmer argued that the mass media has created an oversimplified dichotomy of environmentalists, “who seek long-term protection regardless of short-term economic costs” and developmentalists “who seek long-term economic gain regardless of short term economic costs” (1992, 9). Both Killingsworth and Palmer and DeLuca examined local media coverage of environmental protests in the United States and determined the media paint a picture of a seemingly irreconcilable dichotomy.

DeLuca identified the media’s commitment to industrialism as being connected to concentrated media ownership and corporate interest and investment in media (1999). Both Killingsworth and Palmer and DeLuca maintained that the discussion of environmentalism is conditioned by the media and framed in a negative light based on a commitment to developmentalist ideology and the rhetoric of industrialism (Killingsworth and Palmer 1992; DeLuca 1999). Killingsworth examined several news articles on local environmental issues, in one article he observed was framed as “the classic environmentalist battle” reducing a local problem to a “global abstraction” which

is irresolvable and suggests “pollution is the ‘price’ of ‘prosperity’ and most citizens are willing to pay” (1992, 27).

Both Killingsworth and Palmer and DeLuca maintained that environmentalists are portrayed as self-interested others by the media. In *Image Politics* DeLuca analyzed the media framing of radical environmental action by Greenpeace and EarthFirst!, and maintained that social movements and protesters are framed as “disturbers of order,” “deviants,” and “terrorists” (DeLuca 1999, 89). By aligning themselves with the environment, the wilderness which is not under human control, Killingsworth and Palmer said that environmentalists groups like the Sierra Club, “represented the outsider and were thus all too vulnerable to the attacks of developmentalists, especially those who claimed that the environmentalists were elitists more concerned with their own petty pleasures over a beautiful vista....than with the great masses of American society” (1992, 36). DeLuca also addressed what he viewed as a double standard of “self-interest” when the interests of large corporations and environmentalists collide, he wrote:

“So although the corporate-funded Wise Use groups extol the sanctity of ‘property rights’ in cases of development versus environmental protection, when homeowners and local citizens are fighting the excesses of economic development and progress, thus threatening corporate profits, protection of ‘property’ is dismissed as selfish” (1999, 90).

Although the media may represent developmentalism and environmentalism as two opposing sides, that does not mean individuals make a value judgment and simply choose one side over the other. Survey research by Dunlap and Van Liere in the 1970s could not place individuals’ views in black and white terms and identified “a surprising degree of acceptance” of both the environmentalist, New Environmental Paradigm (NEP), as well as acceptance of the developmentalist, Dominant Social Paradigm by



individuals among the general public (1978, 12). This 1978 study used a Likert-type scale to survey the general public and a group of known environmentalists about crucial aspects of what they identified as the NEP which addressed limits to growth, the balance of nature, and anti-anthropocentrism (Dunlap and Van Liere). Killingsworth and Palmer also identified a continuum of perspectives on nature which range from the view of nature as an object, a resource, and a spirit (1992). Killingsworth and Palmer examined a wide range of perspectives regarding the role of nature in society and identified a need for “a generally accessible narrative” to reconcile conflicting demands and bridge the knowledge gap to recondition the discussion of environmental issues to broader contexts and audiences (1992, 21).

Although the political environmental activist movement may still not be portrayed very favorably in mainstream media, in recent years the award-winning documentary “An Inconvenient Truth” and rapidly rising gas prices have sparked the mainstream media’s awareness of environmental issues. Rather than becoming activists many people are showing their commitment to environmental issues with their checkbooks. A study of students and the general public in the United Kingdom found that attitudes, rather than socio-demographic traits, behavior, or environmental knowledge, may be most consistent predictor of pro-environmental purchasing behavior (Schlegelmilch, Bohlen, and Diamantopoulos 1996). Market research has identified 68 percent of the U.S. population as “Light Greens,” who buy green products sometimes, and 12 percent of the U.S. population as “True Greens,” who regularly look for ‘green’ products (Hanas 2007, 3).

In an editorial for *Media Week* Hugh Hough, president a New York based communication and advertising agency called Green Team, markets products to individuals who are “attempting to affect change through their purchases” and “incorporate their personal values when selecting one brand over another” (2007, 2). Hough called these individuals the ‘awakening consumer’ and said this person is someone who is a bit confused and wants to do the right thing but isn’t sure exactly how to go about it and needs clarity and honesty to be won by marketing efforts (2007). In an article for *Advertising Age* former Sierra Club president and global CEO of Saatchi and Saatchi S [sustainability], Adam Werbach, identified these consumers as part of the ‘blue’ movement, “a post-green, people led movement that aggregates the power of marketers and consumers as catalysts for social change” who are trying to “live their lives with authenticity and commitment to the larger good” (2008, 2). This research supports a movement away from environmental issues as a radical dichotomy toward the idea that individuals and companies can make small changes toward positive social and environmental change.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Sustainability**

Changing attitudes toward the role of business and the overall phenomena of businesses acting to positively effect society can be linked to the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). According to Wood, “The basic principle of corporate social responsibility is that business and society are interwoven rather than distinct entities; therefore, society has certain expectations for appropriate business behavior and outcomes” (1991, 695). Wood identified three key principals of CSR; legitimacy, public

responsibility, and managerial discretion (1991). The principle of legitimacy holds that society “has the right to establish and enforce a balance of power” and grants power to businesses by choosing to buy their products or grant other stakeholder benefits and without this support businesses are rejected and “die” (Wood 1991, 699). The principle of public responsibility is a relational principal emphasizing an organization’s relationship to its environment which maintains businesses should be accountable for helping to resolve problems and social issues contributed to and affected by their industry (Wood 1991). The principal of managerial discretion is the concept that managers have the right but also the responsibility to use discretion as well as personal accountability when choosing how best to act in a socially responsible manor (Wood 1991). In addition to responsibility Wood also discussed responsiveness, the capacity of an organization to take action regarding CSR, which has been characterized by environmental assessment, stakeholder management, and issues management (Wood 1991).

In examining CSR within the context of developing countries Pratt identified four different perspectives on corporate social responsibility (2006). Prevalent for most of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the returns on investment argument maintains that corporate officials’ only responsibility is maximizing investor profits (Pratt 2006). In contrast to this view the trustee management perspective and the self-interest perspective incorporate the principle of legitimacy and recognize effects businesses and stakeholders have on each other. The trustee management perspective holds that businesses are affected by disparate stakeholders and complex environments and must maintain a balanced role with these stakeholders (Pratt 2006). The self-interest perspective argues that socially responsible

behavior is good for business because it creates a “thriving community in which to do business” and not following the expectations of stakeholders “might be subject to public outcry for further oversight and regulation” (Pratt 2006, 255). Both Wood (1991) and Pratt (2006) identify corporate social performance as the most “evolved” form of corporate social responsibility which incorporates CSR, responsiveness, and behavioral outcomes. Wood takes this concept one further identifying the concept of corporate social policy, which is defined as the formal or informal inclusion of corporate decision making policy guided by social issues and impacts which respond to institutional, organizational, and moral/ethical objectives (1991).

Although Pratt recognized that many companies have wide responsibility gaps between the values they expose and their action he recommends businesses measure how their activities affect their profits and their reputation (2006). Pratt viewed CSR as an overarching theory which can help companies behave ethically in the developing world as well as the developed world by affirming “the interplay among human rights, media independence, and good governance” (2006 272).

Corporate sustainability is encompassed in corporate social performance and can be viewed as a branch of corporate social responsibility which reflects businesses’ obligation to preserve the integrity of the natural environment and take action to resolve damages to the natural environment which their businesses contribute to and are affected by. This concept reflects the same principles inherent in corporate social responsibility as well as industry’s attempts to reconcile the seemingly divergent ideologies of developmentalism and environmentalism. Rather than viewing sustainability as

contradictory to the goals of corporations, sustainable development aims “to meet the needs and aspirations of both current and future societies” (Prexl and Signter 2006, 11).

Millstone and Baker Watts wrote that the environmental movement is no longer simply a part of the liberal agenda and is now a mainstream issue of concern to “consumers, investors, politicians, and businesspeople alike” and businesses making a commitment to environmentally friendly practices can not only avoid crisis and expensive fines but also become more profitable (1992, 1-2). Millstone and Baker Watts alluded to the potential of corporate sustainability to converge the ideologies of environmentalism and developmentalism:

“The environmental crisis is presenting the business community with an incredible opportunity to create truly responsible companies which are both profitable enterprises and outstanding corporate citizens” (1992, 31).

The core concept of sustainability “resists the economic version of the metanarrative of progress and thereby promotes maintenance and endurance of the ecological systems on which human life depends” (Killingsworth and Palmer 1992, 130). Prexl and Signtzer viewed corporate sustainability as “a new management concept which poses an alternative to the traditional models of wealth maximization” which is committed to “the planned and strategic management process of working towards a balance of economic, social and environmental values” (2006, 2). In his *Futurist* article “Profits from Principle: Five Forces Redefining Business” Bennett Davis claimed that the forces of consumer conscience, socially conscious investing, the global media, special-interest activism, and the expectations of corporate leadership are redefining the purpose of business by proving that “profitability and social awareness are not antagonistic but

interdependent” (1999, 30). Davis also realistically affirmed, “In the future, each company will define its social role in terms of self-interest and fund good works only to the extent that the company gains financially from them” (1999, 33).

John Paluszek, senior counsel at Ketchum, said corporate sustainability and corporate social responsibility are not only a defensive commitment but also an opportunity (2007). He said cause related marketing and a commitment to corporate sustainability can give a business an edge over competitors (2007). Paluszek also pointed out that policies created in Europe after WWII have helped propel European nations toward more responsible business practices and these practices are illustrating how corporate responsibility can help create a more sustainable world (2007).

Many environmentalists warn that claims of corporate environmental responsibility should not be lauded as a substitute to regulation and some view attempts to create a greener economy by bringing environmentalist issues into the traditional economic equation as problematic (Tokar, 1997, Greer and Bruno 1996). Tokar called for an attempt to include the cost of our impact on the environment in the consideration of economics as well as a need for a “fuller reconciliation of social and ecological values” by challenging the “hegemony of economically centered thinking,” and realigning “social and political institutions with ecological patterns” (1997, 192).

Others believe incorporating ecological principals into business is a lofty but attainable goal. Nicholson discussed how more ecologically centered points of view can be incorporated into business principals (1992). Nicholson summarized the key ethical principals of environmentalism as “divergence from strictly anthropocentric views, the

shift from viewing man apart from nature to that of including him within, inclusion of social justice concerns, and the development of approaches not fitting traditional ethics categories, such as ecological economics, which includes both utilitarian and justice points of view” (1992, 278). Although several groups, such as The Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES), have developed guiding principles and codes of conduct, such as the Valdez Principles, which aim to lead business in incorporating a more ecologically centered ethical principles into business practices, they have limited success in getting large companies to sign them (Nicholson 1992; Greer and Bruno 1996).

Both Strelow (1992) and Prexl and Signitzer (2006) identified the need for environmental managers and public relations trained environmental specialists who can work together to gather, analyze, and evaluate sustainability-related information and compile sustainability or “environmental” annual reports. Prexl and Signitzer argued that corporate sustainability communication can help a company work toward a “balance of economic, social and environmental values” by “enhancing trust and credibility amongst customers by positioning the company as a sustainable organization with sustainable products, use sustainable products to build relationships with customers through marketing, and can contribute to the general communication about the issues of sustainability development by empowering the general public” (2006, 2, 6-7). Most importantly Prexl and Signitzer pointed out the role of the public relations practitioner as mediator, they cited the high conflict potential of corporate sustainability due to “various stakeholders having differing interests in the company’s sustainability performance,”

such as investors interested in increased return rates and activists groups demanding environmental reform (2006, 16).

### **'Greenwashing' Versus Building 'Green' Credibility**

Many companies like McDonalds and Unilever are realizing being seen as socially irresponsible can be damaging but being seen as a responsible company is an opportunity to connect with consumers (Frazier 2007). In light of this opportunity many large corporations and small businesses alike have been quick to jump on the 'green' marketing trend. However, some companies are trying to make this connection while engaging in environmentally and socially irresponsible behaviors. This practice has been termed 'greenwashing' by environmental activists and the media and takes a variety forms.

At its worst 'greenwashing' refers to marketers who "do whatever they can to superficially wrap themselves in some 'responsible' do good message...attaching their products to green messages without doing much of anything to really deliver" (Holbrook 2007, 1). In her 2004 *Communication Arts* article "Greenwashing" designer Ellen Shapiro provided examples of some of the years worst 'greenwashing' offenders from the Web site, [greenwashing.net](http://greenwashing.net). Some of the claims she referenced from the site are: "Kraft foods, cited for promoting Post cereals as having natural ingredients while making them from genetically-engineered corn; Clairol, for claiming that its Herbal Essences shampoo offers a "truly organic experience," though its formula includes several chemicals; American Electric Power, for advertising itself as environmentally friendly, though its emissions contribute to air pollution, acid rain, global warming; and ExxonMobil, for



‘falsely advertising that the air we breathe is getting better, not worse,’ and with other oil giants, helping to kill the Kyoto Protocol, an international initiative that called for tougher emissions standards” (Shapiro 198, 2004).

As companies realize the profitability and positive image benefits of a ‘greener’ corporate image ‘greenwashing’ practices are likely to increase. In Mya Frazier’s article *Advertising Age* article “Going Green? Plant Deep Roots” she pointed out the problem and dangers of disconnecting marketing and reality and noted “as awareness spikes, so, too, will skepticism” (2007, 1). Frazier cited a recent campaign by General Electric as an example of the problem of ‘greenwashing.’ In 2005 GE launched an expensive Ecomagination advertising campaign pointing to it’s investment in solar power, wind power, fuel-efficiency, and ‘green’ locomotives while at the same time lobbying to “weaken a series of EPA proposals to reduce smog and soot levels and replace decade-old standards for diesel locomotives” (Frazier 2007, 4). There has also been much criticism of companies with weak environmental initiatives who invest in expensive marketing campaigns to create a ‘greener’ image. Shapiro discussed the multi-million dollar campaign launched by oil conglomerate British Petroleum (BP) to refine its image with a new logo and a branding program focused on natural energies and a redefined set of corporate values although 80 percent of BP’s financial profile is related to oil exploration and production and only about three percent is invested in alternative energy (Shapiro 2004).

Although consumers may have good reasons to doubt any company that boasts a positive impact on the environment many professional communicators believe that

marketing, public relations, and advertising can assist corporations in solving environmental problems by communicating truths about companies making even small changes (Larry Light 2007, Holbrook 2007, Owsley 2007) “When trend exploitation prevails over responsibly responding to consumer concerns and desires, then it is not surprising there are opinion-influencing critics of marketing who think marketing is inherently harmful” (Light 2007, 3). In his *Advertising Age* article “Marketers, Seize the Opportunity to Help Heal Society’s Ills” Larry Light called for marketers to “change the perception that marketing is contributing to social problems to a belief that marketing can be an effective part of the solution...putting people’s minds at ease boils down to more than communicating truths; it boils down to creating trust” (2007, 3).

While some marketers cling to superficial means that align to hot topics with little substantiation, in his *Advertising Age* article “Don’t Convince Us Your Brand’s Better if it Isn’t” Jim Holbrook maintains that even if a marketer’s company is not the perfect model of sustainability “doing something is better than doing nothing” and as long as what they are telling consumers is authentic “doing a little better” is ok. Holbrook maintains that “if we have the right intentions (based on what our consumers are telling us they want and need), and we are trying to solve real problems (vs. doing just enough to avoid trouble), then we are on the right path to better brand balance” (2007, 3).

Companies that follow this philosophy, such as Toyota, often have products that cater to ‘green’ consumers, like the Prius, as well as giving consumers options, such as the gas-guzzling Land Cruiser (Holbrook 2007). These authentic efforts of trying to make small improvement rather than trying to make the company appear to be something that it is not

is what Holbrook has identified as the key to building green credibility rather than greenwashing.

