

OPERATION LEMONADE: OPUS DEI'S PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN AGAINST  
*THE DA VINCI CODE*

By

KIRSTEN BIONDICH

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN MASS COMMUNICATION

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2007

© 2007 Kirsten Biondich

To my fiancé, my partner in crime and lifeline during our graduate school years.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I picked up my copy of *The Da Vinci Code* from the airport book store almost two years ago, I never imagined it would lead me to this thesis. Without the guidance of my committee chair, Dr. Michael Mitrook, my thoughts and ideas about Opus Dei and their unique communications crisis would not have matured into a formal research project, so I thank him for that and his support through the long process. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee: Dr. Jennifer Robinson, whose expertise in crisis communications was an excellent and needed resource for this study; and Dr. Robert Westin, an advisor to Dan Brown's *Angel and Demons* and an essential guide to everything Da Vinci. Without the help of my committee, this project would never have reached its full potential.

My deepest thanks go to my parents who have always encouraged and expected the best of me. Daily phone conversations with my mom kept me motivated and grounded when I thought this challenge was insurmountable. I know this will not be the last time they stand by my side through life's challenges. They mean everything to me and have taught me to really take pride in any accomplishment—no matter how big or small.

And lastly, but certainly not least, thanks from the bottom of my heart to my future husband, Shane Hamstra. Shane is my calm in the eye of the storm and inspires me in so many ways that I could not begin to list each and every one. We have taken an incredible journey together that brought us from Indianapolis to the University of Florida for graduate school. As we accept our diplomas and exchange our vows all in the month of May, I will be sharing the happiest moments of my life with my true soul mate.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
LIST OF TABLES.....	7
LIST OF FIGURES .....	8
ABSTRACT .....	9
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	11
Purpose of Study .....	13
Background Description .....	13
Opus Dei History .....	13
Common controversies .....	14
Membership .....	18
The Da Vinci Code.....	20
2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	24
Framing.....	24
Framing Theory .....	24
Framing and Public Relations .....	25
Framing Analyses .....	26
Crisis Communication .....	27
Situational Crisis Communication Theory .....	28
Crisis Rumor Control .....	31
Research Questions .....	35
3 METHODOLOGY.....	36
Textual Analysis.....	36
Media Sample .....	37
Thematic Analysis .....	39
In-Depth Interviews .....	41
4 RESULTS .....	42
Textual Analysis.....	42
Analysis of Crisis.....	42
Strategy .....	43
Tactics .....	45
Relation to crisis theory .....	52

Phase A the inactive phase .....	52
Phase B the active phase .....	54
Analysis of Broadcast Media .....	58
Frames .....	59
Fact vs. fiction frame .....	60
War on Christianity frame .....	61
Opportunity frame .....	62
Opus Dei Messaging .....	63
In-Depth Interviews .....	66
5 DISCUSSION .....	70
Summary of Opus Dei's Campaign .....	70
Textual Analysis .....	71
Thematic Analysis .....	73
Fact vs. Fiction .....	73
War on Christianity .....	74
Opportunity .....	74
Messaging .....	75
Interviews .....	76
Implications for Public Relations .....	77
Limitations of Study and Recommendations for Future Research .....	78
 APPENDIX	
A OPUS DEI'S COMMUNICATIONS PLAN .....	80
B THEMATIC ANALYSIS SHEET .....	89
C THEMATIC ANALYSIS BOOK .....	91
LIST OF REFERENCES .....	94
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....	98

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>page</u>
2-1 Crisis types and definitions.....	30
4-1 Major events during Opus Dei's <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> crisis .....	44
4-2 Frequency of frames in stories .....	60
4-3 Frequency of “fact vs. fiction” frame by network.....	60
4-4 Frequency of “war on Christianity” frame by network .....	61
4-5 Frequency of “opportunity” frame by network .....	63
4-6 Amount of stories featuring Opus Dei messaging .....	65
4-7 Amount of stories featuring and correcting Opus Dei controversies .....	66

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
1-1 A cilice. Some Opus Dei members use a cilice to practice corporal mortification. ....	16
1-2 A discipline. A cordlike whip used during corporal mortification. ....	17
2-1 Matching crises and communications strategies. ....	31
4-1 Opus Dei's Web site page about <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> .....	46
4-3 Opus Dei's brochure box for fans of <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> .....	49
4-4 Frequency of broadcast media coverage.....	58
4-5 Frequency of stories by network .....	59
4-6 Frequency of total instances of coverage by network.....	59
4-7 Number of individuals quoted in stories.....	64
4-8 Number of Opus Dei sources vs. opposition sources.....	64



Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Mass Communication

OPERATION LEMONADE: OPUS DEI'S PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN AGAINST  
*THE DA VINCI CODE*

By

Kirsten Biondich

May 2007

Chair: Michael Mitrook  
Major: Mass Communication

With over 60 million copies sold worldwide, *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown is one of the most successful works of fiction ever published. However, the success of this novel and major motion picture created a real-life crisis for the lay Catholic organization called Opus Dei. The murder mystery sensationalized parts of Opus Dei's controversial past and practices including corporal mortification, recruiting techniques and cult-like behavior and presented them as fact in the novel's opening disclaimer. This relatively small, unknown group within the Catholic Church was now portrayed as a sinister, secretive organization to millions of readers all over the world.

The review of literature shows the importance of crisis communications as a public relations function and underlines the major strategies organizations should consider when dealing with a potentially damaging situation. Additionally, framing theory and its relationship to public relations is discussed.

The goal of this research was to fully explore the public relations efforts of Opus Dei during its three-year crisis with *The Da Vinci Code* through a textual analysis of Internet, print and broadcast media and in-depth interviews with key members of Opus Dei's communications staff. The thesis also includes a detailed background of Opus Dei featuring several key

controversies surrounding the organization and a timeline of the crisis focusing on major events and public relations activities.

The research results identified Opus Dei's situation as a rumor crisis and showed that although the recommended crisis management strategy was to attack the accuser, Opus Dei chose to instead to respectfully refute *The Da Vinci Code* and embark on an informational campaign to tell their version of the truth. Opus Dei's decision to not attack Brown or Sony Pictures was typical of many religious organizations facing crisis and reinforced the organization's relationship with their primary stakeholders—the Catholic Church. Opus Dei turned to its internal allies, its membership and other Catholic organizations, for support through the crisis.

Additionally, Opus Dei focused on making the media an ally by giving journalists unprecedented access to Opus Dei's headquarters and responding to all media and information inquiries. In return, the analysis of broadcast media shows that Opus Dei effectively employed many of its key messages and was able to present its side of the story to the public.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

With over 60 million copies sold worldwide according to *The New York Times*, it's hard not to notice Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*. The members of the relatively small Catholic religious organization called Opus Dei were not ready for the attention they were about to receive from this groundbreaking, genre-bending fiction novel. The organization had seen their share of headlines in the past, with accusations of brain-washing, secret rituals and cult-like dominance, but nothing could prepare them for the media barrage created by the overwhelming success of *The Da Vinci Code*.

Most research and material written about Opus Dei is from current and former members of the organization and members of the Catholic Church. Such titles include *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace: My Spiritual Journey in Opus Dei* (2006) by Scott Hahn and *Opus Dei: Leadership and Vision in Today's Catholic Church* (1994) by Vittorio Messori. While these titles present much information and opinion about the organization, they are often considered as one-sided interpretations of Opus Dei. However, respected CNN analyst and Vatican reporter John L. Allen, Jr. tackled both sides of Opus Dei in his book, *Opus Dei: An Objective Look Behind the Myths and Reality of the Most Controversial Force in the Catholic Church* (2005). The primary researcher, who was raised Catholic but had never heard of Opus Dei before *The Da Vinci Code*, turned to Allen's work for an even-handed interpretation of the organization.

*The Da Vinci Code* paints an ominous portrait of Opus Dei in its 454 pages. One of the novel's central antagonists, Silas, is an albino monk who stops at nothing, even murder, in the name of Opus Dei.

"Jesus had but one true message," Sister Sandrine said defiantly. "I cannot see that message in Opus Dei." A sudden explosion of rage erupted behind the monk's eyes. He lunged, lashing out with the candle stand like a club. As Sister Sandrine fell, her last feeling was an overwhelming sense of foreboding (Brown, 2003, 136).

Silas' portrayal, along with other fictional Opus Dei members, caused great concern in the real-life organization. The novel sensationalized Opus Dei's controversial past and presented a frightening portrait of the organization to tens of millions of readers, most of whom had never heard of Opus Dei. However, there are two sides to every controversy. In addition to their scandal-filled past, Opus Dei's teachings and practices often attract criticism from outsiders and even former members. While Dan Brown undoubtedly misrepresented the true nature of Opus Dei, this religious organization was not without its own troubles.

Although the novel first hit bookshelves in 2003, Opus Dei was fairly quiet until 2006. Why the sudden shift to high-gear public relations? Sony Pictures Entertainment aired the first series of previews for their new summer blockbuster featuring the work of Oscar-winning director Ron Howard and actor Tom Hanks—*The Da Vinci Code* movie. Yet, Opus Dei's response to both the novel and the theatrical release was anything but hostile. Brian Finnerty, Opus Dei's director of U.S. media relations, said in a recent interview, "You have to have a sense of humor. Countering a novel and a movie is a little bit like fighting against smoke. If you swing at it with boxing gloves, you wind up looking a little silly" (Eisenberg, 2006). Instead, the organization attempted to, as Carol Eisenberg of *Newsday* put it, "make lemonade out of 'Da Vinci Code' lemons" (Eisenberg, 2006).

And so, they are adopting a new strategy: There will be no calls for boycotts. No angry denunciations. Instead of fighting against popular culture, Opus Dei—along with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and many leading Protestant evangelicals—will attempt to ride the giant wave created by Sony Pictures Entertainment, exploiting it as a 'teachable moment' with their own films, books, Web sites and discussion groups (Eisenberg, 2006).

Rather than urging members and the general public to not buy the book or see the film, Opus Dei decided to focus on setting the record straight in the media through a series of key messages and stories. The communications staff answered all media inquiries, granted on-site interviews, and

allowed cameras inside Opus Dei headquarters in an effort to show they had nothing to hide and were not the secretive, cult-like organization depicted in *The Da Vinci Code*.

*The Da Vinci Code* book and movie attacked Opus Dei's reputation and left the organization with little choice but to respond to the rumors and correct controversies in the media. Opus Dei rallied their members and solidified partnerships with other Christian and Catholic groups to get their message of "the real Opus Dei" out to the media. This crisis case is an excellent example of how a small religious organization fought rumor and controversy without hostility against a hugely successful pop culture phenomenon.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to utilize qualitative methods of research to fully explore Opus Dei's informational public relations campaign against *The Da Vinci Code* book and movie. Through a textual analysis of the campaign and broadcast media coverage and in-depth interviews with Opus Dei communications staff, this study hopes to determine whether Opus Dei's communication efforts to portray "the real Opus Dei" were successful over the course of *The Da Vinci Code* crisis. In addition, this study hopes to provide an example to other religious and non-profit organizations on how to effectively combat rumors and establish beneficial relationships with media.

### **Background Description**

#### **Opus Dei History**

Filled with controversy, antiquated and often misunderstood orthodox practices, Opus Dei's past is certainly open to criticism and rumor propagation. "To me the entire history of Opus Dei seems to be a succession of paradoxes," said Joan Estruch, a professor of sociology at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Estruch, 1995, 260). Founded in 1928 by Saint Josemaria Escrivá, Opus Dei has been a controversial institution since its establishment. "Inside

the church, it is unusual for a group to bring together men and women, and lay people and clergy, in one association to spread the Gospel” (Zoll, 2006). Escrivá was one source of the controversy. Opus Dei’s founder was beatified in 1992 and canonized in 2002, drawing much criticism from those who thought Escrivá’s life was far from that of a saint. Some critics said he was controlling, paranoid and had an explosive temper (Allen, 2005). Escrivá’s questionable political ties to the Franco regime also didn’t sit well amongst Opus Dei opponents. He sent a congratulatory letter to General Francisco Franco applauding his rise to power and his work in restoring Catholicism in Spain. In addition, “Opus Dei had its most notable growth in the period from the end of the Spanish civil war in 1939 to the death of Escrivá in 1975, a period of time that overlaps with the reign of Gen. Francisco Franco” (Allen, 2005, 56). Yet, the debate surrounding Escrivá only scratches the surface of Opus Dei controversies.