Although it is up to advertisers and marketers to establish brand identity and appeal to consumers, many in the marketing and advertising industry have realized that aligning a company with 'green' concerns goes far beyond the public relations and marketing departments. In the *Advertising Age* article, "Why Brand Veneer Must Reflect a Real Soul" Greg Owsley, the chief branding professional for New Belgium Brewing, identified five steps to gaining the approval of environmentally conscientious consumers (2007). Owsley's first step was important though not surprising, he maintained that "the back-of-the house practices have to live up to what your promoting up front...the marketing claims should be no bigger than the scope of the goodwill efforts" (2007, 2). Owsley realized 'authenticity shortcomings' are at the core of 'greenwashing' allegations and maintained that honesty is the best policy and advised marketers to "be prepared with answers to the tough questions or, even better, acknowledging where you have gaps between practice and aspiration, shows your consumers you're honest" (2007,2). While many companies try to align themselves superficially with a 'green' image Owsley maintained 'real soul' is the new paradigm of competitive distinction, businesses that fully embrace their citizenship in the community they serve have the opportunity to forge enduring bonds with their customers (2007, 4)."

In order to establish trust and credibility among stakeholders, advocacy groups, and skeptical 'green' consumers more companies and corporate communicators are looking beyond marketing and advertising and creating sustainability reports, engaging in

stakeholder dialogues, and creating information campaigns (Bernhart and Slater 2007; Prexl and Signitzer 2006). According to the *Communication World* article “How Sustainable is Your Business?” under various names these reports are more comprehensive versions of the traditional annual financial report which integrates economic growth, environmental stewardship and social responsibility to convey a company’s “direct and indirect impact on the environment and society” (Bernhart and Slater 2007, 18). Although they focus on building a positive reputation among key publics and are certainly not immune to the practice of ‘greenwashing’ Bernhart and Slater warned, “these audiences demand reports that are balanced, accurate, transparent, timely, and above all, truthful” (2007, 19).

Although criticism of corporate sustainability communication is not unwarranted Prexl and Signitzer maintained public relations practitioners are best suited to communicate about sustainability issues (2006). When companies are committed to adjusting to society’s changing values Prexl and Signitzer argued that sustainability communication efforts have a marketing case to enhancing the sales of products with more sustainable production processes, a business case to enhance the trust and credibility of the company, and a public case to “directly contribute to the general communication about the issue of sustainable development within a given society” (2006, 7).

When addressing criticism from activists and NGOs, issues of credibility should be a key concern. Research from the Edelman Trust Barometer has indicated that the public believes NGOs are very credible sources of information and NGOs are more

credible than big corporations and governments (Edelman 2007). Both Arndt and Carey and Gettler discussed a new trend that has businesses and NGOs creating alliances. Many companies are beginning to view working with NGOs as a way to help their public image and boost their credibility as well as improve their bottom line (Arndt and Carey 2007, Gettler 2007). Businesses can adopt more socially responsible corporate images by working with activists who criticize them and inviting them in to help fix problems, employing activists and NGOs as consultants, and engaging in corporate activism which can help avoid conflict and increase a company's credibility (Arndt and Carey 2007, Gettler 2007).

Although there may be limits to cooperation between big business and NGOs, business leaders who underestimate these organizations as stakeholders may be asking for trouble (Carey and Arndt 2007, Gettler 2007). In an interview with an Australian newspaper Brian Bacon, the head of the Oxford Leadership Academy, said NGOs are a powerful one trillion dollar industry and as the economy slows down businesses will be forced to change their style of leadership and work more with communities and governments as well as NGOs (Gettler 2007).

### **The Asymmetrical and Symmetrical Models of Communication**

As businesses try to move toward sustainability to better meet the needs of society and future generations there is much debate about the best way to foster these changes. Many scholars point to the need for creating a dialogue. The current view of rhetoric stems from ancient Greek philosophers, most notably Aristotle, who defended rhetoric as the way in which sound ideas, developed with proof and reasoning, are presented for

others to consider (Heath, 2008). According to Heath, Aristotle's stand on rhetoric is "comfortable with the current preference for two-way symmetrical communication" where "each side is neither inherently correct nor morally right, but the process of exchange can reveal the interests of both sides so they can achieve a win-win, integrative outcome based on collaborative decision making"(2008, 217). A similar view was shared by Aristotle's predecessor Isocrates who believed no one can know for certain which ideas are best, however reasoning, knowledge, and the ability to communicate can help us make an informed decision about what is best for a society (Heath 2008). Aristotle and Isocrates also suggested the importance of the speaker's character and credibility as well as the speaker's intent to ethically communicate in the collective interest of all as important elements to prevailing in a rhetorical debate (Heath 2008).

To better understand two-way communication we must first examine all four models of communication identified by Grunig and Hunt. The earliest one-way models, the press agency/publicity model, characterized by generating media coverage, often through deception, and the public information model, which favors truthful disclosure of information to the media, are unsophisticated models that involve the generation of messages to publics where information "flows one-way from the organization through media channels to target publics" (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig 1995, 41). Unlike one-way communication which disseminates information through monologue, two-way communication exchanges information through dialogue (Grunig and Grunig 1992). According to Grunig, Bernays originated the asymmetrical approach which is characterized by "gathering information from target publics in order to devise effective

message strategies” which may be used to persuade or manipulate publics (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig 1995, 41). While the unbalanced asymmetrical model attempts to change the public, the symmetrical model tries to achieve balance by adjusting the relationship between organizations and publics by focusing on dispute resolution to negotiate mutually beneficial outcomes (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig 1995, Grunig and Grunig 1992).

According to Grunig and Grunig the two-way symmetrical model is not only the most ethical approach to public relations, this approach is also the “model most effective in meeting organizational goals (1992, 308).” In both models of communication, strategic research is used to collect information about key publics in order to improve strategic decisions. In the symmetrical model this research could include both scientific and informal research such as keeping in touch with members of key publics and media contacts (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig 1995). Although research has shown that organizations use all four models for different situations and in different programs, Grunig and Grunig and others have suggested that the two-way symmetrical model is the best strategy when dealing with activists (Grunig and Grunig 1992, L. Grunig 1992).

By providing a framework for ethical communication Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig asserted that the two-way symmetrical model gives communicators the ability to adjust the “behaviors of the dominant coalition, thus bringing publics and dominant coalitions closer together” creating a framework for more socially responsible practices (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig 1995, 49). L. Grunig’s case studies found that the issue, not the organization, was generally the target of activist pressure (1992). L. Grunig maintained

that neither the activists or organizations typically have an extremely opposed viewpoint, and “the activist stance tended to go from direct pressure or calls for regulation to a more trusting, cooperative attitude at the first sign of the organizations willingness to negotiate” (1992, 516).

These findings indicated that although it was the least practiced approach, the two-way symmetrical model was likely to be the most effective response to activist pressure (L. Grunig 1992, 525). Based on the findings case studies, L. Grunig suggested six reasons that the balanced communication of the two-way symmetrical approach is most effective way to “overcome bitter social divisiveness” (1992, 525). According to L. Grunig, excellent two-way communication includes “learning the consequences of what organizations are doing to all of their relevant publics” and measures effectiveness “in terms of more than simplistic, short-term gains or losses,” for example “a short-term triumph for the organization might lead to long-term problems with disgruntled activists” (1992, 525, 528, 523). Organizations should also use two-way communication “to tell the publics what they are doing about any negative consequences” and consider involving outsiders early on before opposition takes shape, L. Grunig noted that this would also create the “possibility of mutual influence” (1992, 526). By creating channels of communication before controversy begins and keeping open channels of communication, activists are more likely to trust the organization especially when a possibility of compromise is emphasized (L. Grunig 1992, 526). Furthermore L. Grunig suggested, “An on-going, balanced and proactive program of constituency relations must acknowledge the legitimacy of all constituent groups – regardless of their size” and stated the



importance of learning to negotiate and conduct strategic research went conducting a public relations program involving two-way symmetrical communications (1992, 527).

Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig noted excellent communications departments use both the asymmetrical and symmetrical models, which they concluded make up a single mixed-motive model combining the “short-term use of asymmetrical practices within the context of a broad symmetrical philosophy” (1995, 51). Grunig and Grunig explained that the mixed motive model does a better job of describing public relations practice in the real world by combining both compliance-gaining (asymmetrical) and problem-solving (symmetrical) tactics which can be organized along a continuum where achieving symmetry is the desired\* goal of practice (1992).

### **Creating a Dialogue**

Numerous texts and articles in business, public relations, and marketing regarding corporate sustainability point to a need for companies, and their public relations departments, to create a dialogue with environmental activists and citizens (Ardnt and Carey 2007, Davis 1999, Gettler 2007, Grunig 1992, Greer and Bruno 1996, Prexl and Signitzer 2006, Strelow 1992). There are many ways to create a dialogue but there is little agreement as to what form this dialogue should take.

At the onset of the environmental movement and the formation of Greenpeace in the early 1970s public relations practitioners began to recognize a need to communicate with environmental activists. At the 1970 Midwest Public Relations Conference titled, “Public Relations ’70 Action or Reaction? The Environmental Crisis” Murray Hillman, managing director of The Strategy Workshop, referred to environmentalists and others

calling for a “revolution in values” as revolutionaries who posed a threat to business and called for business to recognize a need to change (1970, 19). Hillman maintained that businesses needed to learn to communicate and create a meaningful dialogue with the revolutionaries, whom he called “the future and the hope of this country” (1970, 20).

In the 1990s writers and scholars suggested several methods for activist engagement in business decisions that effect the environment and local communities. Greer and Bruno suggested companies hold public hearings and give the public the right to participate, submit comments, and vote on referenda concerning environmental issues (1996, 256). Davis suggested activists act as advisors and predicted “in the years ahead, activists will gain the greatest leverage by working directly with companies to help executives make the links between profit and social and environmental probity” (1999, 33).

Creating a dialogue can also help to avoid controversy over environmental issues. Strelow recommended not only providing objective information but also keeping communication open and continuous and ensuring “that communications are truly two-way, so that community concerns and media interests can be identified and addressed in their early stages, not after some crisis has erupted” (1992, 166). Paluszek also supported a need for two-way communications saying that public relations practitioners at their “fullest and finest” must first listen to their audiences and gather information before communicating (2007).

Although creating a “meaningful dialogue” is often advocated, a study by L. Grunig, in which 34 in-depth case studies were conducted on public relations behavior

regarding conflict with activist groups, found that creating a meaningful dialogue and balanced two-way symmetrical communication was the rarest approach used in dealing with activist pressure and has been a largely untested strategy (1992, 514). However, L. Grunig maintained “the research inherent in this model allows for crucial proactive, rather than reactive, public relations” which “should eliminate any sustained, bitter social divisiveness” (1992, 514).

L. Grunig defined an activist public as “a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics, or force” and maintained that although the “dominant coalition may ignore such vital constituencies if it does not consider them crucial” they do “have the power to affect the organization” (1992, 504, 507). Through “contact with the media, letter or telephone campaigns directed toward legislators or members of the public, lobbying, public forums, petition drives, litigation, pseudo-events, public education, or picketing, boycotts, and sit-ins” activist groups, regardless of various size, make-up, and tactics have “the ability to damage organizations with considerably larger reputations are resources” (1992, 516, 514). L. Grunig examined various strategies organizations used when dealing with activist pressure and found all but the two-way symmetrical model to be ineffective (1992).

L. Grunig’s study found that when dealing with activists, the model of communication used was less balanced than the model normally used by the organization in what she called an attempt to “dominate (rather than cooperate with) its environment” (L. Grunig 1992, 517). With most of the organizations (22 of 34) acting as more closed

than open systems, the dominant coalition tended to discount input from activists, including internal activists, wanting “the issue to be perceived as a nonissue” (L. Grunig 1992, 217-220). The study found that in less than half of the cases action was taken as direct result of activist pressure and that action was often directed at members of the public not associated with the activists or in the form of one-way communication, such as press releases (L. Grunig 1992, 217-220). Although practitioners described their programs as “proactive” and “responsive” and expressed the importance of active two-way communication L. Grunig found that this was not the case in practice and credited lack of support from the dominant coalition, lack of training (from education and experience) in public relations, and lack of necessary researching skills as the cause (1992, 521).

### **Criticism of Dialogue with Activists and the Symmetrical Model**

Although many opponents to an organization may be referred to by others or themselves as activists, Smith classified opponents to organizations in several categories and notes that not all opponents are necessary open to creating a dialogue with the groups they oppose (2005). According to Smith, all opponents, including activists, are people or groups who are against an organization and have the potential to damage the organization by limiting its ability to pursue its mission and achieve its goal (2005). Smith classified opponents as advocates, dissidents, antis, activists, missionaries, zealots, or fanatics and maintained that each of these types of opponents has a different rationale for their opposition to an organization and requires a communication approach that is reasonable to the type of opposition (2005). Advocates oppose an organization because they support

something else and their tactics are mainly vocal, dissidents tend to oppose organizations because of a position they hold or actions they have undertaken, and antis are dissidents on a larger scale and may seem to oppose any kind of change or established institution (2005). Activists often oppose organizations as a by-product of a larger goal or issue they support and seek specific and tangible change, whereas missionaries may be similar to activists but tend to be more self-righteous, have more fervor, and tend to be driven by a moral imperative (Smith, 2005). Zealots are single-issue activists with the passion and dedication of missionaries, and Smith classifies the most extreme opponents as fanatics or no holds barred extreme zealots willing to go to any lengths for their cause who want to change the company or put it out of business (2005).

Smith and Lechti agreed that in many cases it may be possible to create a dialogue with advocates and activists. If the organization can find common ground for discussion organizations may be able to create alliances with these groups; however, both believe there are many cases where collaboration is not possible, feasible, or may be disadvantageous to the organization (Smith 2005; Lechti, 1997). According to Smith, dissidents are looking for communication which addresses their position and concerns whereas the only type of communication likely to be effective with antis is communication that says their will be not change, whereas communication with activists could often lead to some degree of cooperation if some level of common ground and compromise can be found (2005). Unlike activists, creating a dialogue with missionaries, zealots, and fanatics is not likely to cause these types of groups to change their position or attitude toward the organization although communication could help to keep the

organization from becoming an obvious target and deter less fanatical supporters (Smith, 2005).

Lechti disputed the claim that two-way symmetric public relations is always feasible and emphasized the importance of examining each situation to determine whether or not the opponent is open to collaboration and whether or not there is a coherent basis for cooperation before adopting a relational approach to an opposition group (1997). According to Lechti “two-way symmetrical theory assumes that parties to the dispute have a shared mission of social progress,” he disagrees, stating, “a shared mission is something to be achieved, not something to be assumed” (1997, 48). Lechti argued that even when dealing with opposition groups that may be open to collaboration there are often cases where the interests of these groups are antagonistic to the goals and interests of other key publics and maintained “a particular rhetorical strategy may repair one organization-public relationship, but cause alienation in another organization-public relationship” (1997, 49). In these cases collaboration may be difficult or impossible.

Lechti also pointed out that although organizations may attempt to develop proactive relationships with activist groups this may not always be possible, especially when activist criticism is being generated by cultural forces outside of the organization’s scope, using an example from Procter and Gamble in the early 1980s when the drug company’s logo was accused of being an occult symbol by religious fundamentalists in the south (1997). Lechti recognized that in some cases the opposition group may have a vested interest to avoid collaboration and like Smith he identifies some instances when opponents may be unwilling to cooperate (1997). Some opposition groups, which Smith might classify as missionaries, zealots or fanatics, are not open to collaboration because

they are more motivated by confrontation or retaliation and collaboration contradicts the dramatic rewards associated confrontation (Lechti 1997). When describing this situation Lechti referenced a conflict between DuPont Chemical and Greenpeace in which “both sides felt that the symbolic costs of collaboration were much greater than any potential benefits” and Greenpeace representatives felt that collaboration with DuPont was “objectionable in principle” (1997, 51). In some cases Lechti and others believe these single issue groups often share some characteristics with religious sects and view themselves as being united by their opposition to evil forces causing them to believe that collaboration with the target of their opposing is undesirable and immoral (1997). Lechti mentions that in some cases opponents create “unreasonable” opposition motivated by rewards, such as financial gain, received by initiating public controversy (1997). Although Lechti does not believe collaboration is always possible he also points out, “many activist publics do not have a radical egalitarian world-view” and emphasizes the importance of assessing the motivations of the activist public in each situation to assess whether collaboration is feasible or not (1997, 52). While Lechti believes collaboration is ideal he does not believe it is always rational (1997). However, Smith indicates that in many situations activists and organizations may be able to work together, at least for a short time, in light of higher shared goals (2005).

While he supported the ethical and theoretical contributions of the symmetrical model of J. Grunig and his colleagues, Karlberg was critical of the researchers’ “asymmetrical research agenda” which focused on the communication needs of corporations and government agencies and ignored the communication needs, constraints, and practices of active publics (1996, 271). Rather than studying how organizations

respond to activists he suggested research also examine activist publics and how symmetrical communication can address the constraints of disproportionate media literacy and public relations expertise and disproportionate time and resources that citizens face when seeking to participate in public discourse (Karlberg 1996). Karlberg suggested that in order to truly achieve symmetry the resources of both sides of a debate must be equal and research should seek to discover “cost-effective symmetrical public relations opportunities and strategies” to be utilized by “resource-poor segments of the population trying to engage the media or enter into public discourse” (1996, 274).

Unlike Grunig, Dozier, Heath, and many other scholars, Holthauzen and Voto’s qualitative study of postmodern ideology in public relations challenged the need for practitioners to be members of the dominate coalition to have the power to affect change (2002). Furthermore, Holtzhausen’s notions of dissensus and dissymmetry recognized that some problems are “irresolvable” and there are times where practitioners may have to choose sides (2002, 73). Although achieving symmetry is often a practitioner’s goal, Holtzhausen and Voto found support for the idea that symmetry does not necessarily lead to consensus (2006). Holtzhausen and Voto also questioned the ability of consensus and symmetry to lead to mutual benefit and maintained that consensus will “automatically reaffirm the will of the most powerful” (2002, 63)

### **Variations on the Symmetrical Model**

Although not implicit, analysis of Heath’s chapter “A Rhetorical Theory Approach to Issues Management” finds support for the mixed-motive model. Heath asserted that issues management is a management function which at its best promotes



stewardship through dialogue and collaboration (2006). Heath identified four duties encompassed in issues management; considering threats and opportunities, adopting high standards of corporate responsibility to be above reproach, and supporting collaborative decision making. Heath wrote;

“A purely ‘rhetorical approach’ to issues management can presume that the organization is correct and does not need to change itself to abate the challenges of it’s critics...Such views of issues management can lead to tactical victories but....do not address the root causes of the friction between organizations and their critics” (2006, 66).

Like Paluszek, Strelow, Dozier, Grunig, Grunig, and others, Heath recognized that a two-way dialogue can help corporations identify opportunities as well as problems, achieve corporate social responsibility, and maintain credibility (2006). Heath wrote, “The process of issues management rhetoric assumes that better conclusions can be derived if issues of fact, evaluation, and policy are subject to public and private debate” (2006, 85). If information is truthful, Heath does not have issue with the use of persuasion. According to Heath, when parties on both sides of a debate use persuasion symmetry is “best defined by the ability of ideas to sustain themselves under public discourse” (2006, 93). This view seems to support the mixed-motive model of two-way communication.

Similar to the mixed-motive mode of public relations, the mixed-motive model of the theory of games unifies the dichotomy of asymmetric and symmetric communication and focuses on conflict resolution while not ignoring “the asymmetric centrality of self-interest or the usefulness of maintaining tension among competing interests” (Murphy 1991,128). In game theory symmetric communication shares important characteristics with a class of games called games of pure cooperation, pure coordination, or pure common interest (Murphy 1991). Murphy maintains that this class of purely cooperative

behavior is seldom found in the real world and is generally tainted with elements of conflict and suggests symmetric communication be refined to “include shades of behavior along a continuum ranging from conflict to cooperation” which she calls a mixed-motive game (1991, 124). In a mixed motive game each side retains self-interest but is motivated to have at least limited cooperation and create a bargaining dialogue in order to create some resolution of conflict (Murphy 1991).

Research by Plowman revealed that public relations practitioners experienced in the use of the mixed motive model of public relations and the negotiation processes of contention, avoidance, compromise, accommodation, cooperation, unconditionally constructive, and win/win or no deal were effective at solving problems were often members of the dominant coalition (1998). Plowman explained how negotiation strategies such as; contending meaning “I win, you lose,” collaborating or win/win, compromise, avoiding which means both parties choose a more favorable alternative, accommodation which is “I lose, you win,” unconditionally constructive where the organization acts in reconciling the strategic interests of both the organization and its strategic public, and win/win or no deal where both parties either collaborate to create mutual benefit or hold off until a win/win agreement can be made, incorporate the elements of symmetry and asymmetry (1998). From this viewpoint “two-way symmetrical communication is not entirely win/win because it incorporates elements of compromise, accommodation, and even avoidance” and “two way asymmetrical is not entirely contending but can include elements of all the other negotiation tactics” (Plowman 1998, 246).

Rather than focusing on the methods and tactics used in resolving conflicts, the work of other scholars, such as Bruning and Ledingham, focuses on understanding organization-public relationships (1999). Although their research has focused on consumers' perceptions of organizations, research that seeks to understand and measure the organization-public relationship could also be used to understand organizations' interactions with activist publics (Bruning and Ledingham 1999, Bruning, Ledingham, and Wilson 1999). The relational perspective is a useful tactic when discussing organizations' interactions with activists because it takes into account the effects that members of key publics can have on one another's economic, social, political and/or cultural well being, in addition to creating a dialogue and collaborating to come to a solution using symmetrical communication concepts to develop positive organization-public relationships by building openness, trust, and understanding (Bruning and Ledingham 1999, Bruning, Ledingham, and Wilson 1999). Consumer based research by Bruning, Ledingham, and Wilson supported that "length of time in the relationship does influence both the perception of the relationship dimensions and loyalty to that relationship" and that "most relationships are susceptible to termination early on" (1999, 7). Bruning and Ledingham surveyed the customers of a bank and developed an organization public relationship scale which can be used to measure the status organization's professional, personal, and community relationships (1999). Although this research provided insight into organizations' relationships with consumers this research could also provide insight better understand how to initiate, develop, maintain, and repair relationships with activist publics.

## **The Power of Activist Pressure**

The 2007 Edleman Trust Barometer's findings indicated that the general public considers NGOs as highly credible sources of information and as these organizations continue to grow and become more established across the world their influence is also growing. Recognizing the growing importance and influence of NGOs, companies are turning to monitoring groups such as SIG (Special Interest Group) Watch to help them conduct effective issues management and engage NGOs and special interest groups in a dialogue. SIGWatch is a global network which tracks the activities of more than 1,000 special interest groups around the world and conducts tailored NGO and issue monitoring analyses for clients. SIGWatch is associated with the Greenhouse Communications, an issues and political consultancy based in Washington, DC, with partners in Europe, South America and Asia. This organization helps companies identify activist groups that have the power to affect the success of their company and identify when partnership may be mutually beneficial and possible. SIGWatch conducts NGO engagement planning which trains management to work with NGOs and has created an analytical technology called 'Issues Satellite' which helps their clients "identify which micro issues require priority action, which opinion-formers are key to different campaigns and which ones, through, for example, engagement or partnership, can help reduce unwarranted controversy" ([www.sigwatch.org](http://www.sigwatch.org)).

Although there are not many examples of the successful use of two-way communication when dealing with activists, scholarly research on crisis communication strategies has identified a need for two-way communication. In a case study on the public relations strategy of the University of Missouri-Kansas City responding to criticism from the local community after planning to tear down nearly two-hundred homes to build athletic fields, Leeper and Leeper discussed the university's failure to involve affected publics in development of their plans and their failure to engage the affected publics in communication after the plan was announced (2006). Within eleven days after the announcement of the plan a community activist group called "Citizens Against Residential Encroachment" had formed, the mayor, local city council, and a some state legislators were angry, and the project had caught the attention of HUD (Leeper and Leeper, 2006). A little over a month later the UMKC decided to develop a new plan that did not involve destroying local neighborhoods and got local residents' points of view before creating a new plan of action (Leeper and Leeper 2006). This public relations crisis ultimately led the university to learn from its mistakes and develop two-way communications with the community by creating an Office of Community and Public Affairs (Leeper and Leeper 2006).

### **Research Questions**

It is the purpose of these case studies to show that much has changed since 1992 when L. Gruning did a series of 32 case studies on corporate public relation's responses to criticism from activists and found most companies did not respond to activist pressure or used only one-way approaches. Where L. Grunig found little evidence of public

relations departments effectively using two-way responses to activist pressure, she believed that this would be the most effective method (1992, 525). Although the two-way symmetrical model often becomes more of a mixed-motive model in practice, these two case studies demonstrated how positive outcomes can be achieved when companies create a two-way dialogue with activists (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig 1999).

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

organizations and help scholars better understand the real world application of two-way communication, on which there has been little research.

R1A: What communication strategies did McDonald's and Unilever use when faced with criticism from Greenpeace?

R1B: Did McDonald's chosen communication strategies create positive mutually beneficial outcomes after the company received public criticism from Greenpeace?

R1C: Did Unilever's chosen communication strategies create positive mutually beneficial outcomes after the company received public criticism from Greenpeace?

R2A: How is Greenpeace leveraging relationships between producers, suppliers, manufactures, and retailers in the global economy?

R2B: Was Greenpeace's strategy of putting pressure on companies that buy products from suppliers with poor environmental practices an effective strategy for creating more sound environmental practices in the developing world effective?

R3 A, 1: Did McDonald's chosen communication strategies in this case improve or damage the company's public image?

R3 A, 2: What are the elements present in this situation that may have contributed to a change in the company's public image?

R3 B, 1: Did Unilever's chosen communication strategies in this case improve or damage the company's public image?

R3 B, 2: What are the elements present in this situation that may have contributed to a change in the company's public image?

R4: Were the communication strategies used by McDonalds and Unilever effective strategies for dealing with criticism from Greenpeace?

R5: Do these cases provide a framework for effective communication strategies for dealing with criticism from activist organizations?



### **Chapter III: Methodology**

Case study is the preferred methodology for this research because the author aimed to better understand how and why dialogue, is a successful strategy for responding to activist criticism. According to Yin, case studies are best used to answer exploratory “how” and “why” research questions because these questions “deal with operational links needing to be traced over time rather than frequencies or incidence” (1994, 6). Case studies are also useful tools for better understanding contemporary events the researcher has little to no control over because they offer a “fuller variety of evidence....which goes beyond the conventional historical study” (Yin 1994, 8, 9).

In the field of public relations, case studies have the advantage of being able to explain in hindsight the strengths and weaknesses of a public relations campaign as well as what specific strategies worked (or did not work) and why (Stacks 2002). Case study is an appropriate methodology for generalizing about, testing, and attempting to expand theory (Yin 1994). Using case study methodology allowed the author to describe the real-

life context of the communication strategies being used in these cases (Yin 1994). Case study method is the only appropriate method for this research due to a research agenda which seeks to answer questions of definition, fact, value, and policy because case study methodology is the only method which can answer all four types of research questions (Stacks 2002). Case study has proven an effective strategy for other researchers investigating the real world applications of two-way communication theory. A 2006 case study by Leeper and Leeper examined the communication strategies of the University of Missouri-Kansas city when faced with activist pressure from the local community and indicated a strong need for two-way communication (2006).

This research lent itself to a multiple case study because Greenpeace conducted two very similar campaigns which targeted the environmental practices of agricultural suppliers in the developing world through two very prominent multinational businesses, McDonald's and Unilever. The author will take a holistic approach to each case in order to examine each campaign and its communication outcomes as a whole (Yin 1994). The author predicted that each case would have similar conclusions and show replication logic to strengthen the support of theory in this research (Yin 1994). Rather than relying on inferences the multiple case study added internal validity to the author's research agenda of determining how both companies' chosen communication strategies affected the outcome of each case (Yin 1994). The multiple case study methodology has proven a useful tool for other researchers when studying corporate environmental initiatives, Gallagher, Andrews, Chandrachai, and Rohitratana used multiple case studies to

highlight the similarities and differences between the implementation of Environmental Management Systems in two American and two Thai companies (2005, 43).

This multiple case study took a historical approach by examining the majority of the existing primary and secondary research concerning each case. Both case studies examined the reports that Greenpeace assembled to make their case for environmental destruction in Brazil and Indonesia, “Eating up the Amazon,” “Cooking the Climate,” and “Burning up Borneo.” The author also examined other primary sources in the form of organizational press releases addressing the situation from Greenpeace, Cargill, McDonald’s, and Unilever as well as content on these organizations’ Web sites. This case study also examined relevant secondary news articles concerning the Greenpeace campaigns, the companies involved, as well as heuristic information about political and environmental issues under scrutiny in the U.K. at the time of the campaigns. Multiple sources of information will add construct validity and help to verify the facts of the case. This research utilized search engines, primarily LexisNexis and Communication and Mass Media Complete, to obtain relevant secondary news sources pertaining to both cases. The author examined news sources from U.K., U.S., and Australian newspapers, articles from trade publications in the fields of public relations, advertising, and marketing as well as a few English language articles from Malaysia and Indonesia. The case studies also examined the history of the companies under study (Cargill, McDonalds, and Unilever) as well as Greenpeace’s history and past campaigns. In order to strategically examine the communication strategies used by all the organizations and

their outcomes the author used a case study analysis method which takes a fairly linear approach, similar to the ROPE method.

The goals, objectives, outcomes, methods and tactics used in both Greenpeace campaigns were be discussed as well as their targeted audiences. The author analyzed strategic decisions and evaluated the proactive and reactive public relations and communication strategies and tactics used by all the organizations in the case. Finally the author offered recommendations and evaluated communication outputs and outcomes, the ethics of each organization's behavior, and the success of organizational objectives.

#### **IV. Case Histories**

Businesses in the global market are linked through the complex systems of interconnected relationships of conglomerate organizations, suppliers, manufacturers and retailers. These relationships often allow the largest retailers to get the best prices from suppliers and manufacturers, allow large companies to put pressure on smaller companies, and allow large conglomerates to place considerable control over organizations they own. However, activist organizations like Greenpeace are learning to play on these relationships in order to get companies they believe are engaging in harmful environmental practices to change. In several campaigns, Greenpeace, an independent global environmental campaigning organization, has traced the supply chain of raw materials to manufacturers and retailers, called attention to their role in destructive practices, and asked them to do something about it (Greenpeace International, July 25, 2006, Greenpeace International, Greenpeace UK May 14, 2008).

Greenpeace was established in 1971 when the group's first action called attention to nuclear testing at Amchitka Island in Alaska (Greenpeace International 2008).

Greenpeace has since used attention getting campaign actions to call attention to the negative effects the actions of governments, corporations, and trade unions have on the planet and its inhabitants around the world (Greenpeace International 2008). During their first thirty years of existence Greenpeace has developed a reputation for using attention getting protest actions to put public pressure on corporations and governments to enact change, often framing their target as an "environmental villain" in the eyes of supporters and the media (Greenpeace International 2008, Begley 2009, Murphy and Dee 1996).

In the past Greenpeace was perceived as a combative organization looking to tarnish the name of its adversaries in hopes of creating public and political pressure (Begley 2009). A case study conducted by Murphy and Dee in 1996 examined Greenpeace's relationship with DuPont and its potential for conflict resolution by testing a bargaining approach on what the researchers called "adversaries who will not negotiate directly"(1996, 7). Murphy and Dee noted that Dunlap and VanLiere's framing of the discussion environmentalists and corporate leaders as part of the NEP and DSP created a sense of polarity; their study revealed both group's stereotyping of the "the evil other" and attempted to specify each side's stereotypes of the other and "see whether each side would be willing to give up its stereotype when confronted with its adversary's true beliefs" (1996, 28, 5). The study compared the decision making values of members of each group's dominant coalition with what the researchers determined were the stated values of the organization for each group and found considerable variation (Murphy and

Dee, 1996). Although the researchers found that both Greenpeace and DuPont had similarities in their decision values neither side suggested renewed attempts to negotiate and Greenpeace respondents refused “any compromise that gave weight to corporate profit on the grounds that economic clout allows corporations unfair advantage over environmentalists” (Murphy and Dee 1996, 27). Murphy and Dee defined a process of self-discovery of decision values and defining the actual values of opinion leaders, the organization, and the opposing organization in order to achieve two-way communication and noted that although it was possible to define a compromise for Greenpeace and DuPont, negotiation often carries a higher cost for environmentalists and corporate policy makers than ongoing discord (1996, 30).