### **Common controversies**

Those outside the church criticize Opus Dei for its power within the Vatican, recruiting techniques, practice of corporal mortification, secrecy and sizeable wealth. “Questions about whether Opus Dei has outside influence grew when Pope John Paul II granted the group a unique status in the church in 1982, and 10 years later set the group's founder Escrivá on an unusually speedy track to sainthood” (Goodstein, 2006). This unique status is commonly referred to as a prelatore. Opus Dei’s Web site provides an explanation as to what that standing means in its section “What is Opus Dei?.”

Opus Dei is a personal prelatore, which is a part of the hierarchical structure of the Church established by the Holy See. Personal prelatores exist to carry out specific missions in the Church, so their membership is determined not by geography, as in the case of a diocese, but by personal incorporation into the prelatore. The Opus Dei Prelature is governed worldwide by a Prelate in Rome, Bishop Javier Echevarría (opusdei.org).

Some critics of the religious organization see its prelature status as not only unusual, but threatening to other sects of Catholicism, as the organization's reputation, whether good or bad, can come back to haunt the Vatican.

Another major source of criticism lies within Opus Dei's recruiting techniques. John Allen, CNN Vatican Analyst and author of *Opus Dei: An Objective Look Behind the Myths and Reality of the Most Controversial Force in the Catholic Church* (2005), notes three elements of contention concerning the issue of Opus Dei recruiting:

- That Opus Dei, as a matter of both policy and practice, is constantly seeking new members
- That Opus Dei is methodical, highly organized, and effective in its approach to recruiting
- That part of Opus Dei's effectiveness arises from deception, manipulation, and coercion (Allen, 2005, 348)

These three points and other criticisms depict Opus Dei as a relentless recruiting machine often preying on young, impressionable college students in order to grow in influence and power. In response to Allen's interviews about the subject, Opus Dei said, "they have no interest in coercing someone into joining Opus Dei. The last thing the world needs are more embittered ex-members of Opus Dei" (Allen, 2005, 347). More importantly, Opus Dei believes that membership in its organization is "a vocation given from God" and therefore, does not make it a policy to constantly recruit (Allen, 2005).

Yet, one of the oldest forms of penance in the Catholic Church is one of the most criticized Opus Dei practices. Corporal mortification means "self-inflicted physical pain intended to tame the flesh and unite Christians with the suffering of Christ" (Allen, 2005, 162). The most devout members of Opus Dei, called numeraries and priests, practice this self-mortification with devices called a cilice and a discipline. A cilice (Figure 1-1) is a spiked metal band worn around the



Figure 1-1. A cilice. Some Opus Dei members use a cilice to practice corporal mortification. Silas, the albino Opus Dei monk character depicted in *The Da Vinci Code*, wore a cilice and used it in gruesome, frightening detail.

Looking down, he examined the spiked cilice belt clamped around his thigh. All true followers of The Way wore this device—a leather strap, studded with sharp metal barbs that cut into the flesh as a perpetual reminder of Christ’s suffering. Grasping the buckle, he cinched it one notch tighter, wincing as the barbs dug deeper into his flesh. Exhaling slowly, he savored the cleansing ritual of the pain (Brown, 2003, 14).

Opus Dei says that the cilice only leaves “small prick holes in the flesh” and is not the bloody, barbaric instrument depicted in *The Da Vinci Code* (Allen, 2005). In addition to the cilice, numeraries also use a discipline (Figure 1-2), which is a cordlike whip, as part of corporal mortification. Members strike the discipline across their back or buttocks once a week or more while reciting a prayer, either the Hail Mary or Our Father. *The Da Vinci Code* also depicted Silas using the discipline in disturbing terms, describing it as a “heavy knotted rope” which was “slashing at his flesh” (Brown, 2003). The media and contemporary culture sensationalize Opus Dei’s practice of corporal mortification because it appears medieval, archaic and ruthless in today’s society. However, it is important to note that Opus Dei did not create this historical custom.





Figure 1-2. A discipline. A cordlike whip used during corporal mortification.

Newly appointed Opus Dei spokesperson Terri Carron tackled the topic of corporal mortification in an interview with Diane Sawyer.

Are there physical penances in the church? Yes. Did Opus Dei invent them? No. No, of course not. You know, Mother Teresa, I mean, everybody knows her life. Most people wouldn't think she'd need any more penance, but she did practice forms of penance. So did Padre Pio. So did Paul VI. I mean, many people in the church. This is not new. But it wasn't invented by Opus Dei (Sawyer, 2006).

Opus Dei is an organization steeped in tradition and committed to orthodox teachings of the past.

Attention has also been paid to Opus Dei's wealth and assets. "It has a reputation for cultivating the rich or those soon to be, at both elite colleges and its own institutions" (Biema, 2006, 58). The organization has schools, training centers, residences and other properties all over the world, some under "bland names like Heights or Northridge Prep" and some lacking any identification at all (Biema, 2006). This lack of descriptive signage is also the case with Opus Dei's New York Headquarters which simply bears the sign, "Murray Hill Place." Critics of the Opus Dei equate the absence of their name from buildings and centers with secrecy. These centers all serve the central purpose of furthering Opus Dei's mission of bringing holiness into the ordinary, daily life and serve as retreats for the lay faithful. Opus Dei has also been rumored

to force members to hand over their salaries to the organization. Many members live a very modest life while working in a professional career, allowing them to donate a sizeable portion of their income to support Opus Dei's centers and activities.

## **Membership**

Becoming a member of Opus Dei doesn't happen overnight. It is a long process with several stages resulting in a lifetime commitment to the organization. The first stage called "whistling" is one in which the prospective member writes a letter to Opus Dei requesting admission (Allen, 2005). Six months later, the member goes through the admission phase in which a small ceremony is held where the member "verbally agrees to live in the spirit of Opus Dei." (Allen, 2005, 22). A year later, oblation occurs where "a formal contract is executed between the member and Opus Dei." Up until the last stage called fidelity, the member is expected to make an annual renewal of their commitment to Opus Dei. If they fail to do so, they are no longer considered a member. The last stage of becoming a full-fledged Opus Dei member is called fidelity and is five years after the oblation phase. "One is now a permanent member of the 'supernatural family' of Opus Dei, and in order to leave at this stage, one should write a letter to the prelate informing him of one's intentions" (Allen, 2005, 22). The entire process to become a member from the initial letter of admission takes roughly six and a half years—hardly a commitment for the faint of heart.

According to Opus Dei, there are 87,000 members, of which only 3,000 reside in the United States (opusdei.org). Furthermore, members are divided into three main classifications: priests (exclusively male), numeraries and supernumeraries. Roughly 1,800 members (2%) are priests. "Their main pastoral ministry is to serve the faithful of the Prelature and the apostolic activities promoted by them" (opusdei.org). The majority of members (70%) are considered supernumeraries, most of them married with children, living in their own residences, and

working full-time jobs (opusdei.org). The final classification of numerary is where *The Da Vinci Code* focuses its attention. The character of Silas is an Opus Dei numerary and regularly practices corporal mortification and lives in an Opus Dei Center. The real-life numeraries make up roughly 20% of Opus Dei's membership and commit to a life of celibacy. These members "usually live in centers of Opus Dei, and are completely available to attend to the apostolic undertakings and the formation of the other faithful of the Prelature," (opusdei.org). Like supernumeraries, some numeraries have professional careers while others work full-time for Opus Dei. As mentioned earlier, these members often give the most back to Opus Dei which has caused much speculation. "Numeraries in the United States who make healthy salaries often run afoul of the Internal Revenue Service, since it's hard for the IRS to swallow that somebody making \$200,000 gives \$150,000 to charity" (Allen, 2005, 24).

So exactly who belongs to Opus Dei? There isn't a list of members available to the public to peruse, and it is not likely there ever will be. "Opus Dei's historic resistance to revealing the names of its members, leaving that decision to individuals, has sparked claims that it is a cult," (Zoll, 2006). Yet, some ex-members of the organization have reluctantly come forward to stir the controversy pot. Notable among them are ex-FBI agent Robert Hanssen who pleaded guilty in 2001 to spying for the Soviet Union, acknowledging that he admitted his crimes to an Opus Dei priest (Goodstein, 2006). Dan Brown wastes no time in making light of the Robert Hanssen connection in *The Da Vinci Code*. Of course the ultimate embarrassment had been the widely publicized trial of FBI spy Robert Hanssen, who, in addition to being a prominent member of Opus Dei, had turned out to be a sexual deviant, his trial uncovering evidence that he had rigged hidden video cameras in his own bedroom so his friends could watch him having sex with his wife. 'Hardly the pastime of a devout Catholic,' the judge had noted (Brown, 2003, 30).

While the Robert Hanssen controversy might have been a blow to Opus Dei, its members were anything but quiet during *The Da Vinci Code* crisis. Many members came forth publicly to defend the organization and show that they were indeed normal, everyday people and not the evil, plotting murderous monks that the book and film had made them out to be.

### **The Da Vinci Code**

Before the fiction novel *The Da Vinci Code* even begins, author Dan Brown includes a disclaimer page that partially reads:

Fact: The Vatican prelature known as Opus Dei is a deeply devout Catholic sect that has been the topic of recent controversy due to reports of brain-washing, coercion, and a dangerous practice known as ‘corporal mortification.’ Opus Dei has just completed construction of a \$47 million National Headquarters at 243 Lexington Avenue in New York City. All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate (Brown, 2003, 1).

Here, Brown sets the tone for Opus Dei that pervades throughout the novel—one embroiled in secrecy, intrigue, and of course, conspiracy.

The novel centers its attention on a renowned Harvard professor of symbology (a fictional discipline), Robert Langdon, who is summoned to Paris’ Louvre Museum to help solve the murder of the museum’s curator. Langdon then becomes the prime suspect and with the help of the curator’s granddaughter, escapes arrest. They work together to solve complex codes and secrets found in Leonardo Da Vinci’s famous masterpieces including *The Last Supper*. As they come closer to solving one of mankind’s greatest mysteries, that of the Holy Grail, the identities of the true murderers become clear. In the end, Langdon is cleared of all wrongdoing, and the Holy Grail’s whereabouts are revealed to be at the Louvre in Paris (Brown, 2003).

The larger topic at hand in *The Da Vinci Code* is Jesus Christ’s divinity. According to the book, Mary Magdalene, a devoted disciple, was the wife of Jesus and was pregnant with his daughter when he was crucified. Furthermore, the book ascertains that Mary Magdalene herself

was the Holy Grail, the bearer of Jesus' blood, and not a physical chalice as thought in Christian theology. This alternative Christian history appeared in several texts before Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* and *The Templar Revelation* are both books Brown acknowledged as inspiration for his best-selling novel. In fact, the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* found *The Da Vinci Code* to be so similar to their 1982 work that they filed a lawsuit against Brown in London in 2006. Interestingly, Random House, the publisher who released *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, also published *The Da Vinci Code* which calls the true motives for this lawsuit into question. While the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* lost the case, sales of their book skyrocketed from the publicity.

Where the real controversy arises is in the blur of fiction and non-fiction to create a storyline that can easily fool readers into forgetting that they are indeed reading a work of fiction. Bart Ehrman, author of Truth and Fiction in *The Da Vinci Code: A Historian Reveals What We Really Know about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine* (2004), explained how someone reading *The Da Vinci Code* could forget it was fiction.

I knew that the book itself was fictional, of course, but as I read it (and for me, as for many others, it was a real page-turner) I realized that Dan Brown's characters were actually making historical claims about Jesus, Mary, and the Gospels. In other words, the fiction was being built on a historical foundation that the reader was to accept as factual, not fictitious (Ehrman, 2004, xii).

The fact is, although Brown put a disclaimer at the beginning of his book claiming that "all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate," (Brown, 2003, 1), many scholars and historians vehemently refute this point and believe the disclaimer to be a lie. Books like *Cracking Da Vinci's Code: You've Read the Fiction, Now Read the Facts* and *Breaking the Da Vinci Code: Answers to the Questions Everyone's Asking* flood popular online book sellers like Amazon.com. Howard Troxler from the *St. Petersburg Times* of Tampa, Florida, blatantly calls out Brown's factual mistakes. "Of course, almost all of the

"evidence" cited in the book is patent nonsense. Some of it is made up or totally twisted from the historical reality. The story gets everything wrong from what the Dead Sea Scrolls contain to what happened at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D." (Troxler, 2006). However, *The Da Vinci Code*'s factual inaccuracies didn't curtail book sales. The controversy created a huge public buzz that paved the way for an unforgettable worldwide movie release.

On May 19, 2006, *The Da Vinci Code* movie appeared in theaters all over the world. Directed by Ron Howard and starring Tom Hanks, Audrey Tautou and Ian McKellen, the movie received lukewarm reviews from the media. "Ron Howard and screenwriter Akiva Goldsman struggle mightily to cram as much as possible of Dan Brown's labyrinthine thriller into a 2-hour-28-minute running time, resulting in a movie both overstuffed and underwhelming" (Ansen, 2006). Despite the negative press, it grossed \$77 million in the United States and \$147 million abroad its opening week (Variety.com). Overall, the movie grossed \$217 million in the United States and \$540 million abroad. The DVD version was released in a special two-disc edition on November 14, 2006, and has grossed \$53 million (Variety.com).

Interviews with prominent Opus Dei spokespeople revealed their shared anxiety of the film's release. "Reading a print version is one thing. Seeing the color images is another," said the director of Opus Dei's communications department in Rome (Biema, 2006, 54). Opus Dei attempted to curb the movie's negative portrayal of Opus Dei by sending multiple requests directly to Sony Pictures Entertainment. First, they asked the studio to not even mention Opus Dei in the movie. When that didn't work, Opus Dei's information office in Japan asked the studio for "a disclaimer making it clear that this is a work of fiction, and that any resemblance to reality is pure coincidence. An eventual decision of Sony in this direction would be a sign of respect" (opusdei.org). In a *Time* magazine interview published before the movie's release,

director Ron Howard acknowledges that Opus Dei is indeed in the movie, but also says, “I don’t say it in the movie one way or the other,” leaving room for interpretation as to whether the organization was literally mentioned or not (Biema, 2006, 55).

And what did the author have to say? While Brown kept relatively quiet about movie particulars, he did counter criticism about his treatment of Opus Dei on his Web site.

I worked very hard to create a fair and balanced depiction of Opus Dei. Even so, there may be those who are offended by the portrayal. While Opus Dei is a very positive force in the lives of many people, for others, affiliation with Opus Dei has been a profoundly negative experience. Their portrayal in the novel is based on numerous books written about Opus Dei as well as on my own personal interviews with current and former members (danbrown.com).

Together, Brown’s novel and Howard’s movie could have been either a public relations disaster or a publicist’s dream come true for Opus Dei. Their public relations strategy was comprehensive and surprisingly inventive for a small, religious group. The case is fully explored in Chapter 4 in “Textual Analysis.”

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Framing**

#### **Framing Theory**

Frames are the boundaries found within and around news stories. Their main purpose is to shape opinion and influence how a story is perceived. Many theorists have developed competing definitions for frames and framing theory. One prominent communications theorist, Robert Entman (1993), described the process of framing as the following:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Frames, then, define problems—determine what a causal agent is doing and costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of cultural values; diagnose causes—identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments—evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies—offer and justify treatments for the problem and predict their likely effects (Entman, 1993, 55).

Framing can change the way conflict is perceived and provide an influential narrative for the reader (Miller & Riechert, 2001). Another definition of framing is “an ongoing process by which ideological interpretative mechanisms are derived from competing stakeholder positions” (Miller & Riechert, 2001, 109). Miller and Reichert (2001) also proposed a “framing cycle” composed of four phases. The cycle begins with the emergence phase, followed by the definition/conflict phase, the resonance phase, and lastly the equilibrium or resolution phase where one frame dominates the others, “acting hegemonically, rendering ‘natural’ the prevailing definition of the situation” (pg. 113).

Cultural myths, narratives, and metaphors are central concepts in framing. Frames can be found everywhere—in news coverage, entertainment, advertising, music and politics. In addition to popular media, frames can be constructed by politicians, activists, non-profit groups, or a single individual. Hertog and McLeod (2001) assert that frames that prevail in any culture are



ones that are shared by many individuals or organizations in society. “Frames provide the unexpressed but shared knowledge of communicators that allows each to engage in discussion that presumes a set of shared assumptions” (pg. 141). If the frame is successful, then the individual will eventually come to see the world (or that issue) in terms of the frame. While certain cultural frames are repeated often, changes in frames can occur from popular culture’s innovation over time. Hertog and McLeod (2001) give an example how a pop culture phenomenon can heavily influence a frame:

Armies of patrons experience movies like ‘Titanic,’ and those who do not see it in the theater are exposed to its publicity and discussion of it through other media. Professionals with great skill produce popular culture artifacts in the form of mythic narratives that provide a powerful common experience for vast audiences (pg. 146).

Frames from popular culture can influence an audience regardless of the audience’s exposure to that particular phenomenon.

### **Framing and Public Relations**

Framing and public relations both share the goal of shaping how an audience perceives a message. Public relations practitioners often utilize frames to influence key stakeholders and publics by defining or limiting a particular message in order to reach a desired communications result. Through extensive research in multiple disciplines including sociology, psychology, anthropology and economics, Hallahan (1999) developed seven models of framing that can apply to public relations. These models include the framing of attributes, framing of risky choices, framing of actions, framing of issues, framing of responsibility, framing of news and framing of situations. Of particular importance to public relations practitioners dealing with a crisis management situation is the framing of responsibility. Hallahan (1999) notes a specific organizational crisis of inadvertence error which “occurs in situations in which people or organizations are portrayed as being involved in a blameworthy action when, in fact, no intent

can be demonstrated” (pg. 228). He notes that proper responsibility framing can help alleviate this situation.

Additionally, Hallahan (1999) explains his seven models of framing through a crisis case example. Initially, a practitioner will determine whether an event is a crisis or not through situational framing. Once the crisis has been identified as such, particular attributes of the situation will be emphasized or understated through attribute framing. Next, the practitioner might present the situation as forcing an organization or group of stakeholders to make a choice between gains and losses through risky choices framing. In order to gain cooperation from affected groups, the practitioner will employ action framing to emphasize the positive actions needed to alleviate the crisis. Additionally, the practitioner could utilize issues framing in order to explain the core issues of the crisis and responsibility framing to communicate the organization’s accountability. Finally, how the organization responds and deals with the crisis might be presented in the media through news framing.

### **Framing Analyses**

Hertog and McLeod (2001) state that in order to analyze frames, the basic conflict must first be identified. One way to determine the conflict is to establish the primary sources and stakeholders of the issue. Another important tactic is to identify the master narrative which is a “powerful organizing device...that organizes a large amount of disparate ideas and information” (pg. 148). Hertog and McLeod (2001) also determined that each frame has a unique vocabulary which is often created by the repetition of particular phrases, adjectives, adverbs, nouns and verb tenses. Different frames will often share particular items from the same vocabulary. It is important for the researcher to identify the relationships between these frames and what content is shared between them and how it is shared. Hertog and McLeod (2001) suggest that in order to fully prepare for a framing analysis, the researcher should explore the topic through a wide

variety of sources, popular and independent. This precursory analysis should allow the researcher to identify the dominant and sub frames for the chosen topic. Once the researcher has identified the frames to be analyzed, a list of language, symbols, usage, narratives, concepts, and categories should be developed for the framing analysis.

There are both qualitative and quantitative methods for framing analysis. However, a quantitative approach is often chosen because it can be used to count how frequently phrases, categories and other language relating to the frame is used in the text. Hertog and McLeod (2001) state that “quantitative analyses are most successful when a particular set of concepts is clearly related to a frame and the number of times the concept is used reflects the emphasis of that concept or set of concepts in the text” (pg. 152). However, most researchers also utilize a qualitative approach in simply making choices about the text, whether it be about what vocabulary determines a particular frame or the presence of absence of important content. A qualitative analysis also lends itself to wide interpretation because different researchers will inherently identify different frames. This problem can be alleviated through the use of another coder, interviews with sources from the text and advice from other researchers.

### **Crisis Communication**

Crisis management is important to the field of public relations because every organization, whether a large multi-national corporation or a small, local non-profit, is vulnerable to crisis. Public relations practitioners are often the main actors in an organizational crisis and are responsible for how the crisis is handled internally and publicly. Many communications researchers have developed crisis management theories, but of particular interest to the case of Opus Dei and *The Da Vinci Code* are the work Coombs (1999), Fearn-Banks (1996), and Kimmel (2004). Coombs (1999) defines several types of crises and establishes the importance of a crisis management plan (CMP). Additionally, he outlines the stages of a crisis and advises how

an organization should act at each phase. Fearn-Banks (1996) analyzes case studies from a variety of organizations in order to focus on particular types of crises. She also outlines the communications procedure an organization should follow when dealing with a minor and major crises. Finally, Kimmell (2004) examines rumor control from a business perspective and offers strategies for how to deal with this unique form of communications crisis.

### **Situational Crisis Communication Theory**

In *Ongoing Crisis Communication*, Coombs (1999) defines crisis as “an event that is an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly” (pg. 2). Not only are crises unpredictable, but they can cause an organization extensive damage in many forms. A crisis could threaten an organization’s resources and lead to “financial loss, injuries or deaths to stakeholders, structural or property damage, sullied reputations and environmental harm” (pg. 3). The most effective way an organization can prevent these type of catastrophic losses is to develop what Coombs (1999) calls a crisis management plan (CMP). This document should serve as an organizational blueprint on how to deal with a crisis when it occurs. It allows the organization to respond more quickly to a crisis by outlining important information such as what members of the organization should respond and the responsibilities each member has during the crisis. By making these decisions early on, an organization can respond in a unified, organized manner which is very crucial when dealing with a crisis situation.

Coombs (1999) utilizes a three-stage approach in crisis management: precrisis, crisis event and postcrisis. Each of the three stages dictates its own set of actions from the organization. For example, in the precrisis stage, an organization can prevent a crisis from happening by detecting early warning signs through what Coombs (1999) calls the substage of “signal detection.” Additionally, in the precrisis stage an organization enter “crisis prevention” in which it can

utilize issues management to “prevent an issue from maturing into a crisis,” risk aversion to “eliminate or lower risk levels,” or relationship building to “cultivate positive relationships with the organization’s key stakeholders” (pg. 15). Finally, if the organization cannot prevent the crisis from occurring, they should prepare for its arrival. Coombs (1999) notes that crisis preparation “typically involves identifying crisis vulnerabilities, creating crisis teams, selecting spokespersons, drafting CMPs, developing crisis portfolios, and structuring the crisis communication system” (pg. 15). Once the crisis event occurs, Coombs (1999) suggests that an organization follow its CMP and more importantly, keep an open line of communication with its stakeholders. He identifies three substages of the crisis event as crisis recognition, crisis containment and business resumption. Once the crisis is resolved, the organization enters the postcrisis stage in which they must decide which actions to take on the behalf of its stakeholders. Coombs (1999) notes that it’s important to give the stakeholders a good impression of the organization’s crisis management efforts and take steps to ensure the organization is better prepared for the next crisis.

Coombs (1999) and other public relations researchers developed a list of typical major crises organizations often face. They include: natural disasters, malevolence, technical breakdowns, human breakdowns, challenges, megadamage, organizational misdeeds, workplace violence and rumors. Table 2.1 explains each of these crises utilizing the definitions found in Coombs’ *Ongoing Crisis Communications*.

Table 2-1. Crisis types and definitions

Natural Disasters	When an organization is damaged as a result of weather or “acts of God.”
Malevolence	When some outside actor or opponent employs extreme tactics to express anger toward the organization or to force the organization to change.
Technical breakdowns	When the technology used or supplied by the organization fails or breaks down.
Human breakdowns	When human error causes disruptions.
Challenges	When the organization is confronted by discontented stakeholders. The stakeholders challenge the organization because they believe it to be operating in an inappropriate manner.
Megadamage	When an accident creates significant environmental damage.
Organizational misdeeds	When management takes actions it knows will harm or place stakeholders at risk for harm without adequate precautions.
Workplace violence	When an employee or former employee commits violence against other employees on organizational grounds.
Rumors	When false information is spread about an organization or its products.