Although Greenpeace still uses adversarial pressure campaigns, such as the NGO’s 2009 campaign against Kimberly-Clark, the makers of Kleenex and Cottonelle brands, for using wood fiber from virgin forests in their products (Greenpeace activists blocked the entrance to one of the companies paper mills with a bus shaped like a box of Kleenex, unfurled banners during a Cottonelle marketing tour, persuaded colleges and small businesses not to use the company’s products, and ambushed a presentation by CEO Thomas Falk) the NGO is no longer only conducting itself as an adversary to organizations and governments that cause pollution ([www.kleercut.net](http://www.kleercut.net)). Many of the campaigns the organization has conducted during the last six years have focused on offering assistance, solutions, lobbying encouragement, and providing support by working with companies to help reach solutions to environmental problems (Greenpeace International 2008). In the late 1990s Greenpeace partnered with a German company and

launched “Greenfreeze” technology, a refrigerator coolant which does not use greenhouses gases called HFCs (Greenpeace International 2008, Begley 2009). The technology is now used by major corporations such as Unilever, Coca Cola, McDonald’s and more recently Wal-Mart as well as in more than 100 million refrigerators used around the world (Greenpeace International 2008, Begley 2009).

According to Greenpeace’s website the organization does not focus on creating permanent allies or enemies, “We promote open, informed debate about society’s environmental choices. We use research, lobbying, and quiet diplomacy to pursue our goals, as well as high-profile, non-violent conflict to raise the level and quality of public debate” (Greenpeace International 2008). According a case study on Greenpeace’s seven-year campaign to get Coca-Cola to stop using HFCs in their refrigeration, the rise in neo-liberal policies emphasizing deregulation and free trade are causing social movement organizations like Greenpeace to target corporations rather than seek political and regulatory change from governments (Trumpy 2008, 481). Trumpy discussed how Greenpeace used “both institutional and non-institutional strategies to achieve its goals” by working within the Olympics, using framing strategies, and using action strategies such as protests and boycotts (2008, 497). In recent years some of Greenpeace’s campaigns have moved from not only focusing attention on companies, trade organizations, and governments engaging in practices the organization believes are harmful to the environment to pressuring the companies that do business with these groups as well (Greenpeace International 2008).



This leveraging approach is what led to Greenpeace's partnerships with McDonald's and Unilever in the UK. In the summer of 2006 Greenpeace used a leveraging strategy with McDonald's, after a three-year investigation by the NGO showed the chicken used for McDonald's nuggets in Europe had been fed on soy grown in deforested areas of the Amazon rainforest. This partnership led to a landmark moratorium on the purchase of Brazilian soy grown on newly deforested land.

At the time Greenpeace launched their campaign focused on McDonald's and other UK retailers' role in the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, the United Kingdom was undergoing increasing political turmoil. In the spring of 2006 many feared the Labour party would split if Prime Minister Tony Blair did not resign from office before the end of his term (MacLeod and Summers 2006). Increasing opposition to the Iraq war, numerous scandals and a dropping approval rating had many European politicians calling for Blair to step down early and allow Gordon Brown to take over (MacLeod and Summers 2006). Meanwhile Blair was meeting with George Bush in Washington in hopes of setting a timetable for the departure of British troops from Iraq (Ire 2006).

The Iraq war was largely blamed for skyrocketing oil prices as the price of crude oil rose from \$19.60 a barrel in 2002 to \$76.85 a barrel by the summer of 2006 (Panker 2007, The Guardian 2006). The Iraq war was seen by some as an attempt to protect the West's access to oil reserves which instead caused oil prices to skyrocket (The Guardian, 2006). Rising oil prices and the fear of losing access to plentiful oil reserves in the Middle East caused some of the world's biggest oil companies, including BP, to rapidly

increase expansion of their portfolios into biofuels which in began to dramatically affect agriculture all around the world (Panicker 2007).

In 2007 the U.S. government passed the Energy Independence and Security Act which included a 36-billion-gallon renewable fuel requirement by 2022 (Anthrop 2008, Southeast Farm Press 2007). Although the increase in renewable fuels may have the power to decrease the United States' and other developed nations dependence on oil from the Middle East, the increased corn based ethanol and other renewable fuels will only make a small dent in the U.S. fuel supply and experts presume it will have a negative impact on food prices and farming practices around the world (Anthrop 2008, Southeast Farm Press 2007, Jha 2008). Although biofuels are praised for being a renewable resource which emit fewer greenhouse gases when burned as fuel that does not mean they do not have a big impact on the environment (Jha, 2008). When carbon rich forests are cleared to make way for large monoculture machine farming operations, biofuels still leave a big carbon footprint and when loss of forests and farmland and effects on biodiversity are taken into account biofuels could have a greater environmental impact than burning fossil fuels (Jha, 2008). A study at the Empa Research Institute in Switzerland which tested the environmental impact of 26 biofuels showed almost half, including soy diesel, Malaysian palm-oil diesel, Brazilian sugar cane ethanol, and U.S. corn ethanol had a more significant environmental impact than fossil fuel (Jha 2008).

### **Changing Demand for Soy and Deforestation in the Amazon**

Many countries in South America, including Brazil, were quick to rush to increased production of cash crops such as sugar cane and soy for biofuels but the need

for non-genetically modified soy in Britain also made un-modified soy a profitable opportunity for Brazilian growers. Soy, corn, and many other export crops grown in the United States are genetically modified (Kaufman 2007). These genetically modified products have been banned in the UK creating a market for non-modified food stuffs and livestock feed (Kaufman 2007). Ninety percent of all farmed soy beans are processed as feed for livestock and 60 percent of all processed foods contain soy (Lambert, 2008). GM foods were banned in the UK in the late 1990s and in 2006 documents released by the European Commission stated continued uncertainty about the safety of GM foods (The Grocer 2008, Poulter 2006). Results of an independent farm scale trial in the UK released in 2006 showed that GM crops may harm wild plants, insects and birds (Poulter 2006).

In May of 2005 satellite photos and data from the Brazilian government showed that 10,088 square miles of rainforest was cut down from August 2003 to August 2004 which prompted the Brazilian government to launch an action plan to protect the Amazon (Collins 2005). Greenpeace Amazon coordinator Paulo Adario said the figures showed “that deforestation is not a priority for the government and its plan (to fight destruction) is not working” (Collins 2005, 1). The article also reported that the majority of the deforestation took place in Mato Grosso state, whose governor is Blairo Maggi, the owner of Amaggi, the world’s largest producer of soy (Collins 2005).

Deforestation for soy production continued despite the efforts of the Brazilian government and by the spring of 2006 Brazil had surpassed the United States as the world’s leading exporter of soy (Howden 2006, Kaufman 2007). As Brazilian growers and international soy traders seized this opportunity, soy production quickly overtook

logging and cattle ranching as the biggest source of deforestation in the Amazon (Greenpeace International, April 6, 2006, Howden July 17, 2006). Despite action from the Brazilian government deforestation in the rainforest continued. It is estimated that 20 percent of the Amazon has already been destroyed and an additional 6,500 square miles were destroyed between 2005 and 2006 alone (Gumbel 2007).

The destruction of the Amazon has concerned conservationists for many years. This dense tropical rainforest is the largest carbon sink on the planet and its diverse ecosystem is home to half of the world's fresh water, one in ten of the world's mammals, and 15 percent of the world's land based plant species (Howden July, 17 2006). According to Greenpeace press releases, although carbon dioxide from rainforests is a vital check on greenhouse emissions, deforestation accounts for 20 percent of greenhouse gas emissions (April 2, 2008). Three quarters of the recent deforestation in the Amazon basin occurred illegally as state-owned reserves were infiltrated by loggers and ranchers and deforested then sold to soy farmers who intensively farmed the soil (Howden 2006). Not only did few of the farmers have legal titles to their land, Brazilian laws which require agricultural development be limited to 20 percent of a farmer's land leaving the remaining 80 percent as forest also were ignored (Greenpeace International April 6, 2006, Lawrence and Vidal 2006).

In 2003 demand for non-GM soy prompted Cargill, the largest privately owned agricultural company in the world, to set up a soy exportation port in Santarem, a riverside community deep in the Amazon basin which provides one-third of the UK's soya imports (Howden July 17 2006). Using satellite images, previously unreleased

government documents and undercover monitoring, Greenpeace campaigners conducted a three-year investigation into the Brazilian soy trade and released a report entitled “Eating Up the Amazon” which implicated Cargill and other multi-national soy export companies in illegal and unethical deforestation, land-grabbing, slavery, and violence in the Amazon Basin and traced their connections to major UK food companies (Greenpeace International April 6, 2006, Howden July 17, 2006 and July 26, 2006, Sauven 2006). The report implicated privately owned Minnesota multinational Cargill as the worst offender along with several other major multinationals including ADM, Bunge, Dreyfus, and Amaggi and called attention to destructive behaviors environmentalists claim have caused a five-fold increase in deforestation in the Amazon basin (Greenpeace International April 6, 2006, Downie 2007 Howden July 17 2006 and July 26, 2006).

In April of 2006 when Greenpeace released a report on it’s three-year investigation on the soy trade entitled “Eating Up the Amazon,” two Brazilian courts had previously ruled that Cargill’s facility should be shut down temporarily because the company had not completed the required environmental impact study before opening the facility, however, the facility remained open while the matter was being appealed to higher courts (Greenpeace International April 6, 2006, Howden, July 17, 2006). The Greenpeace report claimed that Cargill enticed farmers to move to fragile areas and plant illegally with little understanding of forest conservation (Greenpeace International April 6, 2006, Kaufman 2007). After the Santarem terminal opened in 2003 land prices went up 18-fold; many landowners sold to multi-nationals, and there was a major leap in soy production (Greenpeace International April 6, 2006, Gumbel 2007). In addition to

sourcing, processing, and shipping the soy Cargill also provided financing for seed, harvesting, bulldozers, and chainsaws to farmers with no titles to their lands who could not get loans from Brazilian banks (Greenpeace International April 6, 2006, Howden, and July 17, 2006).

Despite ongoing criticism from locals, conservationists, and NGOs, Cargill's responses remained defensive until they were pressured by companies that buy their soy. Through press releases and its spokesperson Laurie Johnson, Cargill responded to criticism regarding its role in deforestation claiming the land in question had already been deforested (Lawrence and Vidal 2006). Cargill has responded to all criticism by insisting they are essential to development and economic growth in this impoverished region of Brazil (Howden July 26, 2006). The company has also responded to media inquiries about deforestation by arguing that "soy production covers only six percent of the Amazon – a price worth paying for one of Brazil's key export crops" (Gumbel 2007, 2). In response to the court battle over the legality of their export facility in Santarem, Cargill told the media the company followed all the permitting requirements and the legal issue was over a misunderstanding about the type of impact study which was required and whether or not the state or the federal government was responsible for the sanctioning environmental impact reports (Howden July 17, 2006, Gumbel 2007). In the midst of criticism Cargill claimed its operations in the Amazon were transparent and that the company was committed to sustainable development and environmental management (Cargill 2006, Howden July 17, 2006).

In May of 2006 Cargill posted a five-page response to Greenpeace's report on its Web site in which it agreed that the rainforest should be preserved, Brazilian law should be obeyed, and illegal practices should be eradicated but did not accept any responsibility for the allegations and critically fired back at Greenpeace. The response argued that Cargill was working with other NGOs toward insuring compliance with the Brazilian Forest Code, that deforestation in the region would be worse if Cargill was not there, and emphasized the company's good works, such as building a library in the community of Santarem (Cargill 2006). Cargill claimed most of the soy going through the facility in Santarem was grown outside of the Amazon and that Greenpeace had no proof that they bought soy from farmers using slave labor (Cargill 2006). Cargill also accused Greenpeace of being hypocritical because the organization is critical of genetically modified (GM) soy and the soy operation in the Amazon region is dedicated to non-GM soy which is more labor intensive and less profitable for farmers to grow, allowing the poor in the region to take over a niche others may not want (Cargill 2006). It was not until Cargill and other multinational soy exporters were under pressure from McDonald's and other major UK retailers that the industry's attitude toward the issue began to change.

### **Greenpeace Action**

Along with the release of "Eating up the Amazon" Greenpeace staged protests at Cargill's corporate headquarters in France, the UK, and Brazil and anchored the Greenpeace ship MV Arctic Sunrise at the Cargill Port at Santarem (Greenpeace UK, May 22, 2006). In protest Cargill employees tried to cut the anchor then the ship was rammed by a tug boat and boarded by angry soy farmers trying to get at the crew

(Greenpeace UK, May 22, 2006). Cargill also owns British-based Sun Valley foods which supplies major clients such as McDonald's and Morrisons supermarkets with processed chicken products that are sold throughout the UK and Europe (Howden July 17 2006). Through their investigation Greenpeace also traced Amazon grown soy into the supply chains of these and other major companies operating in Europe including KFC, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, and Unilever (Greenpeace International April 6, 2006, Lawrence and Vidal 2006).

When launching their campaign to end deforestation caused by soy production in the Amazon Greenpeace choose to also focus on calling attention to the European retailers who were purchasing the soy from Cargill and other major soy trading multinationals. When the organization's "Eating up the Amazon" investigation was reported in the national and European media in April of 2006 Greenpeace campaigners dressed as chickens protested at McDonald's restaurants in seven British cities (Sauven 2006, 1).

### **McDonalds**

In 2004 Morgan Spurlock's documentary *Supersize Me* and the book *Fast Food Nation* had cast McDonald's as a villain in the global obesity problem and profits were down (Dunne 2009, Hall 2004). The McLibel case had also given McDonald's its fair share of bad publicity. The trial is widely lauded as a public relations catastrophe that caused the company a lot of embarrassment (Gib 2005, Hickman 2006). In 1998 McDonald's sued two British environmentalists, Dave Morris and Helen Steel (affiliated with a group called London Greenpeace which is not connected with Greenpeace



International) for libel over distributing leaflets in the 1980s titled “What’s Wrong With McDonalds” which accused the company of starving the Third World, destroying the rainforests, low wages, animal cruelty, selling unhealthy food, and exploiting children in advertising (Gib 2005, Hickman 2006). Although McDonald’s won the high profile court case, which was one of the longest in British history, the court upheld some of the allegations and not others (Gib 2005, Hickman 2006). Although McDonald’s won the case in 1997 the lengthy court case was brought into the public spotlight again in 2005 when the European Court of Human rights ruled the case had been unfair because the defendants had no legal aid (Hickman 2006). McDonald’s response to criticism from Greenpeace showed a shift in the manner the company was responding to its critics.

At the time “Eating up the Amazon” was released Nick Hindle had recently been appointed vice president of communications at McDonald’s and was working on changing the perception of McDonald’s in the UK as well as changing McDonald’s approach to responding to criticism (Dunne 2009, Hall 2004, PR Week 2008). Shortly after being named CEO of McDonald’s UK, Hindle signed Steve Easterbrook up for a live television debate with *Fast Food Nation* author Eric Schlosser (Dunne 2009). In a 2009 *CorpComms Magazine* article Hindle said “...it had gotten so bad in the past we had stopped talking....We lost the appetite to engage and communicate. Journalists would go to other people for comments who would fill the vacuum. We lost control of the debate” (Dunne 2009, 1). McDonald’s handling of the Amazon soy situation showed McDonald’s was moving away from adversarial relationships and had become more

willing engage its critics in dialogue and make innovative changes in its business practices and strategies (O'Connor 2008).

After Greenpeace's report was released and Greenpeace volunteers in chicken suits protested at several of McDonald's restaurants in the UK the fast food giants immediately got the ball rolling, met with Greenpeace campaigners, and decided to take action. Not only did McDonald's agree to get Amazon soy out of its chicken feed they also formed an alliance with other UK retailers to put pressure on the soy suppliers to stop sourcing soy from the Amazon (Greenpeace International, July 25, 2006, Howden July 26, 2006, Kaufman 2007, Langert 2006, Lawrence and Vida 2006<sup>1</sup>, Sauven 2006). According to a blog on McDonald's on McDonald's Web site the company thanked Greenpeace for bringing attention to what it called "a social responsibility issue for our supply chain" and asked to meet with them (Langert 2006). Karen Van Bergen, McDonald's UK vice president told *The Guardian*, "McDonald's has had a long-standing policy not to source beef from recently deforested areas in the Amazon rainforest, so it was important to us to bring soy sourcing in line with this policy" (Lawrence and Vidal 2006). According to their Web site, McDonald's issued a policy in 1989 that they would not buy beef from suppliers which was raised in rainforests or on recently cleared rainforest land ([www.mcdonalds.com](http://www.mcdonalds.com)).