Researchers have defined several crisis communication strategies that accompany the different types of crises. Coombs plotted these points along a continuum (Figure 2-1) with defensive and accommodative end points. He notes that “Rumors, malevolence, and natural disasters are at the low end of the organizational responsibility continuum. Rumors are untruths, so there is no real crisis if stakeholders reject the rumors” (pg. 127). What if stakeholders do not completely reject the rumors?

Rumors require crisis managers to use the denial or attack accuser strategies. Denial is used when there is no clear accuser. Attack-the-accuser works when the crisis offers a clear accuser who is providing inaccurate information (pg. 128).

On the other side of the spectrum are organizational misdeeds and accidents. These crises require definite response from the organization, whether it be a full apology or some other corrective action. Natural disaster and malevolence crises are in the middle of the continuum, allowing an organization a choice of response including excuse, justification and ingratiation. Coombs (1999)

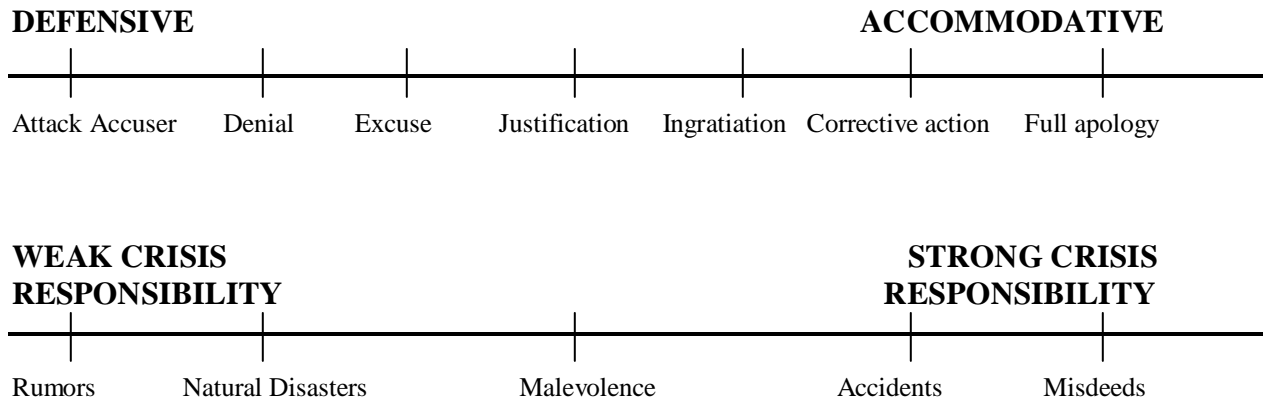


Figure 2-1. Matching crises and communications strategies.

notes that defensive strategies “claim that there is no crisis or try to deny responsibility for the crisis” (pg. 122). He says that an organization is often most concerned with its own reputation when utilizing a defensive strategy. However, an accommodative strategy “accepts responsibility for or takes remedial action to correct the crisis” (pg. 122). Here the organization is most concerned in helping its stakeholders or victims affected by the crisis, regardless of any reputational or financial damage it might suffer. These crisis communications strategies are good guidelines for an organization to use when developing a CMP. However, each strategy should be carefully reevaluated as all crises are unique and require one if not several actions from the effected organization. Coombs (1999) explains how an organization’s interaction with stakeholders during a crisis is a key factor in choosing an appropriate crisis strategy. Additionally, an organization’s institutional memory, or how an organization has responded to crisis in the past, can affect future crisis management planning.

### **Crisis Rumor Control**

In *Crisis Communications*, Fearn-Banks (1996) defines a crisis as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name” (pg. 1). Like Coombs, Fearn-Banks (1996) also

developed a list of typical crises including: acquisition, bankruptcy, boycott, bribery, contamination, fatality, fire, kidnapping, lawsuits, merger, murder, product failure, sexual discrimination, terrorism and many others. Fearn-Banks (1996) also recommends an organization have a CMP or crisis communications plan (CCP). One of the first steps an organization must take before developing an effective CMP is to determine which particular crises they are most likely to face. She says that “crisis communications plans should be developed for the crises believed to be both most probable and most devastating” (pg. 20).

Fearn-Banks (1996) developed five stages of a crisis including detection, prevention/preparation, containment, recovery and learning. In the detection phase, an organization should notice warning signs in the hopes of preventing the crisis from occurring. If there are no discernible warning signs, an organization can also practice good public relations in order to prevent crises. Fearn-Banks (1996) claims that:

Continuous, ongoing public relations programs and regular two-way communications build relationships with key publics and thereby prevent crises, lessen the blows of crises, or limit the duration of crises (pg. 5).

When a crisis is unavoidable, an organization should rely on its CMP to organize its response because it “provides a functioning collective brain for all persons involved in a crisis, persons who may not operate at normal capacity due to the shock or emotions of the crisis event” (pg. 7). During the containment phase, an organization is attempting to “limit the duration of the crisis or keep it from spreading to other areas affecting the organization” (pg. 7). The recovery and learning phases go hand in hand and mark the end of the crisis. During recovery, an organization works to restore business and the favor of its stakeholders. Throughout this process, the organization should also be learning from its strengths and weaknesses during the crisis. This is a good opportunity to fine tune the CMP and better prepare for future crisis situations.



Fearn-Banks (1996) explores what causes crises and thoroughly investigates rumor. She asserts that anyone or any organization can fall victim to a rumor and it can cause “the longest and most damaging of crises” (pg. 34). Rumors often have no facts behind them and don’t come from a credible source. Fearn-Banks (1996) brings up an important saying about rumors that people often remember and give credence to: “There’s a ring of truth in every rumor” (pg. 35). Whether or not a rumor is completely false, partly false or true, most people often believe that there is indeed a bit of truth in any rumor. Fearn-Banks (1996) also notes that identifying the original source of a rumor can be incredibly difficult because every person that passes the rumor on can change it and then become a source themselves. She says rumors spread because “people believe they are news, news with some emotional relationship to their lives” (pg. 36). Additionally, people who “distrust the ‘establishment’—organizations, governments and big corporations” are more likely to believe and spread rumors (pg. 37).

Fearn-Banks (1996) classifies rumors into several types including intentional rumor, premature-fact rumor, malicious rumor, outrageous rumor, nearly true rumor and birthday rumor. The intentional rumor is started by a person or organization in order to achieve a particular goal whether it be increased business or reputation. A premature-fact rumor “is an early version of what will eventually be true” like an eminent business closing or merger (pg. 37). If a business wants to damage a competitor’s company, they could start a malicious rumor. An outrageous rumor sounds so ridiculous that people often believe it because they can’t imagine that someone would make it up. A nearly true rumor, often one of the most dangerous types, contains some elements of truth that people often attach credibility to, allowing them to better accept the complete rumor as truth. The birthday rumor is repeated time and time again, making it “as

regular as birthdays” (pg. 38). Like the different types of crises, rumor types sometimes overlap, allowing a rumor to be in more than one category at a time.

Lastly, Fearn-Banks (1996) suggests some common communications strategies for dealing with a negative rumor already in circulation (pg. 39). These include the following:

- Disseminate to publics complete, accurate information that is contradictory to the message of the rumor. Your information should imply strongly that the rumor is untrue.
- Analyze the rumor for its probable origin and possible impact.
- Do nothing. When choosing this strategy, be careful that, if the rumor persists, it will not be damaging.
- Deny the rumor publicly and vehemently. Prove it has no basis in truth.
- Get an outside expert on the subject to discredit the rumor.
- Buy ads in high-circulation publications.

Fearn-Banks (1996) is careful to note that “some of the suggestions are conflicting because there are various schools of thought on how to handle the problem” (pg. 38). Regardless of what strategy an organization chooses to fight a rumor, it must stand next to its decision and appear unified in the media.

An additional view on rumor by Kimmel (2004) establishes three perspectives explaining why rumors begin and spread. The first is the functional approach which has roots in sociology and social psychology. This perspective suggests that “rumors arise out of logical reasoning or popular imagination to restore a sense of stability when events turn unpredictable and are psychologically threatening” (pg. 51). The psychoanalytic approach, the second perspective, defines rumors as “psychological defense mechanisms or fantasies produced by the unconscious mind that assist in integrating the individual within the group, at the same time allowing one to maintain a unique personality” (pg. 52). Lastly, the marketing approach explores how consumer and marketplace behavior can influence rumor creation and propagation. When dealing with

consumer product rumors, this perspective suggests to utilize “attribution theory, information processing theory, and theories of information diffusion and word-of-mouth communication” (pg. 55). The differences between these three perspectives underscore the complexity and unique communications challenges of a rumor.

In discussing strategies for neutralizing rumors, Kimmel (2004) suggests several tactics that coincide with rumor characteristics. When a rumor is true, possible actions include confirmation, product recall or modification and a public relations campaign. However, when a rumor is false, an organization faces more strategic challenges than if it were true. Tactics for a false rumor include refutation, positive advertising, dissemination of accurate information and legal action. Beyond these choices, an organization must determine if the rumor is credible or not. When an organization faces a credible rumor that is false, it could issue denials or threaten lawsuits. But if the false rumor is not credible, the organization could launch an information campaign, threaten lawsuits, reassociate with the rumor or disassociate with the rumor.

### **Research Questions**

After reviewing literature focusing on framing theory (Entman, 1993; Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Miller & Reichert, 2001; Hallahan, 1999) and crisis communications theory (Coombs, 1999; Fearn-Banks, 1996; Kimmel, 2004), the following research questions were developed and regard to Opus Dei’s public relations campaign against *The Da Vinci Code*.

RQ1: How did Opus Dei structure its informational campaign against *The Da Vinci Code*?

RQ2: Where does crisis communications theory apply to Opus Dei’s public relations campaign?

RQ3: How did broadcast news media frame Opus Dei’s crisis with *The Da Vinci Code*?

RQ4: How much Opus Dei messaging was present in broadcast news media coverage?

RQ5: What were the strengths and weaknesses of Opus Dei’s public relations campaign?

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Based on the research questions and literature review, this study utilized a qualitative approach combining textual analysis and in-depth interviews in order to fully analyze Opus Dei's public relations campaign against *The Da Vinci Code*. Textual analysis was used in order to understand how Opus Dei was portrayed in the media and how the organization responded to *The Da Vinci Code* crisis through its public relations goals, strategies and tactics. This analysis utilized a wide array of evidence from several sources including print and broadcast news media coverage, Opus Dei's Web site and Opus Dei's communications documents. Once these sources were analyzed, a central communications plan was outlined that identified Opus Dei's primary strategies, goals and tactics for its informational campaign against *The Da Vinci Code*.

Additionally, a timeline signifying major events during the three-year crisis between Opus Dei and *The Da Vinci Code* was constructed. To support the analysis, the researcher chose three widely accepted crisis communications texts to aid in describing and understanding the decision-making process Opus Dei applied in this situation. Opus Dei's goals, strategies and tactics were further analyzed utilizing the crisis communications literature in order to determine Opus Dei's crisis management strategy. Finally, in-depth interviews with two members of Opus Dei communications staff provided the organization's perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of Opus Dei's informational campaign.

### **Textual Analysis**

A textual analysis was used on all media materials (web, print and broadcast) to determine the frames broadcast news media employed in its coverage of Opus Dei and *The Da Vinci Code* and utilized framing theory as outlined in the literature review. Miller and Reichert (2001)

established that frames found within media coverage can influence the reader's perception of a particular conflict or issue.

In the beginning stages of this textual analysis of broadcast news media, the researcher first read through the entire sample in order to establish the coding sheet and code book. According to Hall (1975), "this process of soaking oneself to define the categories and build a code" is a common methodology for textual analysis (pg. 1). In this sense, the researcher "works back through the narrative elements of form, rhetoric, and style to uncover the underlying social and historical processes and the metalanguage that guided its production" (Roy, 1995, pg. 318). Using this method, the researcher also identified the themes exposed in the textual analysis of Opus Dei's crisis with *The Da Vinci Code* and paid special attention to the "visual, verbal, rhetorical, and presentational codes that media employ to make a story eventful" (Roy, 1995, pg. 318). This particular method of textual analysis is useful in understanding "how stereotypical depictions are invoked through the language and conventions of the press" (Lule, 1995, pg. 177).