Not all the companies targeted in the report were quick to work with Greenpeace to make changes in Amazon soy production. Kentucky Fried Chicken was also identified as selling chicken fed on Amazon soy in their UK restaurants but refused to discuss their role Amazon destruction and claimed the soy used for its chicken feed came from other

parts of Brazil (Howden, July 26, 2006, Carey and Arndt 2007, Greenpeace International, May 19, 2006).

As a result of their alliance with Greenpeace, McDonald's led other retailers in pressuring Cargill and other multinational soy brokers into signing a two-year moratorium on buying soy from newly deforested land in the Amazon, which Greenpeace called a 'historic' partnership (Greenpeace International July 25, 2006; Howden July 26, 2006, Kaufman 2007, Lawrence and Vidal 2006, Sauven 2006). McDonald's teamed with leading UK supermarkets to put pressure on their multinational soy suppliers who signed a two-year moratorium on buying soy from newly deforested areas of the rainforest on July 24 of 2006, not quite three months after the investigation was published (Downie 2007, Greenpeace International 2008, Howden July 26, 2006, Kaufman 2007, Lawrence and Vidal 2006, McDonalds UK Aug. 7, 2006, Sauven 2006). Under the terms of the moratorium the soy exporting multinationals agreed to work with government agencies and NGOs to set up a monitoring system to insure that soy is not coming from newly deforested land and to insure that Brazilian law is being complied with (Downie 2007, Cargill 2006, Greenpeace International 2008, Howden July 26, 2006).

McDonald's UK CEO, vice-president, and other top-level executives were quoted with positive messages towards Greenpeace's campaign and the moratorium in the British press and on Greenpeace and McDonald's Web sites (Kaufman 2007, Lawrence and Vidal 2006). Greenpeace and the UK and national news media praised McDonald's for playing a very positive role in the campaign and gave the company a lot of credit for the moratorium (Greenpeace International, July 25, 2006; Howden July 26, 2006, 1;

Kaufman 2007, 2; Lawrence and Vidal, 1; Sauven 2006, 1). According to Greenpeace's Web site the purpose of the moratorium was to stop the destruction until a working group of soy traders, producers, NGOs, and government officials could create an action plan to insure legality, governance and long term protection of the Amazon rainforest (2008). A Greenpeace press release called the moratorium a "historic deal that impacts far beyond the golden arches" and said McDonald's sent a message to suppliers that whether or not they have an excuse, no raw material that causes embarrassment will be tolerated (Greenpeace International July 25, 2006, Lawrence and Vidal 2006, 1). In an August 2, 2006 article he wrote for *The Guardian*, John Sauven, campaigns director for Greenpeace, wrote that the moratorium demonstrated "the influence consumers can have on events thousands of miles away, and the power that can be brought to bear when business is willing to apply its might to the greatest problems faced by our species and our world" (2).

Since the moratorium Cargill farmers in two Amazon municipalities can only sell to McDonald's if they promise to plant trees on deforested land (Downie 2007). Cargill is paying the Nature Conservancy, an international NGO, 390,000 dollars to oversee the Responsible Soy Project, a sustainable soy development program which seeks to find solutions to bringing farms in compliance with Brazil's 80/20 forest code (Downie 2007). Conservationists believe this program could become a model of sustainable development all over Brazil (Downie 2007).

After two previous appeals, a Brazilian high court upheld the ruling of lower courts and ordered Cargill to suspend its operations at its Santarem facility (Gumbel

2007, 1). The judge ruled Cargill had failed to submit the legally required environmental impact assessments when it built the facility in 2003 (Gumbel 2007). Although Cargill's Web site mentions the April 2007 court ruling it claims that the facility remained open, the legal issue was over a "jurisdictional dispute," and admits no wrong doing by the company (Cargill 2008).

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

give everyone time to plan how to better control farming and protect the forest” (Kaufman, 2).

### **Media Coverage and Current State of the Case**

Greenpeace achieved their goal of ending deforestation by getting the clients of Cargill and other soy multinationals to pressure these organizations into adopting more sound environmental and social responsibility principles. By accusing the soy exporters’ clients of being a part of the problem then partnering with them to create a solution Greenpeace showed it was willing to work with the same corporations it criticizes. Greenpeace’s leveraging strategy played on the complexities and pressures of the globalized economy and effectively caused media attention and strong reactions from McDonald’s and other retailers (Kaufman 2007). This strategy also took an issue that may have seemed out of reach and far removed from the average person living in the developed world and connected it straight to their box of chicken McNuggets.

After a string of bad publicity over obesity issues and the McLibel trial McDonald’s has adopted a new approach to its public relations, rather than adopting defensive strategies the company has engaged in more rectifying strategies in recent years. In a 2008 *PR Week* article Clare O’Conner spoke with McDonald’s UK Vice President of Communications, Nick Hindle about their communications strategies. Although the Amazon soy case was not discussed in the article, Hindle talked about how McDonald’s has become more willing to engage with its detractors, build relationships with critics as well as stakeholders, and be innovative by making changes within the business (Conner 2008). After receiving positive media coverage for their role in the

Amazon soy moratorium McDonald's in the UK has continued to seize this reputation building opportunity by taking more steps toward creating a "greener" company.

McDonald's locations in the UK are now using organic milk and free-range eggs sourced from UK farmers, switching to Rainforest Alliance Certified coffee, and using biodiesel from its own cooking oil for its delivery fleets (McDonald's UK July 27, 2007; Conner 2008).

An April 2008 Greenpeace press release claimed the moratorium was holding well and monitoring of the area showed no soy produced the previous year had come from deforested areas (Greenpeace International 2008). However, although the moratorium may have been holding well other instances of unethical action continued to disturb the Amazon in 2007. It was reported in a UK newspaper that an investigation by Greenpeace in 2007 revealed the Brazilian government was giving away land in the Santarem area in a housing scam meant to settle homeless families (Morris 2007.)

According to Morris, Brazilian President, Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva promised to settle 400,000 homeless families before he was elected and in the last three months of his first term da Silva created 97 sustainable development settlements (2007). An investigation by Greenpeace revealed that the Brazilian government had "set up large settlements in rainforest areas instead of placing them in already deforested areas and was settling urban families who promptly sold logging rights to major timber companies" (Morris 2006, 1). Santarem's federal prosecutor was quoted stating that the settlement scams occurred because logging companies were a big source of financial support in da Silva's election (Morris 2007).

Two news articles written in 2008 also reported problems with the moratorium. An article from *The Independent* reported that from August to December of 2008 7,000 sq kilometers of forest was cleared to make way for corn, soy, and cattle, mainly in the Amazonian states of Mato Grosso, Para, and Rondonia (Fan 2008, *The Independent* (London) January 25, 2008). The article credits the “traditionally spotty” enforcement of Brazilian environmental laws for the increase in logging as well as a rise in corn production due to increased demand for corn based ethanol in the U.S. for the rise in rainforest destruction (*The Independent* (London) January 25, 2008). Another January 2008 article by Fan was critical of the moratorium’s ability to keep soy production out of the Amazon stating the “soy monitoring system is littered with holes” (1). Fan discussed Cargill’s work to create sustainable soy initiatives with the Nature Conservancy in Santarem but also wrote the biggest soy traders could not “pledge with any accuracy that they are not buying soy from deforested areas” and that Brazilian law enforcement was not doing an adequate job of addressing issues of land grabbing, illegal squatting, and debt slavery (2008, 1). Fan also reported that at the end of 2007 the Brazilian government had proposed a Zero Deforestation by 2015 bill that would ban agricultural commodities such as soy and beef from 30 municipalities in the Amazon (2008).

In June of 2008 the two-year moratorium was extended to July of 2009 and a similar initiative was created for the timber and beef industries (Da Costa 2008, Greenpeace USA June 17, 2008). A Greenpeace press release on the extension of the moratorium was optimistic stating “although recent figures show an increase in Amazon deforestation rates, after three years of decline, the first field evaluations show that the



soy harvested this year in the Brazilian Amazon has not come from newly deforested areas. In other words, the moratorium is doing its job and halting soya related forest destruction, despite the pressure from rising soya prices” (Greenpeace USA June 17, 2008, 1).

Although the soy problem was getting better, deforestation from the cattle industry continued. In June of 2009 Greenpeace released a report called “Slaughtering the Amazon” which explained how the Brazilian cattle industry being was being backed by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Brazilian National Development Bank causing cattle ranching to take over as the “largest single source of deforestation in the world” (Greenpeace USA, June 13, 2009). Two weeks following the release of the report the IFC withdrew a 90 million dollar loan for Brazilian cattle giant Bertin to expand into the Amazon (Greenpeace USA, June 13, 1009, 1). The report also detailed how leather and other products from Brazilian cattle giants had made its way into the supply chains of top international shoe companies and retailers including Adidas, Reebok, Timberland, Geox, Clarks, Nike, Carrefour, Gucci, IKEA, Kraft, and Wal-Mart (Greenpeace USA June 13, 2009, 1).

### **Unilever and Greenpeace**

In April of 2008 Greenpeace revisited the strategies used in their Brazilian soy campaign in a similar campaign which targeted palm oil production in Indonesia. Greenpeace’s campaign goal was to stop the destruction of valuable rainforests and peatlands in Indonesia which their reports “Cooking the Climate” and “Burning up Borneo” claimed were damaging the local economy, endangered orangutans, and the

global climate (Greenpeace, April 21, 2008). Scientific research has indicated that more than half of palm oil expansion in Indonesia between 1990 and 2005 occurred on forest land ([www.mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com) August 28, 2008). According to Greenpeace UK 80 percent of the world's palm oil comes from Indonesia and Malaysia (Nov. 11, 2008). Instead of directing their campaign at the palm oil suppliers Greenpeace chose to target one of the largest users of palm oil in the world, Unilever, the company behind international brands like Dove, Lipton, Knorr, Blue Band, and Suave (Greenpeace International April 22, 2008; Unilever Global Site).

A 2007 Greenpeace report entitled "Cooking the Climate" detailed the destruction of the world's deepest peat beds located in the province of Riau in Sumatra which contains an estimated 14.6 billion tons of carbon. The report claimed the increasing clearing, draining, and burning of peatland resulted in 1.8 billion tons of carbon dioxide being released annually causing four percent of all annual global greenhouse gas emissions, which in turn caused Indonesia to have the third highest man made climate emissions in the world (Greenpeace Nov. 8, 2007).

According to Wetlands International both Indonesia and Malaysia, the world's top palm oil producing countries, each grow about a quarter of their palm oil supply on peatland (Bell, 2007). Peat bogs can burn for months in the summer dry seasons when peatland is drained and burned for palm oil production (Bell, 2007). The burning of peatland to create palm oil plantations in Indonesia is responsible for large smoke clouds, know as haze, that blow over Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei ([Chinadaily.com.cn](http://Chinadaily.com.cn) 2007). Peat, an ancient plant material which never fully decomposes` due to wet

conditions, stores carbon and even if it is not burned the draining of peat causes carbon to be released as the peat oxidizes (Bell 2007).

Greenpeace's 2007 report "Cooking the Climate" described how deforestation is exacerbated by the palm oil trading and processing methods of commodities companies who are members of the Roundtable on Responsible Palm Oil (RSPO) and supply the biggest food manufacturers in the world, such as Unilever, Nestle, Kraft, and Procter & Gamble. In the report the RSPO acknowledged to Greenpeace that RSPO members such as Cargill, ADM, Sinar Mas, and Golden Hope's trading and refining processes, which indiscriminately purchase and blend oil, make traceability impossible (Greenpeace Nov. 8, 2007). Unilever is head of the RSPO and purchases three percent of the total world palm oil production mainly from large agricultural companies such as Cargill, ADM, Sinar Mas, and Golden Hope (Greenpeace Nov. 8, 2007). Palm oil is also a major source of biodiesel, along with soy and rapeseed oil, which has been driving the expansion of palm oil plantations in Indonesia (Greenpeace Nov. 8, 2007). Increasing demand for biofuels caused Cargill and Sinar Mars and other major suppliers to expand their trade and buy more palm oil for refinement into biodiesel (Greenpeace Nov. 8, 2007). The release of "Cooking the Climate" was coupled with a protest action in Dumai, Indonesia where the Greenpeace ship the Rainbow Warrior attempted to block a tanker carrying 30,000 tons of palm oil from leaving port (Greenpeace International 2007, *New Straits Times* 2007).

"Cooking the Climate" suggested a temporary ban of forest clearance and peatland degradation as well as a global funding mechanism for avoiding deforestation as

a part of the post-2012 phase of the Kyoto protocol (Greenpeace Nov. 8, 2007).

Greenpeace urged the Indonesian government and palm oil suppliers and purchasers to support a moratorium on deforestation of rainforests and peatlands (Greenpeace Nov. 8, 2007). The RSPO acknowledged some of the problems brought to light in “Cooking the Climate” and Unilever responded by blaming the rush to biofuels for the problem and stated the company was “looking for a sustainable solution” (*The Guardian* (London) Nov. 8, 2007 and *The Toronto Star* Nov. 9, 2007)

Producers and government officials in Malaysia and Indonesia were aware of western NGOs investigating palm oil production even before “Cooking the Climate” was released (Zaidi 2007). In July of 2007 Malaysian legislators, members of European NGOs, and members of the Malaysian Palm Oil Council met to discuss what Malaysian palm oil producers felt were “unfounded fears a majority of pressure groups from the other side of the world have” (Damodaran 2007, 1). In a *New Straits Times* article Malaysian legislators and the Malaysian Palm Oil Council asserted that only 20 percent of land was used for agriculture while more than 60 percent was kept as forest and only 11 percent of the total palm production area in Malaysia was on peatland (Damodaran 2007). The article said industry leaders wanted to increase the palm oil supply through yield improvement not increased clearing (Damodaran 2007). Members of the European NGOs wanted more transparency regarding future land use plans and wanted to know how national laws and RSPO requirements would be policed and enforced (Damodaran 2007).

The Malaysian Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister, Datuk Peter Chin Fak Kui, told the Malaysian *New Straits Times* that reports made by Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth regarding climate change, deforestation, the slaughtering of orangutans and the destruction of their habitats were false and that industry needed to “provide real information on government policy and plantation practices such as zero burning and no destruction of natural forest” (Zaidi 2007, 1). The Indonesian Agriculture Minister, Dr. Anton Apriyantono, told the *New Straits Times* that Indonesia only plants on land earmarked for agriculture not natural forest (Zaidi 2007). The Malaysian Palm Oil Council chief, Dr. Yusof Basiron, remarked that the palm oil industry’s reputation was being damaged “for no good reason” (Zaidi 2007).