### **Media Sample**

Several sources concerning Opus Dei's crisis with *The Da Vinci Code* were used in the textual analysis. Opus Dei's Web site, [www.opusdei.org](http://www.opusdei.org), provided information from the perspective of the organization. A search of "Da Vinci Code" on the site yielded 47 results that include press statements, interviews, arguments, and media coverage. All of these results provided important information about the campaign's strategies, goals and tactics. Opus Dei's Web site also was the major source for the timeline. One of the most important documents from Opus Dei's Web site was "Three Years with *The Da Vinci Code*" which was available on the Web page and for download as a Microsoft Word document. This document (Appendix A) was directly from Opus Dei's Department of Communications and outlined their public relations strategy in eight pages. The plan was presented to the 5th Professional Seminar for Church

Communications Offices in Rome in April 2006, shortly before the release of *The Da Vinci Code* major motion picture. In this plan, Opus Dei communications staff provided a brief background of the crisis, gave a rough chronology of events, diagnosed the situation, stated objectives, outlined some of its strategies, and offered some points of evaluation.

Print media coverage also supported the information found in Opus Dei's communications plan and Web site. In its April 24, 2006 edition, *Time* magazine featured a weeping figure of Jesus Christ on its cover with the title "The Opus Dei Code." This issue featured several stories about Opus Dei including an interview with Juan Manuel Mora, director of Opus Dei's communications department in Rome. In the interview, Mora named Opus Dei's public relations campaign "Operation Lemonade" and referred to the communications document outlined above. *Time* is historically known for its in-depth coverage of religion and talented religion writers. "At *Time*, in particular, all coverage, including that of religion, still bears traces of the predestination and manifest destiny predilections of its founder, Henry Luce, who was the son of Presbyterian missionaries" (Buddenbaum, 1998, pg. 97). The search terms "Opus Dei" and "Da Vinci Code" were utilized with the Lexis-Nexis online database to obtain other sources of print media coverage including elite sources (sources with high circulation and reputation) *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post* and *The Guardian*.

Through an in-depth investigation of Opus Dei's crisis with *The Da Vinci Code*, it was determined that broadcast news media coverage would produce a rich sample for this thematic analysis. The research sample was collected via the Lexis-Nexis online database, a trusted resource for broadcast media transcripts, using the transcript as the unit of analysis. The sample was created by using the search term "Opus Dei" in the body text, which allowed any story mentioning Opus Dei to be included. The sampling frame included six major broadcast news

media outlets: ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, FOX and MSNBC. MSNBC was included because of Chris Matthews' in-depth coverage of the Opus Dei and *The Da Vinci Code* situation as identified in the case analysis research. The timeline selected for the sample begins March 11, 2003, one week before *The Da Vinci Code* book release, and continues until August 19, 2006, three months following the release of *The Da Vinci Code* major motion picture. An additional three months were added to the timeline to allow residual coverage of the movie and Opus Dei to be included in the overall analysis.

The initial search of "Opus Dei" coverage from March 11, 2003 to August 19, 2006 from ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, FOX and MSNBC yielded 166 results. Each of these results were divided into four categories that determined whether they would be used in the final sample. The researcher determined the classifications of "story," "promo/short mention," "repeat," and "not relevant" after reading each transcript in the sample. All articles that featured relevant information about Opus Dei and *The Da Vinci Code* crisis at length were classified as stories and used in the final sample. Articles that only briefly mentioned Opus Dei in a sentence or in a promotion for a future story were classified as promo/short mention. Stories that were repeated in more than one broadcast were classified as repeats and stories that did not address the topic of Opus Dei and *The Da Vinci Code* in any way were labeled as not relevant. After this analysis of the initial sample, 40 transcripts were stories, 55 were promo/short mention, 41 were repeats and 30 were not relevant (for details by source, see Chapter 4).

### **Thematic Analysis**

A thematic analysis sheet and book (Appendix B & C) were developed for the analysis of broadcast news media coverage after the preliminary reading of the sample. Variables considered in the analysis included:

- Time, date, and name of television show

- Sources quoted from Opus Dei, the Christian Church, and outside experts
- Presence of a scene depiction from *The Da Vinci Code* book or movie
- Presence of key Opus Dei messaging
- Key words and phrases describing Opus Dei and *The Da Vinci Code*
- The presence of common Opus Dei controversies
- The presence of primary and secondary frames

The indicators for the presence of key Opus Dei messaging were determined from the analysis of the crisis and the researcher's preliminary readings on Opus Dei and its crisis with *The Da Vinci Code*. These key messages were also found in the organization's communications plan outline (Appendix A). Examples of key Opus Dei messaging include: converting lemons into lemonade, ordinary Catholics, openness and transparency, taking advantage of opportunity as teaching moment and the real Silas. Determining Opus Dei's common controversies was accomplished using a similar method. Based on readings of Opus Dei's organizational materials and various texts about the religious group including Allen's (2005) work, several Opus controversies including gruesome corporal mortification, questionable recruiting techniques and cult-like behavior were identified. The three central frames of "fact vs. fiction," "war on Christianity," and "opportunity" were established through the preliminary reading of the broadcast news media sample. Once these coding categories were defined, the researcher created the thematic analysis sheet and book (Appendix B & C).

The "levels of agreement among independent coders who code the same content using the same coding instrument" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006), is crucial when conducting a textual analysis study. A lack of agreement can result in recording incorrect data, missing important details and making incorrect assumptions about the sample. Two researchers working through the process to obtain a level of agreement coded a 10% subset of the sample that was randomly selected. The first coder was the principal researcher for this study. The second coder was a graduate student in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida.



A training session was held for the second coder to familiarize them with the thematic analysis sheet and book and answer any questions about the process. The results of the two coders were analyzed using Holsti's (1969) formula for determining the reliability of nominal data. The inter-coder reliability coefficients of the two content analyses were calculated to be .94.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

As the final qualitative method of research, this study utilized two in-depth interviews to gain Opus Dei's perspective on their crisis with *The Da Vinci Code*. In *Strategic Public Relations Management*, Austin and Pinkleton (2000) define in-depth interviewing as "an open-ended interview technique in which respondents are encouraged to discuss an issue or problem, or answer a question, in great length and in great detail" (pg. 107). The main focus of the interviews was to further explore the strategies, goals, and tactics in Opus Dei's communications plan and hear first-hand accounts of how the organization managed the crisis.

Two members of Opus Dei's communications staff, Brian Finnerty and Marie T. Oates, were chosen for the interviews based on their intimate knowledge of the public relations campaign against *The Da Vinci Code*. A list of questions for each interview was developed and included questions such as "What were some major milestones in your campaign against *The Da Vinci Code*?" and "Why did Opus Dei choose to be silent in the beginning of this crisis?" However, in this type of semi-structured interview, it was important to allow the respondents the ability to "explore and elaborate about their attitudes and opinions, motivations, values, experiences, feelings, emotions, and related information" (pg. 108). The interviews were conducted in New York City, one at Opus Dei's United States Headquarters and the other at a nearby restaurant. Each interview lasted approximately two and one half hours. The researcher took detailed notes during the interview and also asked follow-up questions via email.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The findings of this analysis of Opus Dei's public relations campaign against *The Da Vinci Code* are presented by each research method utilized. The textual analysis works to develop a better understanding of the campaign and analyzes Opus Dei's goals, strategies and tactics based on crisis communications theory. The analysis of popular broadcast news outlets examines the dominant frames found within the media's coverage of *The Da Vinci Code* and Opus Dei situation and what Opus Dei messaging pervaded the coverage. In addition, the in-depth interviews with two Opus Dei communications staff explain the organization's motivations behind their public relations campaign and give valuable insight into what went wrong and right during the course of the crisis.

### **Textual Analysis**

#### **Analysis of Crisis**

*RQ1: How did Opus Dei structure its informational campaign against The Da Vinci Code?*

"We could not just sit still and wait for the flagellation of the film itself. Nobody wanted a battleground. But not just silence either," said Juan Manuel Mora, the director of Opus Dei's communications department in Rome (Biema, 2006, 54). So the organization took action and created a public relations campaign affectionately called "Operation Lemonade" after the adage, "If you're handed lemons, make lemonade," (Biema, 2006, 54). Opus Dei officials from New York, London, Paris, Madrid, Cologne, Lagos and Montreal met in Rome on January 10, 2006 to plan a communications strategy to offset negative publicity created by *The Da Vinci Code*. During Mora's interview with *Time* magazine, he outlined the approach the officials agreed upon in Rome.

1) Turn the glare of publicity into a proselytizing opportunity. 'We can either weep, or we can sing our song,' says Mora, postulating that some people, learning about the non-

fictional Opus Dei, will think, Well, it's not that bad. 2) Reach out for allies: 'This film offends all Catholics, not just Opus Dei. It says the entire church is a big lie.' 3) Engage only in measured discourse. Says Mora: 'Any aggressive tone would have played into the marketing of the film' (Biema, 2006, 54).

In this interview, Opus Dei announced its public relations goals for the campaign against *The Da Vinci Code* and focused on three core ideas:

- Make the crisis an opportunity by utilizing it as a teaching moment
- Create and sustain partnerships with internal and external stakeholders
- Respond in a peaceful manner to attacks on organization

Brian Finnerty, Opus Dei's director of U.S. media relations and former journalist with *Investor's Business Daily*, has facilitated a more open relationship between the organization and the media since 1995. As part of research phase for Operation Lemonade, Finnerty noted: "We consulted with various friends and experts in PR who were willing to help us out. They told us how to show the world that Opus Dei is about ordinary Catholics trying to get closer to God in their daily lives, and that we're happy to share that with people," (Watkins, 2006). While Opus Dei found itself in a crisis situation with *The Da Vinci Code*, they were able to research and formulate a public relations strategy to counter negative publicity while also educating others about their organization. A timeline of their three-year ordeal with *The Da Vinci Code* is presented below.

### **Strategy**

On April 27, 2006, Opus Dei's Department of Communications presented their communications strategy in a presentation titled, "Three Years with *The Da Vinci Code*" to the 5th Professional Seminar for Church Communications Offices in Rome. The speech, which can be found on Opus Dei's Web site, reveals many communication strategies chosen by the group to counter *The Da Vinci Code* controversy. They outline a chronology of the central plan beginning

Table 4-1. Major events during Opus Dei's *The Da Vinci Code* crisis

2003.01	An article appears in <i>Publisher's Weekly</i> about a forthcoming novel, <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> . Members of Opus Dei first learn of the book and their role in it.
2003.03	Doubleday releases Dan Brown's <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> where it debuted at number 1 on the <i>New York Times</i> Bestseller List.
2003.09	Opus Dei posts a statement about <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> on their Web site www.opusdei.org in response to inquiries from members and media.
2003.10	News breaks that Ron Howard and Sony Pictures Entertainment will adapt <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> into a major motion picture.
2004.01	Opus Dei writes the first of a series of three letters to Sony asking that their name not be used in the movie. Sony does not provide information to Opus Dei.
2005.11	Doubleday publishes John Allen's book titled <i>Opus Dei: An Objective Look Behind the Most Controversial Force in the Catholic Church</i> .
2005.12	In a <i>Newsweek</i> article, Ron Howard claims that the movie will stay true to the Book including its Opus Dei references.
2006.01	Members of Opus Dei's communications staff from all over the world convene in Rome to devise their public relations campaign nicknamed "Project Lemonade."
2006.01	Opus Dei's Rome Spokesperson Marc Carroggio publicly responds to Howard's <i>Newsweek</i> article in an interview with Zenit News Agency.
2006.01	Opus Dei Priest Fr. John Wauck begins a blog called <i>Da Vinci Code &amp; Opus Dei</i> that responds to rumors in the book.
2006.02	Opus Dei's Communication Office in Rome releases a press statement responding to inquiries about <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> and asking Sony to show a sign of respect.
2006.03	Opus Dei updates and reintroduces its Web site in order to handle the increased traffic due to <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> .
2006.04	The Information Office of Opus Dei in Japan sends an open letter to shareholders, directors, and employees of Sony and asking for a disclaimer to be put at the beginning of the film.
2006.04	The St. Josemaria Institute, an organization promoting the teaching of Opus Dei's founder Josemaria Escrivá, releases a documentary called <i>Passionately Loving the World: Ordinary Americans Living the Spirituality of St. Josemaria</i> .
2006.05	Doubleday releases a new edition of <i>The Way</i> , a collection of points of prayer from Opus Dei's founder Josemaria Escrivá. The book was first published in 1934.
2006.05	<i>The Da Vinci Code</i> movie is released worldwide on May 19.
2006.07	Salt + Light Television, a Canadian Catholic television network, releases a documentary called <i>Opus Dei: Decoding God's Work</i> countering the rumors from <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> and presenting an in-depth look at the organization.

with the release of *The Da Vinci Code* novel in 2003 to the May 2006 release of the motion picture. The religious organization defined their core strategy as follows:

To implement a communications plan that would be worldwide in its scope, Christian in its content and positive in its tone, in order to neutralise the negative effects. Of the three possibilities (the way of silence, the way of the Law, the way of communication) the third

was chosen. The response should always be well-mannered and friendly. Therefore style and language were not secondary matters (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006).

Opus Dei's two principle objectives guided the plan's emphasis on truth and transparency.

“There was to be an information effort to show that the real Opus Dei had nothing in common with the Opus Dei presented in the book: no monks, no murders, no masochism, no misogyny” (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006). The other objective centered on attempting an open dialogue with Sony, asking them “to avoid giving offense to Christians, by a free decision, not through pressure or threats” (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006).

Throughout Opus Dei's campaign outline, the idea of transparent, open communication drives each decision and overall messaging. “The decision to communicate our point of view openly and positively, in a proactive way, has generated a wonderful time to talk about Christianity, the Catholic Church and the little part of the Catholic Church that is Opus Dei (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006). Opus Dei decided to stop at nothing to show the world that they are not the power-hungry, controlling organization of myth, but rather a humble Catholic group furthering true Christian values and faith. By focusing on an informational campaign like instead of a public attack, Opus Dei took advantage of a golden opportunity to educate an international mass audience on what their organization really was and how it was the opposite of its portrayal in *The Da Vinci Code*.

### **Tactics**

Perhaps one of Opus Dei's first steps towards implementation was the revamping of its communications staff. The group hired “a telegenic new spokesperson” named Terri Carron to not only aid Finnerty by fielding media inquiries, but also appear in television interviews with major networks like ABC and CBS (Vargas, 2006). In an interview with Diane Sawyer, Carron shared her feelings about *The Code* uproar.



Figure 4-1. Opus Dei’s Web site page about *The Da Vinci Code*

Well, I don't hate *The Da Vinci Code*. It's just that, you know, obviously I think you'd be very hard to find many people in Opus Dei who have actually read it. But the reaction to the fact that it's out there is negative, you know, for many reasons (Sawyer, 2006).

Maybe not the most eloquent, but Carron does manage to further the strategy’s plan of “measured discourse” by not taking an aggressive tone.

Opus Dei also recognized the importance of a strong Internet presence. On March 22, 2006, they introduced a completely revamped organizational Web site, opusdei.org, offering it in 22 different languages (Figure 4-1). “*The Da Vinci Code* has definitely increased the number of visitors to our website. In 2005, we had 15 million page hits, from 3 million different visitors. Just on the U.S. version of the site, we have had a million visitors to our page about *The Da Vinci Code*” (opusdei.org). In addition to a new design and site structure, Opus Dei also developed a “Press Room” section that lists contact information for their worldwide press offices



Figure 4-2. Blog of Opus Dei Priest Fr. John Wauck

and offers “backgrounders, press releases and audiovisual materials” and opportunities to arrange Opus Dei presentations at parishes, clubs and associations (opusdei.org). Not only does the site look extremely professional, but it’s also accomplishing an important goal in creating a good impression in the minds of casual Web surfers driven to site because of *The Da Vinci Code*.

Looking beyond their own Web site, Opus Dei has also made other allies in the online world. The group worked together with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to create a new Web site “to refute the book’s claims about the divinity and marriage of Jesus” (Dooley, 2006). Aptly named [jesusdecoded.com](http://jesusdecoded.com), the site looks a bit like Sony’s official site for the movie with its Flash-enabled display and somber music playing softly in the background. In addition to that project, Opus Dei is promoting a blog by a member priest in Rome called [davincicode-opusdei.com](http://davincicode-opusdei.com) (Figure 4-2). Oddly enough, the site’s owner Fr. John Paul Wauck is actually the brother-in-law of ex-FBI agent Robert Hanssen.

Bonnie's youngest brother, John Paul, has long been one of the family's more outspoken members. Wauck relatives joke that he applied for Harvard several times before finally being admitted. Why he chose such a liberal bastion of learning to matriculate is puzzling, since his first job after graduating from Harvard in 1985 was to edit the antiabortion magazine *Human Life Review* (Havill, 2001, 44).

Needless to say that Wauck makes no mention of his connection to Hanssen on his blog, but does corroborate the information about Harvard and *Human Life Review*. As evidenced in the textual analysis of broadcast news media, Fr. Wauck received a lot of media attention and gave several interviews to major outlets including ABC and CBS about his views on *The Da Vinci Code* crisis. He also showed a sense of humor in his interviews and was quoted in three different ABC stories as saying, "If you're looking for facts, you'd be better off watching Monty Python and the Holy Grail," which refers to the lack of concrete historical evidence presented in *The Da Vinci Code*.

Moving into the medium of print, Opus Dei released a new edition of St. Josemaria Escrivá's *The Way*, a collection of points of prayer by its founder, which was published 10 days before *The Da Vinci Code*'s May 19th release. Ironically, the book was from Doubleday (a subsidiary of Random House), the same publisher that put *The Da Vinci Code* into print. This effort attempted to reach the millions of readers of *The Da Vinci Code* by offering them one of Opus Dei's most treasured and beloved texts. The group also produced a pamphlet entitled "Seeking Holiness in Daily Life" which they placed in a box (Figure 4-3) at the front door of their New York headquarters under a sign addressed to "Fans of *The Da Vinci Code*" (Eisenberg, 2006). "The box cost \$10, but pictures of it have been reproduced in more than 100 newspapers and filmed by film crews from around the world" (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006). Opus Dei was quite pleased with the results of its "low-cost information resource."





Figure 4-3. Opus Dei's brochure box for fans of *The Da Vinci Code*

Opus Dei did much to utilize TV airwaves as a “teachable moment” (Eisenberg, 2006). Rev. Michael Barrett, an Opus Dei priest in Houston, “is one of a corps dispatched onto television and radio airwaves as Opus Dei tests the adage that there is no such thing as bad publicity,” (Dooley, 2006). He along with others appeared on networks like CNN, ABC, CBS and MSNBC to defend the organization against the claims made in *The Da Vinci Code*. The textual analysis results of this study also show how often these Opus Dei sources appeared in broadcast news coverage (Figure 4-7).

On April 19, 2006, one month before the film's release, Opus Dei released a short 28-minute film about their organization to a packed audience in New York City. The group said, “this video is a way to show how Saint Josemaría and Opus Dei have had a positive effect on the lives of thousands of people,” (opusdei.org). The DVD can be ordered at no charge at the Web site [stjosemaria.org](http://stjosemaria.org). In addition to an organizational video, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops who sponsored [jesusdecoded.com](http://jesusdecoded.com) released an hour-long TV documentary in May, “timed to coincide with the box office release of the "Code," refuting some of its more

sensational assertions, such as the idea that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and sired a line of progeny,” (Eisenberg, 2006).

Shot on location in Israel, Turkey, and Italy, and making use of an international group of scholars versed in art, history, and Scripture, *Jesus Decoded* offers a solid Catholic response to “Da Vinci Code believers,” concentrating especially on the first three centuries of the development of the Church. The documentary will be distributed to NBC TV stations for broadcast the weekend of May 20 and it will be available to purchase on DVD and video at the same time (jesusdecoded.com).

By making a union with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Opus Dei was able to benefit from a professional Web site and full-length documentary that strengthened its position against *The Da Vinci Code*.

As Opus Dei’s Web site states, “The publicity surrounding the book [*The Da Vinci Code*] and the film provide a good opportunity to explain what the Church as it truly is,” (opusdei.org). Opus Dei took advantage of that publicity by creating their own public relations whirlwind by employing key messages in electronic media, print and television. In addition to free publicity, Opus Dei also made an opportunity out of the controversy by telling the world about its mission and core principles. One article noted, “It may be one of those odd twists of modern publicity that *The Da Vinci Code* could end up bringing new members to Opus Dei. At least, we were told more than once, it has people asking questions,” (McFadden, 2006). Opus Dei priest Michael Barrett also said, “In the past, for all the talking we did, nobody listened. *The Da Vinci Code* all of a sudden made us famous, not in a great way. But it meant that we had to start talking and now people listened,” (Dooley, 2006). The *Time* article also pointed out that the movie could cause a spike in Opus Dei’s membership.

The movie will not deter Opus’ usual constituency—conservative Catholics do not look to Ron Howard for guidance. But by forcing Opus into greater transparency, the film could aid it: if the organization is as harmless and “mature” as Bohlin contends, then such exposure could bring in a bumper crop of devotees (Biema, 2006, 63).

Coupled with their concise and directed communications plan, Opus Dei can most likely expect that outcome in their membership.

Opus Dei's redesigned Web site, new blog, DVD, and re-release of *The Way* were all tactics to attract news attention to the organization's activities and away from *The Da Vinci Code* controversy. In the communications plan outline, Opus Dei notes that they "put greater effort into the diffusion of different news items to help show the real Church, the real Opus Dei. It seemed to us that this was a service to help those who were preparing a story or report about the Church and Opus Dei" (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006). Opus Dei manufactured and promoted two smaller news stories that emphasized the humanity and transparency of the organization. The "Fans of *The Da Vinci Code*" brochure box they placed outside their New York Headquarters not only drew considerable media attention, but also showed Opus Dei as an organization willing to open its front doors and share its message to anyone interested. They allowed reporters access to The Murray Hill Place Building in New York City and "journalists joke that they have not found the 'torture chambers' mentioned in the book" (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006). This image directly opposes Opus Dei's reputation as an inaccessible, secretive religious sect.

Opus Dei also found a light-hearted way to counter the negative image of Brown's fanatical character Silas. The organization actually located an ordinary, spiritually devoted man named Silas within its membership and profiled him and his family on its Web site and in the media. "Silas Agbim is not a murderous albino monk, but a stockbroker from Biafra (Nigeria) who lives in Brooklyn with his wife Ngozi" (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006). The press quickly picked up on the story, reporting it in *The New York Times*, *Time*, CNN, CBS, ABC, and

international media. Respected Opus Dei researcher John Allen summed up the organization's recent communications efforts well in saying:

In terms of the way they now package themselves, [Opus Dei] has become a very professionally run operation. It's evident that the media is very important to them and they see the movie as the next big event. They're currently trying to get on top of it. The trick for Opus Dei, of course, is to walk a fine line - projecting a positive image without promoting the film (Watkins, 2006).

### **Relation to crisis theory**

*RQ2: Where does crisis communications theory apply to Opus Dei's public relations campaign?*

Opus Dei has referred to its situation with *The Da Vinci Code* as "a case of a communications crisis, although a particular kind of crisis" (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006). So what type of crisis did Opus Dei believe they were dealing with? As mentioned in the literature review, Coombs (1999) and other public relations researchers created a list of typical crises that include: natural disasters, malevolence, technical breakdowns, human breakdowns, challenges, megadamage, organizational misdeeds, workplace violence and rumors. Of particular importance to the Opus Dei case is the rumor classification defined as: "when false information is spread about an organization or its products. The false information hurts the organization's reputation by putting the organization in an unfavorable light" (pg. 61). Opus Dei's already unstable reputation was threatened by the rumors purported in *The Da Vinci Code*, a fiction novel many Christians and non-Christians accepted as truth.