Shortly after the release of “Cooking the Climate,” in an article in the *New Straits Times* a Malaysian palm oil grower, who requested anonymity, referred to Greenpeace’s protest action that blocked a tanker from leaving port with palm oil as an act of terror against the palm oil industry (Nov. 20, 2007). The article charged Greenpeace and other NGOs with using orangutans to create emotional appeals to smear the “good image of palm oil” and forcing European supermarkets to insist on using palm oil that has been certified as sustainable (*New Straits Times* Nov. 20, 2007, 2). The article called the Netherlands plan to certify palm oil used for biofuels and the RSPO’s plans to freeze development in the state of Sarawak “a glaring case of double standards” because certification is not required for vegetable oils being imported from other countries and 70 percent of land in the UK is used for agriculture as opposed to 20 percent in Malaysia (*New Straits Times* Nov. 20, 2007, 2). The author of the article, who was not given a

byline, wrote that NGOs should focus on the 15 million new carbon dioxide emitting vehicles introduced in Europe each year and suggested the NGOs “persuade their own governments to replant and convert their country’s agricultural land into forests” and went on to propose that if the pollution was associated with their families or affected their economic well being “these NGOs will conveniently not stick to their principles” (*New Straits Times* Nov. 20, 2007, 3). Although no official ban on logging and forest conversion was created, in 2007 Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono pledged to reduce carbon emissions by 50 percent by 2009 and 95 percent by 2025 (Allard 2009, Greenpeace USA Aug. 15, 2008). In December of 2007, governors from the Indonesian states of Aceh, Papua, and West Papua along with the governor of the Brazilian state of Amazonas met with policymakers and scientists in Bali to discuss measures to reduce climate change and signed a pact which created a temporary logging moratorium in their states ([www.mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com) 2007). The agreement was fostered by an Australian firm seeking to reduce carbon dioxide emissions through carbon credits ([www.mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com) 2007). Environmentalists and some governments had proposed a system for trading carbon in order to create an economic incentives for preserving carbon rich areas including peatland and forests ([www.mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com) 2007). Because some governments and environmentalists had hoped provisions in the 2008-2012 Kyoto protocol would provide carbon rich nations like Indonesia with financial rewards for storing carbon rather than converting carbon rich areas into profitable farm land these provisions were not included in the first phase of the Kyoto protocol (Bell, 2007, *The Economist*, 2007, [Chinadaily.com.cn](http://Chinadaily.com.cn) 2007). On article mentioned that weak law enforcement in Indonesia and the high profitability of crops like palm oil would require

forest conservation plans to be very profitable and suggested these plans should not rely on the “power and honesty of governments” in order to be successful (The Economist, 2007).

### **Greenpeace Action**

Nearly five months after the release of the “Cooking the Climate” there was no tangible corrective action taken by the RSPO or the individual company’s involved causing Greenpeace to focus their tactics on Unilever. In a second report, entitled “Burning up Borneo,” Greenpeace provided new evidence that “it is Unilever’s own palm oil traders and producers (themselves RSPO members) who are leading ‘aggressive expansion’ of the sector that results in the devastation of the last remaining orangutan rainforest and peatland habitat in Borneo” (Greenpeace April 21, 2008, 2). The report claimed half of Unilever’s palm oil supply came from Indonesia and criticized the company for failing to lead the palm oil industry toward sustainable practices through its purchasing power or through its leadership role in the RSPO (Greenpeace April 21, 2008). An April 21, 2008 press release on Greenpeace International’s Web site detailing why Unilever was being targeted by their campaign called the RSPO “little more than a greenwashing operation” and said although Unilever’s Web site paints the company as both environmentally and socially responsible “when it comes to palm oil the reality is very different” (1).

On April 21, 2008 Greenpeace activists occupied the production lines of a Unilever factory near Liverpool and activists dressed as orangutans hung banners and passed out flyers at Unilever headquarters in London, the Netherlands, and Rome

(Greenpeace April 21, 2008). Greenpeace also sent activists in orangutan costumes to three public relations and marketing firms that work with Unilever (Magee 2008). The protest actions coincided with the release of the Greenpeace report “Burning up Borneo” to the media and the campaign also targeted UK consumers through the release of a viral video called “Dove Onslaught(er)” and billboards and flyers mimicking the Dove campaign for real beauty with photos of orangutans. This campaign generated a lot of media attention and tens of thousands of protest emails to Unilever from around the world (Greenpeace International April 21, 2008, Greenpeace International).

## **Unilever**

Unilever is an Anglo-Dutch company that was formed in 1930 and now has 400 brands of grocery and hygiene products including Lipton, Knorr, Clif, and Dove, employs 179,000 people in 100 countries, and maintains global partnerships with international retailers (*The Sunday Times* (London) 2007). Unilever’s main competition is U.S. conglomerate Procter & Gamble and its approach for growth has been expanding the company geographically launching custom brands and opening factories in India and Asia (*The Sunday Times* (London) 2007).

Although several Unilever brands have received some minor criticism in recent years, palm oil being the most significant criticism, the company has positioned itself and appears to be widely accepted as a world leader in CSR and has international teams of



“external experts” and employees dedicated to helping the company with issues of sustainable development, issues management, and social responsibility (Kwanchai 2008, McLaren 2008, Partridge 2007, Unilever Global Site). Unilever has been recognized as a trailblazing company which is investing in developing community partnerships in the countries it does business (McLaren 2008, Partridge 2007). In Canada one percent Unilever’s pre-tax profits are donated to a community vitality fund which benefits to children’s health and water resource organizations which provide community benefits such as parenting resources and water restoration projects (McLaren 2008). Jerry Moon the director of the International Center for CSR referred to Unilever’s program for encouraging women to become entrepreneurs in India as an example of how multinational companies operating in the developing world are learning to be sensitive to local issues and “act like local companies” (Partridge 2007). Another article in the Thai newspaper *The Nation* discussing businesses making a genuine commitment to sustainable initiatives highlighted Unilever for using innovation to make their products less wasteful throughout their lifecycle and mentioned the company had been recognized for best practices in greenhouse gas emissions and climate change strategies after reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent over the last decade (Kwanchai 2008). Unilever’s employees are given time off work to volunteer in their communities and the company’s Global Site details many service projects that contribute to sustainable economic development in developed and developing countries the conglomerate operates in, such as education and hunger eradication through development in Ghana, sustainable entrepreneurship for women in South Africa and India, and river restoration in Indonesia.

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

Shortly after the Greenpeace protest actions Unilever posted a video on its Web site discussing the problems of deforestation from palm oil production and conversion of land for biofuels and asserted that the company is on the same side as Greenpeace and was happy to support the moratorium on deforestation in Indonesia and was committed to go above the NGOs expectations and commit to sourcing 100 percent certified sustainable palm oil by 2015 (Unilever Global Site). The video asserted that the company believed 80 percent of the palm oil they were using was already from sustainable plantations but had not yet been certified (Unilever Global Site). The video stated a desire

for Greenpeace to continue to keep tabs on Unilever's suppliers and addressed a need for the company to get support from government organizations in order to sort out the certification process and guarantee sustainable palm oil (Unilever Global Site).

On August 15 2008, the governor of the Indonesian province of Riau, which is home to 25 percent of Indonesia's palm oil plantations and stores 14.6 billion tones of carbon in peatland, pledged a temporary ban on the destruction of peatlands until formal law was passed (Greenpeace USA). However on August 28 of 2008 a group of 250 members of the Indonesian Palm Oil Producers Association rejected a proposed moratorium on clearing forests and peatlands for palm plantations stating that such measures would hurt the economy and increase unemployment and poverty ([www.mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com)). A representative for the Indonesian Palm Oil Producers Association said members of this organization would voluntarily reduce their impact by following new guidelines set forth by the RSPO ([www.mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com), August 28, 2008). From October 6 to November 15 of 2008 Greenpeace activists set out on a "Forests for Climate" national ship tour of Indonesia in order to rally the Indonesian people and encourage the Indonesian government to enact an immediate moratorium on all forest conversion (Greenpeace Oct. 6, 2008). On Nov. 14 protest actions by Greenpeace activists, including a Greenpeace ship occupying a loading dock and an activist being chained to the anchor of the Sinar Mas ship for over 36 hours, attempted to stop a shipment of palm oil from RSPO member Sinar Mas from leaving an Indonesian port in Dumai (Greenpeace International Nov. 14, 2008).

Although Unilever was proud of its commitment to sourcing sustainable palm oil and Greenpeace activists had pushed for many of the standards adopted by the new RSPO certification process, a Greenpeace press release released before the delivery of the first batch of sustainable palm oil by United Plantations stated, “as they currently stand the RSPO’s standards and criteria are not strong enough to guarantee that any of the palm oil it certifies is actually sustainable....standards are not being adhered to by palm oil producers...there is nothing that is going to stop RSPO members from being involved in socially and environmentally destructive activities in their non-RSPO certified operations” (Greenpeace UK, Nov. 11, 2008, Greenpeace Netherlands Nov. 2008). Greenpeace reports addressed concerns that voluntary certification was allowing United Plantations to certify plantations as sustainable in Malaysia while conducting illegal and unethical farming practices in Indonesia (Greenpeace UK, Nov. 11, 2008, Greenpeace UK, Nov. 18, 2008, Greenpeace Netherlands Nov. 2008). In order to have any plantations certified as sustainable Greenpeace and other NGOs pushed the RSPO to set minimum criteria for “partial certification” of all a company’s operations including; a time bound plan for achieving full certification, no significant land conflicts, no labor disputes, no violation of national laws, and no replacement of High Conservation Value forest since November of 2005 (Greenpeace UK, Nov. 18, 2008, Greenpeace Netherlands Nov. 2008). Greenpeace’s investigation of Unilever supplier United Plantations contained many concerns regarding the company’s minimum criteria at its plantations in Indonesian including evidence of significant land conflicts, violations Indonesian laws such as developing peatland deeper than two meters, not respecting conservation areas, and not

creating speedy plans to have all plantations certified as sustainable (Greenpeace UK, Nov. 18, 2008, Greenpeace Netherlands Nov. 2008).

### **Media Coverage and Current State of the Case.**

In January of 2009 Unilever's Web site featured information about 'certified sustainable palm oil' prominently and discussed sustainable palm oil certification as well as Greenpeace's protest of the company and detailed how company is taking action to stop rainforest and peatland destruction for palm oil (Unilever Global Site). The Web site also discussed the November 2008 celebration of the delivery of the first batch of certified sustainable palm oil to the RSPO and admitted that on the same day Greenpeace issued a report on how the same sustainable supplier, United Plantations, had violated RSPO sustainability standards in Indonesia (Unilever Global Site, 4). Unilever's director for sustainable agriculture and president of the RSPO, Jan Kees Vis, was quoted reacting positively to the criticism saying, "It is vital that organizations like Greenpeace can challenge the process at all stages" (Unilever Global Site, 4). Unilever's Global Site also contains a lot of information about the RSPO and features information about the company's sustainable palm oil plantations in Ghana as well information about the company's commitment to sourcing other sustainable and animal friendly agricultural products such as fish, eggs, tomatoes, soy, and Rainforest Alliance certified Lipton tea.

Unilever's commitment to sourcing sustainable palm oil and committing support for the moratorium generated media coverage in the UK news media as well as in U.S. and UK advertising and marketing trade media. After Greenpeace's protest of Unilever an editorial in the journal *Revolution* discussed how Unilever was widely considered "one

of the more ethical cosmetic brands” but the corporation’s efforts to “highlight real beauty” had been overshadowed by Greenpeace’s campaign (May 1, 2008). Articles announcing Unilever’s decision to commit to sustainable palm oil by 2015 in the UK news media and advertising and marketing trade media called the decision a “bow” and “forced” response to pressure from Greenpeace (Beale 2008, Sandison 2008). Greenpeace executive director, John Sauven was quoted in two of these articles stressing the need for continued support of the moratorium saying “Unilever’s commitment to sourcing sustainable palm oil will be meaningless unless its suppliers to stop trashing Indonesia’s rainforests – this is why the moratorium is so important”(Murphy 2008, Sandison 2008)

In an article for *Advertising Age* Jack Neff discussed how companies in the forefront of ethical marketing like Unilever, which was at the top of ethical and sustainability indexes in 2007, and Procter & Gamble with its Children’s Safe Drinking Water program, have become popular targets for Greenpeace (2008). Neff discussed how one ethical claim can cause consumers and activists to criticize a company on other fronts (2008). In Neff’s article a Unilever spokesperson was quoted suggesting that Unilever was targeted because they are “the biggest ‘name’” saying activists believe “they get the most traction (and news coverage) by aiming at the biggest ‘name,’ rather than the biggest challenge” (2008,1). The May 2, 2008 issue of *PR Week* discussed the tactics Greenpeace used by dressing as orangutans and ambushing Ogilvy, Jackie Cooper, and Lexus PR, three communications agencies that work for Unilever, to urge the agencies to put pressure on their client (Magee 2008, 1). In Magee’s 2008 article Lexus PR CEO Margo Raggett was critical of Greenpeace for showing up unannounced calling the

protest action “inappropriate and, to a large degree, pointless” saying people would pay more attention to the tactics used than the issue and that Greenpeace activists could have made an appointment to discuss concerns (1).

In February of 2009 the Indonesian government lifted the year-long moratorium enacted by several Indonesian governors in December of 2007 and opened up 25 million hectares of peatland “in areas that meet certain criteria” for palm oil production (Soeriaatmadja 2009, Allard 2009). Australian reporter Tom Allard reported that the increased deforestation was contributing to an increasing number of tiger and elephant attacks on local villagers in areas where palm oil plantations and logging are prevalent due to these animal’s dwindling habitats (2009). Following the end of the moratorium Greenpeace activists were kicked and punched after chaining themselves to the front entrance of the Sinar Mas Group headquarters in Jakarta in March of 2009, after the NGO gathered fresh evidence of the company’s ongoing destruction in Riau Province, Sumatra, West Kalimantan, and Papua (Greenpeace International March 20, 2009). Greenpeace had learned Sinar Mas, Indonesia’s largest logging and palm oil company, was poised for massive expansion planning to convert another 770 square miles of Indonesian rainforest into palm oil plantations and acquire an additional 4,200 square miles of land through government concessions (Greenpeace International March 20, 2009). Greenpeace is continuing to ask the Indonesian government to enact a moratorium on any further forest conversion of rainforest and peatland in order to “safeguard the wealth of endangered species in the region such as the orangutan, and Sumatran tiger” and protect the welfare of forest dependent communities in Indonesia (Greenpeace International March 20, 2009). Furthermore, Greenpeace is also continuing to lobby the Indonesian government to

push “industrialized countries to pay for this reduction in deforestation” (Greenpeace International March 20, 2009).

## **V. Discussion**

Although both Unilever and McDonald’s gave statements to the media and posted information on their Web sites regarding Greenpeace’s protest actions, rather than focusing all their efforts on one-way strategies both companies chose to create a two-way dialogue with Greenpeace activists and actively address their concerns (Greenpeace International, July 25, 2006, Kaufman 2007, Greenpeace International, Greenpeace UK May 14, 2008, Langert 2008, Unilever Global Site). Although the exact nature of this communication cannot be assessed without more in-depth analysis, multiple accounts by



the companies, activists, and the media acknowledged that in each case Greenpeace representatives were invited to meet with members of top management from McDonald's and Unilever for a face-to-face discussion of Greenpeace's concerns about each company's role in deforestation in the developing world (Greenpeace International, July 25, 2006, Kaufman 2007, Greenpeace International, Greenpeace UK May 14, 2008, Unilever Global Site). Whereas L. Grunig saw very few positive results when examining companies who discounted input from activists these cases suggest engaging activists in a dialogue and taking action as a result of activist criticism can yield more positive results (1992).

Both McDonald's and Unilever were able to turn high profile criticism from Greenpeace, which could have potentially damaged the company's image and bottom line, into an opportunity to assert a commitment to sustainable businesses practices by engaging their critics in a dialogue and taking action (Greenpeace International May 14, 2008 and July 25, 2008). In each case Greenpeace was able to get the targeted corporations to support moratoriums and work toward stopping environmental destruction. Although issues regarding deforestation in Indonesia and the Amazon persist, both companies committed to helping Greenpeace work toward a solution and have not been targeted by the NGO in more recent campaigns focusing on deforestation issues in Indonesia and the Amazon (Greenpeace International March 20, 2009; Greenpeace USA, June 13, 2009,).

Both cases provide examples from practice that could be taken as support for L. Grunig's theory that two-way symmetrical communication is the best way to create a

win-win situation when responding activist publics (1992). Although it is not possible to determine whether or not McDonald's and Unilever's interactions with Greenpeace were truly symmetrical, as discussed earlier, purely symmetrical communication is rarely practiced in real life situations (Heath 2006, Murphy 1991, Plowman 1998). Although communication was not necessarily symmetrical, McDonald's, Unilever, and Greenpeace used two-way communication and achieved positive results from this communication. Both of these cases offer support for the opinions of scholars and practitioners such as Paluszek, Strelow, Dozier, Grunig, Grunig, and Heath who advocate engaging critics in a two-way dialogue to identify opportunities as well as problems and help companies work toward maintaining credibility and building corporate social responsibility.