### **Phase A the inactive phase**

To effectively deal with any crisis, an organization needs to participate in crisis management and develop a crisis management plan (CMP) (Coombs, 1999). Whether Opus Dei had a CMP in place before *The Da Vinci Code* crisis is unclear, but their actions immediately following the crisis indicate that they solidified a concrete plan during their communications

meeting in Rome. Opus Dei decided upon “promoting a kind of response before its time. In other words, instead of avoiding crisis we have tried to bring it forward, to anticipate it” (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006). When *The Da Vinci Code* hit bookstores in 2003, Opus Dei was unaware of its existence until only weeks before its release. Opus Dei’s initial strategy of silence towards the novel was perhaps due to lack of preparedness and expert communications consultation. They underestimated the book’s selling power and hold the story would have on its millions of readers.

In addition, since Opus Dei is an organization within the Catholic Church, they followed the actions and Church’s initial reaction to *The Da Vinci Code*—silence. Opus Dei called this period Phase A in its communications plan. A more in-depth explanation as to why Opus Dei chose this initial strategy is found in the “In-Depth Interviews” section. Coombs (1999) notes that “The use of silence reflects uncertainty and passivity by the organization. Passiveness is the exact opposite perception an organization should be attempting to create” (pg. 115). Proper preparation for a crisis situation involves “diagnosing crisis vulnerabilities, selecting and training the crisis management team and spokespersons, creating the crisis portfolio, and refining the crisis communication system” (pg. 4).

However, Opus Dei needed to consider its relationship with its primary stakeholder, the Catholic Church, in all of its crisis strategies. Coombs (1999) underlines the importance of building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders and points out that “failure to maintain a continuing interaction with a primary stakeholder could result in the failure of the organization” (pg. 20). Like any other large company, the Catholic Church has what Coombs (1999) calls an “institutional memory,” or how an organization has responded in the past to crises. Traditionally, the Catholic Church and other religious organizations do not employ an

aggressive approach to crisis situations. An example of this strategy can be seen in the recent Catholic priest abuse scandals in Boston. In *Silencing the Lambs: The Catholic Church's Response to the 2002 Sexual Abuse Scandal*, Dixon (2004) argues that religious organizations face unique challenges in crisis situations.

However, an inherent bias toward the secular in these analyses ignores the unique constraints and objectives of an ecclesiastical organization's response to crisis, which seldom considers fiduciary objectives as the primary motive for response. Moreover, while the crisis of secular organizations may affect a large number of constituencies' lives, the range of impact is negligible when compared to the reach of the denominational influence of the Catholic Church (pg. 65).

While Opus Dei is an independent organization within the Catholic Church, it still maintains a vital relationship with the Church and is thereby influenced by the institution's history and expectations.

### **Phase B the active phase**

When word of a major motion picture adaptation of *The Da Vinci Code* reached Opus Dei, they adopted a completely different crisis communications strategy from their earlier approach.

The film was a future event, which we learned about when it was publicized that Sony Pictures had bought the rights of the novel. Therefore we could be proactive; we did not wish to wait passively, and we decided to take the initiative (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006).

Opus Dei realized that a quick response was now necessary in order to successfully create a strong foundation for effective crisis management and "to get the organization's definition of the crisis—its side of the story—into the media and out to the stakeholders" (Coombs, 1999, 115). Kimmel (2004) also suggests that an organization utilize an informational campaign when facing a false rumor that lacks credibility. Opus Dei named this period of its communications campaign Phase B.

Coombs (1999) establishes that "believability is essential" when dealing with rumors. Opus Dei's history with the media and rumors about its organizational activities as outlined

earlier did not set a good precedent for *The Da Vinci Code* crisis. Critics of the Catholic group were more susceptible to believe the claims set forth in the novel because of the organization's checkered past. Coombs (1999) explains why an organization's credibility is vital when dealing with a rumor crisis.

Defusing a rumor requires that the organization be perceived as a credible channel of information—the stakeholders must believe the organization is a source of accurate information. The organization must be more credible than the rumor (pg. 49).

However, Opus Dei's credibility might have not been the only factor working against them. Fearn-Banks (1996) notes that “rumors are also spread because people distrust the ‘establishment’—organizations, governments, and big corporations” (pg. 37). Perhaps our culture's current dissatisfaction with religion and the Catholic Church's recent priest abuse scandals have added to the overall level of distrust and made this particular crisis even more difficult to manage.

Fearn-Banks (1996) outlines several different types of rumors including: intentional rumor, premature-fact rumor, malicious rumor, outrageous rumor, nearly true rumor and birthday rumor. Of all the types, the nearly true and birthday rumor classifications best describe Opus Dei's rumor crisis. “The nearly true rumor is so named because it is partly true. People hear it, attach credibility to a part of the story, then draw a conclusion that the rumor must be entirely true” (pg. 38). For example, the depiction of Opus Dei's practice of corporal mortification in *The Da Vinci Code* as a gruesome, bloody, incredibly painful experience is not true. However, Opus Dei does practice a much less intense form of corporal mortification—which then makes the rumor nearly true. Besides its controversial past, validity was attributed to Opus Dei's rumors through Dan Brown's opening disclaimer to *The Da Vinci Code* reminding readers of the organization's alleged misdeeds. The continued repetition and presence of allegations of Opus Dei's

brainwashing, corporal mortification and cult-like behavior have also made this a birthday rumor, named for its repeated emergence over time, as regular as birthdays (Fearn-Banks, 1996).

Once a negative rumor is circulated to stakeholders and media, there are several steps an organization should consider following in order to keep reputational damage to a minimum. Perhaps the most important piece of advice is for an organization to establish an open line of communication with its stakeholders. “Disseminate to publics complete, accurate information that is contradictory to the message of the rumor. Do not mention the rumor itself. You do not want to advance its circulation” (Fearn-Banks, 1996, 39). Kimmel (2004) also underscores the importance of providing accurate information to stakeholders when dealing with a rumor crisis. Opus Dei provided its members with a point-by-point rebuttal of *The Da Vinci Code*'s false claims in a statement on its Web site. The organization also took every available opportunity to promote their points in media discourse.

Fearn-Banks (1996) suggests to “get an outside expert on the subject to discredit the rumor” in order to be more believable (pg. 39). Established Vatican correspondent for the National Catholic Reporter and a Vatican analyst for CNN and NPR, John L. Allen, Jr. was just the expert Opus Dei needed. During *The Da Vinci Code* crisis, Allen approached Opus Dei with a proposal for a book to show the real side of Opus Dei, to which they readily agreed and supported.

“I believe their calculation was that even an objective book that gives voice to criticisms of the group would be preferable to the mythology and prejudice that so often clouds public discussion. Despite the polarizing nature of discussion about Opus Dei, I hope we can all agree that a discussion rooted in reality is more likely to be productive” (Allen, 2005, 9-11).

As evidenced in the textual analysis research, Allen's book received plenty of media coverage during Opus Dei's crisis. He participated in several interviews in which he countered rumors



about Opus Dei with research from his book. This outside expert certainly gave more credibility to Opus Dei when they needed it the most.

Almost as important as Opus Dei's relationship with its stakeholders was its relationship with the media. Coombs (1999) recommends that an organization maintain an environment of openness during its initial crisis response. "Availability to media, willingness to disclose information and honesty" are all traits of an open organization (pg. 117). In their communications plan outline, Opus Dei noted the importance of "treating the media as an ally" (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006). They called for "open conversations with journalists" and "gave priority to responding to all requests from journalists" (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006). The strategy to foster a mutually-beneficial relationship with media gave Opus Dei some control over their crisis. They were able to portray an open, positive image amongst media and effectively made them allies, not enemies. "From this position it is possible to be listened to and understood, especially by the media, which in this kind of situation are not adversaries, because they understand that the Church is not a threat but a victim" (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006).

In its overall strategy, Opus Dei chose not to attack, but rather inform. As mentioned in the literature review, Coombs (1999) developed a continuum (Figure 2-1) for matching crises and communications strategies. While the "attack-the-accuser" strategy might seem the most obvious choice for Opus Dei, they decided to respectfully refute their accuser instead. As mentioned earlier, Opus Dei's relationship with its primary stakeholder, the Catholic Church, affected its crisis strategy selection. Coombs (1999) stresses that "the information needs of the stakeholders must be met prior to the use of reputational management efforts" (pg. 128). In other words, Opus Dei needed to first consider the Catholic Church before deciding on a major communications strategy. "We have tried always to maintain a style and tone of respect. This means never

employing aggressive language, no attacks or threats, and never judging the intention of others” (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006). This Christian-like response, typical to religious organizations, to a damaging crisis put Opus Dei on the moral high ground, creating a more positive image of the group in the media and among its stakeholders.

### Analysis of Broadcast Media

For the textual analysis of broadcast news coverage, transcripts were collected over the three-year period of Opus Dei’s crisis with *The Da Vinci Code* beginning in 2003 and ending in 2006. Figure 4-4 shows the frequency of coverage over this time period. The months closest to *The Da Vinci Code* film’s release, April and May 2006, were also the months that Opus Dei experienced the most media coverage. Figure 4-5 denotes the number of stories each of the major news networks aired during this time period. CNN featured the most stories about Opus Dei and *The Da Vinci Code*. Additionally, Figure 4-6 shows a complete picture of the broadcast news media coverage in summarizing the number of promos/short mentions, repeats and stories each of the six networks aired during the crisis. CNN was also the forerunner in this categorization, while ABC and MSNBC followed.

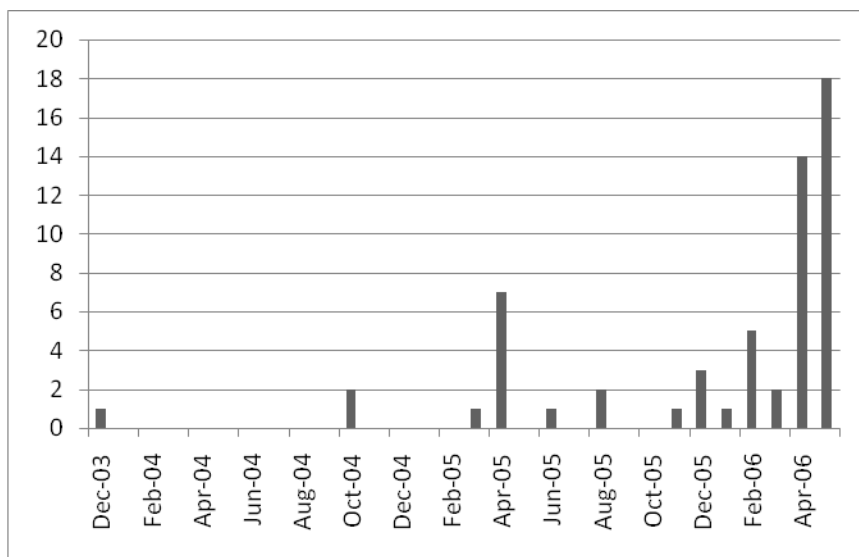


Figure 4-4. Frequency of broadcast media coverage

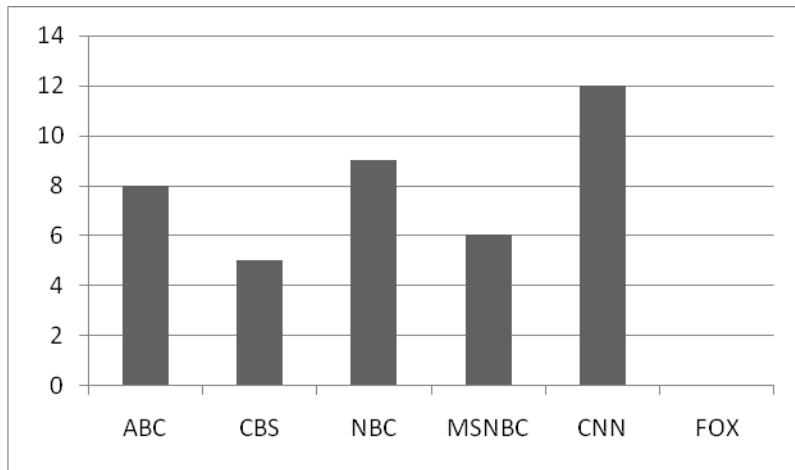


Figure 4-5. Frequency of stories by network

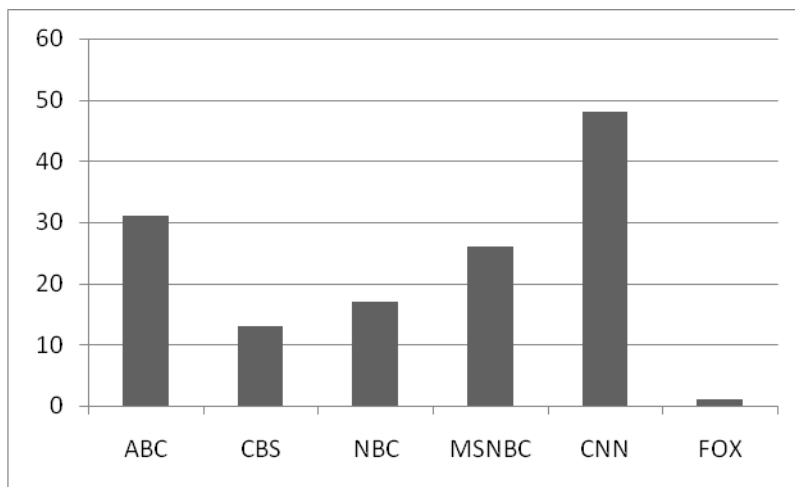


Figure 4-6. Frequency of total instances of coverage by network

### Frames

*RQ3: How did broadcast news media frame Opus Dei's crisis with The Da Vinci Code?*