Greenpeace's actions supported the mixed motive model of two-way communication as well as Heath's notion of symmetry, by using pressure as well as persuasion to subject issues of policy to public debate and equilibrium was achieved by the "the ability of ideas to sustain themselves under public discourse" (Heath 2006, 93). Unlike Karlberg's notion that activist publics with fewer financial resources are disadvantaged in communications with large corporations, these cases demonstrated how activist groups now have the ability and credibility needed to make an impact on large corporations with far greater resources (1996). Although they may have has fewer financial resources than major multinational corporations like McDonald's and Unilever, the Greenpeace campaigns in these cases indicated the ability of NGOs to use their interconnected network of activists around the world to create media coverage and harness public opinion through credible research, attention getting campaign materials,

and protest actions. Greenpeace's campaign strategies have successfully pressured major corporations to view the NGO's arguments as a legitimate threat as well as an opportunity. These cases suggest support for Arndt and Carey's notion that it is better to invite the activists in than to have them picketing outside and by working with critics who used to be viewed as enemies companies can improve their bottom line as well as their public image (2007). In many cases it is not possible to collaborate and create a "shared mission" with opponents, however these cases demonstrate that some activist groups may be open to collaborating with the companies they criticize (Lechti 1997).

Although Cargill's public relations department addressed the accusations made by Greenpeace through internal publications and press releases and media spokeswoman Laurie Johnson commented to the media, the company's responses took a purely defensive approach. McDonald's and other retailers siding with Greenpeace did little to help Cargill's goal of discrediting the claims made by the NGO (Howden July 26, 2006; Kaufman 2007; Lawrence and Vidal 2006). In the media coverage Cargill's responses were reactionary and defensive responses coming down from the public relations department (Howden July 17, 2006 and July 26, 2006; Kaufman 2007, Lawrence and Vidal 2006). When McDonald's and other retailers in the UK choose Greenpeace over their business partners more credibility was added to Greenpeace's side of the story. In addition to adopting defensive crisis management strategies Cargill made no attempts to discuss allegations directly with Greenpeace and the NGO's Web site and press releases chronicle hostile and violent interactions between Cargill employees and Greenpeace activists (Greenpeace UK May 16, 2006 and May 22, 2006).

Although McDonald's response to Greenpeace was more reactive than proactive, by working with Greenpeace McDonald's took a situation that threatened to cause another negative blow to their corporate image and was very successful in using it as an opportunity to position the company as an ally to Greenpeace in the fight to stop rainforest destruction in the Amazon. The two-way tactics employed by McDonald's were much more effective than Cargill's defensive one-way strategies of defending the company in the national press and responding to criticism in internal publications (Cargill 2006, Gumbel 2007, Howden July 17, 2006, Lawrence and Vidal 2006). Rather than making defensive statements to the media, McDonald's representatives chose to meet with Greenpeace and positioned the company as an ally to the NGO in the confrontation over deforestation in the Amazon (Greenpeace International July 25, 2006, Howden July 26, 2006, Kaufman 2007, Lawrence and Vidal 2006, Sauven 2006). As a result of this partnership not only was McDonald's able to create positive attention as an ally rather than an enemy of Greenpeace the company was also able to join forces with other retailers and help Greenpeace quickly accomplish their goal of creating a moratorium on deforestation for soy production in the Amazon (Downie 2007, Greenpeace International 2008, Howden July 26, 2006, Kaufman 2006, Lawrence and Vidal 2006, McDonald's UK Aug. 7, 2006, Sauven 2006). Media coverage gave McDonald's a lot of the credit for pressuring Cargill and other soy producers to change (Howden July 26, 2006, Kaufman 2007, Lawrence and Vidal 2006). In Lawrence and Vidal's July 24, 2006 article on the moratorium McDonald's was named specifically, along with nameless UK companies, as playing a key role in the moratorium;

“Companies such as McDonald’s were linked to rainforest destruction because meat factories in Europe were using Brazilian soya feed from the big traders. The companies are believed to have been highly influential in forcing the multinational traders to agree to reform” (1-2).

Howden also named McDonald’s as specifically important in reforming the Brazilian soy industry;

“The industry, under pressure from customers such as McDonald’s, has now agreed to work with government agencies and NGO’s to set up a monitoring system and safeguards to ensure that soya is not sourced from newly deforested land” (July 26, 2006, 2).

McDonald’s alliance with Greenpeace further discredited Cargill and added credibility to Greenpeace’s side of the argument and demonstrated that at least in the UK the company values the opinions of their customers as the most important stakeholders, over allegiance to their business partners. McDonald’s was also able to successfully use their conflict with Greenpeace as a launching point for creating a ‘greener’ image for the company in Europe (Conner 2008, Dunne 2009, McDonald’s UK, July 27, 2007).

As Unilever had positioned their company as socially and environmentally responsible before coming under criticism it is arguable that Unilever had more at stake and therefore less of a choice about engaging Greenpeace in a dialogue and taking action than McDonald’s (Beagle 2008, Kawanchi 2008, McLaren 2008, Partridge 2007, Unilever Global Site). Although a national moratorium on deforestation for palm oil was never passed in Indonesia, Unilever was able to use their reactionary response to Greenpeace’s campaign as an opportunity to position the company as a leader in the solution to the problem and affirm their commitment to sustainability. Although Unilever was able to create a positive outcome in this public conflict the company should have done more to address activists’ concerns about their role in deforestation sooner. Rather

than using one-way communication in the form of a statement blaming the biofuels industry for their inability to ensure that the palm oil they were buying was not linked to destructive environmental practices after “Cooking the Climate” was released in 2007, Unilever might have been able to avoid Greenpeace’s attention getting protests by inviting activists to their headquarters and beginning a dialogue with them after their first report implicated them in deforestation in 2007 (*The Guardian* (London) Nov. 8, 2007, *The Toronto Star* Nov. 9, 2007). Although Greenpeace’s attention getting campaign tactics were criticized by members of Unilever’s public relations firms their tactics were successful in getting Unilever to support their call for a moratorium, encouraging the RSPO to allow Greenpeace to give input on new RSPO certification standards, and causing Unilever to create an initiative to source sustainable palm oil (Greenpeace International April 21, 2008, Greenpeace Netherlands Nov. 2008, Greenpeace UK Nov. 11, 2008, Magee 2008, Unilever Global Site).

Greenpeace knew it would be difficult to successfully pressure Cargill and other soy-multinationals into action by focusing the suppliers and exporters alone. Greenpeace’s decision to change tactics and implicate the soy bean and palm oil producer’s clients in Europe in unethical practices proved to be a successful strategy for leveraging relationships between suppliers, exporters and retailers in a connected global society. By making each company the target of public criticism, Greenpeace was able to get both companies to take their concerns seriously, meet with Greenpeace campaigners, and take corrective action in response to the NGOs concerns.

Although Greenpeace's attention getting tactics may not seem conducive to creating a dialogue with big corporations their tactics were successful in getting both companies to come to the table and discuss the issues. As businesses continue to commit to sustainable practices the dichotomy of environmentalists verses developmentalists identified by Killingsworth and Palmer and DeLuca will steadily decline as business practices continue to work toward achieving the economic, social, and environmental balance identified by Tokar, Millstone and Baker Watts, Prexl and Signter, Fraizer, Nicholson, Davis and others. As businesses continue to make ethical and sustainable marketing claims and attempt to create trust and credibility among consumers by committing to sustainable business practices, the ability of NGOs to leverage relationships between companies in the developed world and destructive and unethical business practices in the developing world will strengthen the potency of this strategy.

This strategy was effective for Greenpeace because large companies in the developed world believe they need to exercise environmentally and socially responsible behavior in order to be successful and suppliers rely on the business of these large multinational corporations. By focusing on awareness and acceptance of their position among the European news media and consumers Greenpeace was successful in connecting obscure global problems to things that consumers eat and use everyday like chicken McNuggets and Dove soap. This strategy was largely successful because corporations that depend on consumers buying their products, like McDonald's and Unilever, do not want to be connected to damaging practices that are exploiting the environment in the developing world. Since consumers do not buy products directly from

large privately held companies that sell to large corporations, like Cargill, they have less at stake when they are connected to destructive or unethical practices. A message about the Unilever campaign on the NGO's website told Greenpeace supporters;

“We believe environmentalists and Greenpeace supporters can be more effective if we pressure Unilever to change, by exposing the truth about palm oil and showing that we care. Like a negative restaurant review is more damaging than no review at all - Unilever is more sensitive to public exposure and debate than a consumer boycott” (Greenpeace International).

Greenpeace is revisiting this strategy again this year by focusing on leather used by major shoe companies and retailers which is coming from recently deforested parts of the Amazon (Greenpeace USA, June 13, 2009).

In the first case Greenpeace achieved their goal of temporarily halting deforestation and climate change in the Amazon by getting large multi-national companies to join with McDonald's and pressure their international soy suppliers and the Brazilian government into enact moratoriums on what the NGO believes are destructive environmental practices (Greenpeace International July 25, 2006, Howden July 26, 2006, Kaufman 2007, Lawrence and Vidal 2006, Sauven 2006). Although problems with plans to ensure no Brazilian soy is coming from newly deforested parts of the Amazon persist, the successful extension of the moratorium into July of 2009 was a starting point for adopting more sound environmentally and socially responsible principles in the Amazon rainforest (The Independent January 2008, Fan 2008). Greenpeace is continuing to successfully use a similar leveraging strategy to pressure banks and retailers connected to the Brazilian cattle industry to take action against the industry's continued encroachment on the Amazon (Greenpeace USA June 13, 2009). In the second case although



destruction of peatland continues and Greenpeace's leveraging strategies have not yet been successful in getting the Indonesian government to pass a national moratorium on the conversion of peatland into palm oil plantations, focusing their campaign on Unilever was successful in getting Unilever to take action and support the NGO's agenda (Allard 2009, Greenpeace International April 21 2008 and March 20, 2009, Soeriaatmadja 2009).

Greenpeace's attention getting tactics put highly visible pressure on Unilever, and the public relations and marketing firms they hired to manage their image, and sent them a message that their ethics and accountability will be publicly judged. Although their tactics received a lot of attention they were successful in calling attention to the issue as well. It may not be realistic for NGOs to ask communication agencies to put pressure on their clients to have more socially responsible business practices, although it should be necessary for any company, especially any company that is trying to promote a socially responsible image, to ask its public relations department to be pro-active in identifying critics and potential critics and determining how to best respond to those critics.

Greenpeace's choice in strategies suggests that in this interconnected global economy harnessing the power and influence of large corporations that do business in and/or buy raw materials from the developing world can be more conducive to influencing suppliers and governments to enact change than depending on an NGOs ability to influence political leaders that may make promises to preserve valuable resources while continuing to act in the best interests their national economic growth and their campaign supporters. Discussing the conflict between the rush to biofuels and stopping carbon emissions from deforestation, British environmental activist Jutta Kill

was quoted saying, “It certainly is a big policy incoherence if one part of the climate discussion is to reduce emissions from deforestation and the other leads to an incentive to deforestation” (Chinadaily.com.cn 2007). The involvement of international NGOs and internationally traded companies in conflicts between economic development and forest preservation in developing countries helps to bring these conflicts of interest to light, holds suppliers and governments accountable, connects global problems to people living in the developed world, and does not let global companies quietly support destructive practices. Continuing not to let the quiet and perhaps inadvertent support for destruction of the developing world by big companies go unnoticed by consumers, using leveraging campaigns, and creating partnerships is proving to be an effective method for NGOs addressing complex social and environmental problems. Although outside influences such as the rush to biofuels and suppliers’ support of national governments has made a permeate stop to deforestation an ongoing challenge for Greenpeace, creating partnerships with large companies in the developing world should continue to help to strengthen the NGO’s ability get results and steadily continue to slow, if not stop, deforestation. Increased cooperation and continued use of these leveraging strategies as well as sustaining ongoing partnerships with businesses should help to continue to increase the power of Greenpeace and other NGOs to fight against external forces escalating deforestation and climate change in the developing world. Getting large multinational corporations to take action and partner with Greenpeace also adds legitimacy to their claims and helps to change the perception of Greenpeace as a combative organization of adversarial activists who will not negotiate and are more

concerned about the environment than the welfare of people living in the developing world (Begley 2009, Dienhart 2006, Murphy and Dee 1996).

McDonald's chosen strategy of using two-way communication after being confronted with criticism from Greenpeace was successful in improving the company's corporate image because it allowed McDonald's to find common ground with Greenpeace and create a partnership. If McDonald's had chosen to defend Cargill and use a similar communication strategy as their business partner it is likely that McDonald's would have continued to be a target for Greenpeace and the ongoing conflict would have generated a lot of negative press coverage. By helping Greenpeace work toward a solution to deforestation McDonald's was able to divert this potentially damaging conflict into an opportunity to improve the damaged state of the corporation's public image and position McDonald's in the UK as a company that is committed offering consumers environmentally responsible products (Conner 2008, Dunne 2009, Gib 2005, Hall 2004, Hickman 2006, McDonlads UK July 27, 2007).

At the time of the Greepnepeace campaign McDonald's image had not yet fully recovered from the damage of the film *Supersize Me* and the McLibel trial (Dunne 2009, Gib 2005, Hall 2004, Hickman 2006). The positive press received by McDonald's following their partnership with Greenpeace was a far cry from previous years' press on the company which was often very critical of the company's high fat foods' contribution to international obesity issues (Dunne 2009, Hall 2004, Howden July 26, 2006, Kaufman 2007, Lawrence and Vidal 2006).

As a result of their partnership with Greenpeace, McDonald's received a lot of positive coverage in the British and U.S. news media portraying the European branch of the company as corporate do-gooders and was able to use the conflict as a launching point for sustainable initiatives in the company throughout the UK (Conner 2008, Dunne 2009, Howden July 26, 2006, Kaufman 2007, McDonald's UK 2007, Sauven 2006, Lawrence and Vidal 2006). Press coverage and comments from Greenpeace leadership in the press portrayed McDonald's as being engaged in a partnership with Greenpeace which created an "unprecedented" moratorium (Kaufman 2007, Sauven 2006).

In an article for *The Guardian* Greenpeace campaigns director John Sauven wrote;

"An unlikely union of Greenpeace, McDonald's, and leading UK supermarkets successfully pressured multinational US-based commodities brokers into signing a two-year moratorium on buying soya from newly deforested land in the Amazon" (1).

In an article for *The Washington Post* on the trip members of Greenpeace and

McDonald's took to the Amazon following the moratorium Marc Kaufman wrote;

"And though Greenpeace had not long ago been accusing McDonald's of complicity in the deforestation, by time of the Amazon trip in January, the eight official were calling each other partners. Those were not just words. The ubiquitous fast-food company and the global environmentalists had already jointly pressured the biggest soy traders in Brazil into placing an unprecedented two-year moratorium on the purchase of any soy from newly deforested areas" (2007, 1).

Comments from Greenpeace on their Web site and in the press also gave McDonald's a lot of credit for successfully getting suppliers to agree to the initial two-year moratorium (Greenpeace International, July 25, 2006, Howden 25, 2006, Kaufman 2007, Lawrence and Vidal 2006, Sauven 2006). Greenpeace International's July 25, 2006 press release announcing the moratorium specifically names McDonald's as a catalyst for change in the Amazon;

“In an historic deal that has impacts far beyond the golden arches and into the global agricultural market, McDonald’s is now the leading company in the campaign to halt deforestation for the expansion of soya farming in the Amazon...In April we launched our campaign exposing the food retailer’s role in rainforest destruction...The result is that McDonald’s and other big food retailers have worked with us to develop a zero deforestation plan” (1).

In his article for *The Guardian* Sauven also credited McDonald’s for the success of the moratorium and praised the company’s leadership;

“I cannot say it came naturally to Greenpeace to jump into bed with the world’s largest fast-food company. But it is a fact that the company immediately recognized the nature of the problem and sought not simply to put its own house in order but to use its might to push a multi-million dollar industry towards a more sustainable future. For that McDonald’s European executives should be congratulated” (1).

McDonald’s also used the passing of the moratorium to assert the company’s commitment to rainforest conservation on a press release on the company’s Web site;

“In the Spring of 2006, Greenpeace issued a report alerting us and other company’s to another rainforest threat-soya farming in the Amazon rainforest area of Brazil. We viewed this as a social responsibility issue for our supply chain because some of our European poultry supplier were using soya feed sourced from Brazil. We reached out to Greenpeace, other NGOs, our suppliers, and the Brazilian government. As a result, a two-year moratorium on soya sourcing from the vulnerable areas has been established” (www.mcdonalds.com).

On his “Open for Discussion” blog on McDonald’s Web site, which contained links to the “Eating Up the Amazon” report, Greenpeace’s July 25, 2006 press release, and Sauven’s August 2, 2006 article for *The Guardian*, McDonald’s Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility Bob Langert discussed the company’s collaboration with Greenpeace;

“Greenpeace publicly asked companies like McDonald’s to work with their suppliers to stop using soya from the vulnerable areas of the rainforest. We immediately invited Greenpeace to meet so we could get a clearer understanding of their research. And we reached out to other NGOs, our suppliers, and other companies to get more insight into this important issue...Just recently, a two-year moratorium plan was announced by the

soya traders in Brazil....I believe it's a great testimony to the value of our collaborative approach and another step forward to address environmental impacts in our supply chain, no matter how far upstream" (Langert 2006).

Media accounts, Greenpeace press releases, and information on McDonald's Web site all offered the perception that McDonald's relationship with Greenpeace was a partnership, however, none of the news articles or press releases regarding Unilever's relationship with Greenpeace refer to a partnership (Greenpeace International, Greenpeace, International April 21, 2008, Greenpeace, Langert 2006, Leake 2008, *Liverpool Daily Echo* May 11, 2008 Sanidson 2008, *Revolution* 2008, www.mcdonalds.com). Since the issue of soy was further down on McDonald's supply chain and McDonald's was not trying to position itself as a organization with strong corporate social responsibility its partnership with Greenpeace appeared to have a more positive effect on its public image than in the Unilever case. Greenpeace's criticism of Unilever on the NGO's Web site and to the press accused the company of 'greenwashing' and the press coverage of this conflict portrayed Unilever in a less positive light than McDonald's was portrayed in 2006 (Greenpeace International, Greenpeace, International July 25, 2006 and April 21, 2008, Leake 2008, *Liverpool Daily Echo* May 11, 2008, Kaufman 2007, Sauven 2006, Sanidson 2008, *Revolution* 2008). Although the author did not conduct an in-depth analysis of Unilever's public image prior to and following the case, the ongoing criticism of the company, their supplier United Plantations, and the RSPO by Greenpeace likely caused some damage to the positive public perception of Unilever. Unilever had been head of the RSPO for several years and had failed to successfully monitor palm production in the developing world and continued to have issues with at least one supplier after sustainability standards were finalized by the RSPO

(Greenpeace International Nov. 7, 2007 and April 21, 2008, Greenpeace UK Nov. 11, 2008, Greenpeace Netherlands Nov. 2008). Unlike in the McDonald's case, press coverage in the UK and abroad gave Greenpeace's protest credit for getting Unilever to take action and portrayed the company as "bowing to pressure" from Greenpeace, not creating a partnership, and used the protest to discuss the problem of 'greenwashing' (Leake 2008, *Liverpool Daily Echo* May 11, 2008, Sandison 2008, 1).

In an article following Unilever's announcement that the company would have their palm oil certified as sustainable by 2015 Sandison wrote;

"Unilever has bowed to pressure from Greenpeace, which recently staged a protest outside the consumer giant's UK sites and offices of its marketing services agencies, and agreed to start buying palm oil from certified sustainable sources" (2008, 1).

Beale's article in *Campaign* also gives pressure from Greenpeace credit for Unilever's actions;

"As the world's largest corporate users of the product [palm oil], Unilever was bull's-eye for the campaign...Last week, Unilever was forced into a response pledging to have all of its palm oil certified by 2015" (2008, 1).

Leake's article in *The Sunday Times* used Greenpeace's protest of Unilever to discuss the problem of 'greenwashing' and contained a quote from a Greenpeace campaigner discussing Unilever's 'greenwashing' dilemma;

"The protest was aimed at highlighting Unilever's use of palm oil supplied by companies destroying the rainforests of Indonesia – home to the orangutan – but also at what the organization regards as 'greenwash.' Tim Birch, a Greenpeace campaigner, said, 'Unilever pretends to be a responsible company, but if they invested as much in sorting out their suppliers as they do on greenwashing their brand, they could fix this problem for good'" (2008, 1).

Neff's article discusses how Unilever became a target for Greenpeace because of stances it takes on social issues. The company is also described as 'greenwashing' by a Greenpeace representative in his article;

"...it was Unilever that Greenpeace singled out for special attention, sending people in orangutan suits to scale the company's London headquarters last month and unleashing sophisticated parodies of Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty" on the London Underground and You Tube...It appears to have been very effective. On May 1, Unilever CEO Patrick Cescau backed Greenpeace's call for a moratorium on deforestation in Indonesia by palm-oil producers and pledged to get the ingredient only from sustainable sources by 2015. Unilever wasn't singled out just because of its high profile environmental and social stances, a Greenpeace spokesman said, claiming the company is the world's largest user of palm oil. The group had noted Unilever's high profile stances on environmental issues, including chairing an industry committee on sustainable palm oil that hasn't done much since 2002. 'So there was an element of greenwash there,' he said." (Neff 2008, 1-2).

Articles written following Unilever's commitment to taking action appear to be accounts of a company which was caught 'greenwashing' and pressured to make a change, a stark contrast to articles written following the McDonald's case referring to a partnership between a large corporation and an international NGO (Beale 2008, Kaufman 2007, Langert 2006, Murphy 2008, Neff 2008, Sandison 2008, Sauven 2006, [www.mcdonalds.com](http://www.mcdonalds.com)). Although Neff claimed Unilever's big 'name' and stances on environmental issues caused the company to become an easy target for Greenpeace's palm oil campaign, due Unilever's stated commitment to issues of sustainability and social responsibility the company also had more credibility to lose as a result of criticism from Greenpeace and therefore had less of a choice in responding to and taking action as a result of the NGO's criticism (Kwanchai 2008, McLaren 2008, Partridge 2007, Unilever Global Site). If Unilever had chosen to respond to Greenpeace using only one-way strategies through its Web site and the media it is likely Unilever would have



suffered much more damage to their reputation due to continued protest from Greenpeace and more negative press. Beale proposed Greenpeace's public protests caused Unilever to be "forced into a response" and by making a commitment to sourcing sustainable palm oil "the whole affair has allowed Unilever to make a very public statement about its green ambition" (2008). Unilever's economic development and sustainability programs in countries all over the world have helped to position the company as a global leader in corporate sustainability and social responsibility and choosing to respond and take action allowed the company to affirm their commitment to responsible business practices but becoming a target of Greenpeace may call into question the sincerity of the company's other current and future CSR claims (Kwanchai 2008, McLaren 2008, Partridge 2007, Unilever Global Site). If Unilever had chosen to use more effective issues management strategies, such as those outlined by Heath, the company would have identified Greenpeace's palm oil campaign as a threat when "Cooking the Climate" was released and opted to meet with Greenpeace in order to work toward a solution through dialogue and collaborative decision making thereby upholding high standards of social responsibility and remaining above reproach before becoming the direct target of Greenpeace's campaign (2006).

Like McDonald's, Unilever choose to support Greenpeace's call for a moratorium. Although several Indonesian governors had committed to moratoriums on peatland and rainforest destruction in several key states until early in 2009, the campaign failed to successfully pressure the Indonesian Palm Oil Producers Association and Indonesian government to support a national moratorium (Soeriaatmadja 2009,

www.mognabay.com). Lack of a successful national moratorium and continued investigations of Indonesian RSPO member palm oil producers contributed to fewer opportunities for favorable press coverage for Unilever than in the McDonald's case (Allard 2009, Greenpeace International Nov. 14, 2008 and March 20, 2009). It could also be suggested that if a national moratorium had been successfully passed and was able to effectively end, or at least dramatically curb, deforestation soon after Unilever had committed their support, the company might have been given some of the credit for its success by Greenpeace and the international media.

Although a Greenpeace press release discussed the importance of “massive consumer pressure” in the McDonald's campaign, Sauven also called McDonald's a partner in pressuring suppliers and was quoted as saying the company had “played a highly positive role” in the campaign (Greenpeace International July 25, 2006, 1 Kaufman 2007, 3). In contrast, media accounts do not portray the NGO's relationship with Unilever as a partnership and Sauven's comments to the media following the announcement of Unilever's plans to take action are not very positive and give the impression he is skeptical saying Unilever's commitment “will be meaningless” unless a moratorium is passed and goes on to say, “Every day that Unilever keeps buying palm oil from these suppliers, orangutans are pushed closer to extinction” (Murphy 2008,1; Sandison 2008, 1).

Content on Unilever's Web site discussing palm oil and the Greenpeace campaign was optimistic about the company's ability to affect change but was also transparent in addressing some of Greenpeace's ongoing concerns. In the video on palm oil that

Unilever released on its Web site in April of 2008 said the company's position was "very similar" to Greenpeace's and Unilever was happy to support the moratorium. However Unilever's foods president Vindi Banga responded to a question about RSPO members behaving badly by saying;

"...bear in mind that, as one company, it's not our job to police the world. Our job is to do what we can to establish a sustainable agenda and to be bold and strike forward and lead that agenda....We can then hope that the rest of the world will follow in those tracks."

Following Banga's statement, comments from Jonathon Porritt, founder director, Forum for the Future, seemed to contradict Banga by implying the 'best performers' should take a policing role;

"The next step, undoubtedly, is to get the certification process sorted out, so that when a company like Unilever makes this promise to its consumers, that the raw materials in its products have come from certified genuinely sustainable producers, it can show in the audit of the supply chain that that really is the case. The only way you ever make this change is if governments regulate and if the best performers in the sector make sure that the worst performers are basically stopped from damaging the reputation of the sector as a whole."

While Unilever's May 14, 2008 press release praised Unilever for having "agreed to take up the challenge of leading the way and building a coalition of allies to support a moratorium" Greenpeace berated the RSPOs efforts to certify palm oil in November of 2008 saying of Unilever's supplier United Plantations had failed;

"...to meet the already inadequate criteria established by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil...and the certification, in this instance, looks like little more than a bit of marketing lubrication for the industry" (Greenpeace UK Nov. 18, 2008, 1)

Although Greenpeace did not name Unilever as responsible for United Plantation's actions, as head of the RSPO, Unilever was implicated indirectly and the sector as a whole should have been embarrassed by Greenpeace's reports. The RSPO's inability to

establish a genuinely sustainable agenda makes a case that the RSPO, and indirectly Unilever, are more interested in maintaining their reputation than leading actual reform.

If Unilever can make good on their promise to source 100 percent sustainable palm oil by 2015 and RSPO members are made accountable for the standards set forth by the organization they should not become a target in Unilever's Indonesian palm oil campaign again. By continuing to work toward sustainability in all of their brands Unilever should be able to uphold their public image as a socially and environmentally responsible company. Unilever's decision to engage Greenpeace in a dialogue, support the moratorium, and take action to certify palm oil also shows a commitment to ethical behavior because the company is willing to engage critics and take action to correct their mistakes. In the future Unilever should use research to identify relevant issues and engage critics in a dialogue at the onset of pertinent concerns from activist publics.

Both of these cases are examples of how creating a dialogue can be an effective strategy for dealing with activist criticism. By being open to meeting with Greenpeace and engaging the NGO in a dialogue McDonald's and Unilever both attempted to create a perception, be it real or contrived, that they were a partner in a the solution to a global problem rather than a victim of blame and ridicule by Greenpeace. The defensive one-way strategies used by Cargill in the form of press releases and communication through the press proved to have limited effects on the outcomes of the first case and supports research which has shown that credibility and public opinion rests on the side of the NGOs (Edelman 2007).

Although Greenpeace's leveraging of McDonald's and Unilever did not ultimately prove to be a permanent solution to issues of deforestation in both cases, it did appear to create positive mutually beneficial results from companies' interactions with activists. Although the first case had a more successful overall outcome and was considered a true partnership by the media, creating a dialogue was effective for both companies because it took the spotlight off of the company as being a direct participant in the problem and repositioned each company as a part of the solution. In addition to being a beneficial strategy for the companies, this strategy allowed Greenpeace to harness the power and influence large multinational companies can have over their suppliers and as well as national governments.

As indicated by Kaufman's *Washington Post* article which discusses how McDonald's corporate leaders toured a recently deforested part of the Amazon with Greenpeace activists, the McDonald's case appears to be a positive example of how companies can initiate, develop, and repair relationships with activist publics (2007). In Kaufman's article Sauven said that partnering with McDonald's was not Greenpeace's initial plan and a representative from McDonald's was quoted saying, "I think we surprised them at first by saying, 'You're right. We have a problem here'" (2007, 3). Further analysis of this case could also argue that the success of the McDonald's case was a result of the company's ability to effectively use a relational approach, such as that formulated by Bruning and Ledingham and Wilson, which creates a mutually beneficial relationship through dialogue and two-way communication concepts in order to foster openness, trust, and understanding (1999).

As more companies, like Adidas, Nike, and Wal-Mart, continue to become the target of leveraging strategies by Greenpeace and other NGOs, more companies will likely follow McDonald's and Unilever in creating a dialogue with critical NGOs (Greenpeace USA June 13, 2009). As a result the author predicts companies who choose to engage NGOs in two-way communication will have more positive results than those who do not. Similar campaigns should continue to illustrate that companies like McDonald's, who create true partnerships with NGOs and work diligently toward getting positive results, will have a positive light shined on them, while companies who claim to be responsible but ignore global problems that effect their business will be publicly chastised. Leveraging strategies used by NGOs should be able to compel companies to adopt more proactive and effective issues management strategies, especially within companies making sustainability and CSR claims, in order to avoid becoming the target of such campaigns and create alliances to work toward a solution to problems before becoming a direct target of these campaigns.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

These two case studies provide a framework for companies seeking to effectively handle criticism from activist publics. Both of these cases also support a need to foster ongoing relationships, collaborate, and take action when a company commits to creating a dialogue with activist publics. These cases appear to support the research of Strelow, Dozier, Grunig, Grunig, and Heath and provide contextual support for two-way dialogue as the most important component for fostering mutually beneficial relationships between companies and environmental publics as well as converging seemingly conflicting

ideologies. Both of these cases also provide examples of a new type of activist campaign that takes global problems, like deforestation in the developing world, and connects them to products seen in restaurants and shopping centers in the developed world.

Although not all conflicts can be resolved and good issues management and making socially and environmentally responsible business decisions should be able to prevent companies from being the target of NGOs and activist organizations, these case studies demonstrate that by working with NGOs and activists a company can divert damage to its reputation into an opportunity to better its image as well as its impact on society. These two case studies offer evidence which demonstrates that if public relations practitioners can create a dialogue with environmentalist publics through two-way communication the profession of public relations can be a guiding force for creating more sustainable business practices, fostering corporate social and environmental responsibility, solving global problems, and creating positive social change. These cases suggest that as large multi-national companies who genuinely want to commit to making a positive impact on environmental and social issues learn to invite and welcome input and alliances with NGOs, these companies will have the opportunity to become powerful vehicles for positive social change around the world.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Due to the use of historical primary and secondary research that is publicly available it may not be possible to validly determine whether communication between Greenpeace and the companies they were putting pressure on was symmetrical or asymmetrical. Although more data may have been available in foreign language

publications, the author only examined primary and secondary research in English. In-depth interviewing of key participants would have offered insight into the nature of communication that took place between activists and company leadership where this research focuses more on the outcomes of the communication that took place.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Future studies should examine companies' interactions with Greenpeace and other NGOs in similar campaigns in order to understand the usefulness of these campaigns with more reliability. Future research in this area should include more in-depth qualitative research which includes interviews with public relations practitioners, activists, and corporate leaders in order to better understand the relationships created in similar leveraging campaigns with activists. As activists continue to use these types of leveraging strategies, quantitative case studies, similar to L. Grunig's (1992) case study of organizations' interactions with activists, should seek to examine larger numbers of cases in order to determine key factors that contribute to successful or unsuccessful outcomes for business dealing activist criticism, such as speed of response and prior image of the company. Examining similar interactions between activist organizations and large corporations through quantitative and qualitative content analyses of press releases from both NGOs and large corporations would also contribute to better understanding of these relationships and allow trends to be discovered in companies' communication with activist publics.



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