After analyzing the total sample of broadcast news media coverage, three major frames were identified and later defined in the code book. Each of these three frames were found in all instances of the sample, which was comprised of stories from ABC, CBS, NBC, MSNBC and CNN. The FOX News Network did not air any relevant stories during the time period of the crisis. Table 4-2 shows how frequently each frame appeared in the sample of stories (n=40).

Table 4-2. Frequency of frames in stories

<b>Frame</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>
Fact vs. Fiction	67.5% (n=27)	20.0% (n=2)
War on Christianity	20.0% (n=8)	20.0% (n=2)
Opportunity	12.5% (n=5)	60.0% (n=6)

Table 4-3. Frequency of “fact vs. fiction” frame by network

<b>Network</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>
ABC	75.0% (n=6)	33.3% (n=1)
CBS	60.0% (n=3)	---
NBC	44.4% (n=4)	---
CNN	75.0% (n=9)	33.3% (n=1)
MSNBC	83.0% (n=5)	---

### **Fact vs. fiction frame**

The “fact vs. fiction” frame was defined by words and phrases such as fact, fiction, myth, reality, true and false. Stories employing this frame often presented the common controversies and rumors about Opus Dei and then countered them with factual information given by Opus Dei staff, members or other outside experts. This frame greatly played to Opus Dei’s informational public relations campaign because it allowed them to present their side of the story to the media while looking credible against the rumors purported in *The Da Vinci Code*. The “fact vs. fiction” frame appeared the most frequently in broadcast news media coverage and was the primary frame for 67.5% of the 40 stories featured on the five major networks. In the 10 stories that had secondary frames, the “fact vs. fiction” frame accounted for 20% of the total. When each individual network was analyzed for the presence of the “fact vs. fiction” frame (Table 4-3), it was determined that MSNBC used this frame the most often, utilizing it in 83% of its stories, while ABC and CNN employed it in 75% of its stories.

Some examples of this frame include: “We’re going to find out what’s fact and what’s fiction” and “There is the Opus Dei of myth... then there’s the Opus Dei of reality” (Hammer, 2006, May 22; Cooper, 2006, May 26). Brian Finnerty, director of communications for Opus Dei

in the United States, imparted the embodiment of the “fact vs. fiction” frame in one of his interviews with CNN.

The fictional Opus Dei is about a monk running around killing people in search of the Holy Grail. The real Opus Dei is ordinary people trying to come closer to God in their work and everyday lives (Whitfield, 2006, April 22).

This frame served as the central backdrop for Opus Dei’s conflict with *The Da Vinci Code*. The organization was plagued by nearly-true rumors that were exacerbated by this cultural phenomenon, making it difficult for anyone unfamiliar with the organization to discern the fact from the fiction.

### **War on Christianity frame**

The “war on Christianity” frame was defined by words and phrases such as call to action, boycott, trashing religion, battle, defend and culture war. Stories employing this frame often feature experts from the Christian Church and refer to the Vatican’s discontent with *The Da Vinci Code*. Another topic often covered in this frame is modern culture’s discontent with religious authority and institutions. The “war on Christianity” frame was the second most utilized frame in the broadcast news coverage and was found in 20% of the stories. As a secondary frame, it appeared in 20% of the stories. When each individual network was analyzed for the presence of the “war on Christianity” frame (Table 4-4), it was found that NBC utilized this frame the most often, while CBS, CNN, and MSNBC followed.

Table 4-4. Frequency of “war on Christianity” frame by network

<b>Network</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>
ABC	---	---
CBS	20.0% (n=1)	---
NBC	44.4% (n=4)	100.0% (n=1)
CNN	16.7% (n=2)	33.3% (n=1)
MSNBC	16.7% (n=1)	---

Some examples of this frame include: “This is really a call to action for Christians to learn more about Christianity” and “Coming up, why are so many pastors convinced that this is part of an ongoing war against Christianity?” (Sodos, 2006, February 8; Zahn, 2006; May 19). One particularly good example of this frame appeared in a CNN interview with Father David O’Connell, president of the Catholic University of America. “From my vantage point, you know, as you’re going into battle, you’ve got to know who the enemy is and you’ve got to develop a strategy to confront it” (Blitzer, 2006, May 18). While Father O’Connell was referring to *The Da Vinci Code*’s attack on Catholicism and the foundation of Christianity, this sentiment could also describe Opus Dei’s crisis and the importance of a solid communications plan. The “war on Christianity” frame looked at the larger issues of this crisis, making the Catholic Church and *The Da Vinci Code* the primary opponents in this culture war.

### **Opportunity frame**

The “opportunity” frame was defined by words and phrases such as making lemonade out of lemons, opportunity, new-found publicity, opening doors and increased interest. Stories employing this frame often focus on how the crisis is actually an opportunity for Opus Dei to spread its message and mission across the world and set false information straight. This frame might have first appeared in *Time*’s story about how Opus Dei named their communications campaign “Project Lemonade.” The “opportunity” frame appeared the least frequently in broadcast news coverage and was found in 12.5% of the stories. As a secondary frame however, the “opportunity” frame appeared in 60% of the sample. When each individual network was analyzed for the “opportunity” frame (Table 4-5), it was found that ABC utilized this frame the most often, followed by CBS, NBC and CNN.

Table 4-5. Frequency of “opportunity” frame by network

Network	Primary	Secondary
ABC	25.0% (n=2)	66.7% (n=2)
CBS	20.0% (n=1)	100.0% (n=1)
NBC	11.1% (n=1)	---
CNN	8.3% (n=1)	33.3% (n=1)
MSNBC	---	100.0% (n=2)

Some examples of this frame include: “What we are doing is taking advantage of every media opportunity that we can get to talk about what the real Opus Dei is” and “they’re trying now to make lemonade out of the lemons hurled at them by that book” (Sodos, 2006, February 8; Sawyer, 2006, April 18). A CBS story on the Early Show used the “opportunity” frame to explain how both sides of the Opus Dei vs. The Da Vinci Code crisis were benefitting from the controversy:

But the controversy over the movie has generated the kind of publicity money can’t buy. Oddly, all parties to the argument now embrace it as a way of either selling tickets or putting their viewpoint across (Phillips, 2006, May 17).

One of the biggest concerns about Opus Dei’s public relations campaign against *The Da Vinci Code* was that their communications efforts would only serve to bolster book sales and movie tickets. However, Opus Dei’s prime objective was to not urge the public to boycott the film or movie, but rather provide true and accurate information about itself through the media. As mentioned in this CBS story, an unavoidable byproduct of this crisis was that both sides received large amounts of publicity that drew more attention to each side.

### **Opus Dei Messaging**

*RQ4: How much Opus Dei messaging was present in broadcast news media coverage?*

The textual analysis of broadcast news coverage also analyzed each story’s sources and categorized them into Opus Dei representatives, Christian Church representatives, and other outside experts. Figure 4-7 depicts the number of different individuals quoted in the story

sample. It is important to note that the other outside experts category might have been larger than others due to MSNBC’s frequent use of panel discussions that feature 3-4 participants that speak on a wide variety of topics. The other outside experts category also included Opus Dei’s opposition—former members or cult experts. Figure 4-8 shows that the stories analyzed featured a higher proportion of Opus Dei members than their opposition. Even when the opposition was quoted in a story, it was almost done disparagingly. In an interview with Chris Matthews of MSNBC, former Opus Dei member Tammy DiNicola and mother Dianne DiNicola presented their take on Opus Dei as a controlling, abusive cult-like organization.

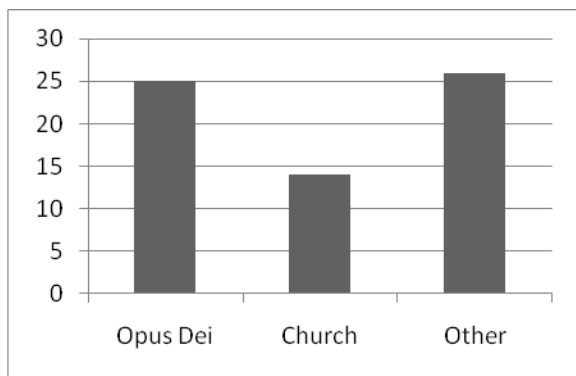


Figure 4-7. Number of individuals quoted in stories

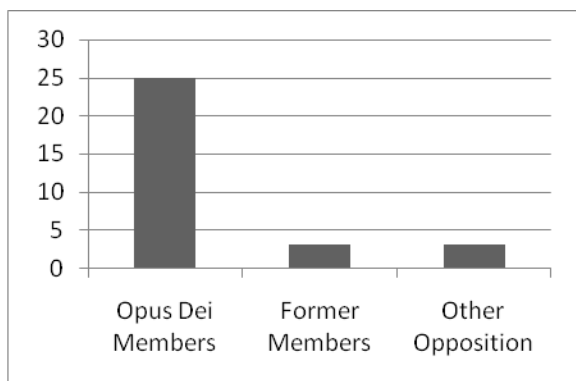


Figure 4-8. Number of Opus Dei sources vs. opposition sources



Another former member was also interviewed and gave a positive review of Opus Dei. Matthews repeatedly questioned this former member, asking if he believed the DiNicola’s accounts. “No, do you believe the DiNicola’s, both of them, Dianne and Tammy? Do you believe what they’re saying? Do you think they’re being dishonest? Do you believe that they’re giving an accurate portrayal of their experiences with Opus Dei?” (Matthews, 2006, June 5). It seemed as if Matthews, a confessed Catholic himself, was trying to urge this former member into calling out the DiNicola’s purported lies. However, it is apparent through the sources quoted in the story sample that Opus Dei had plenty of opportunities to get its message out.

The textual analysis coded for the presence of key Opus Dei messaging. As outlined earlier in the methodology, this messaging included stories such as Opus Dei’s real Silas, the open letter to Sony, ordinary Christian members, Father Wauck’s blog, etc. Opus Dei focused on these messages and stories in its informational campaign and successfully inserted them into broadcast news coverage. Table 4-6 shows how often each network featured Opus Dei messaging in its stories and the average number of messages per story. CNN featured the most messaging, while ABC and MSNBC were close in their coverage.

Table 4-6. Amount of stories featuring Opus Dei messaging

<b>Percentage of Stories with Opus Dei Messaging by Network</b>					
ABC	CBS	NBC	MSNBC	CNN	FOX
87.5%	60.0%	55.6%	83.3%	91.7%	---
<b>Average Number of Opus Dei Messages per Story by Network</b>					
ABC	CBS	NBC	MSNBC	CNN	FOX
3.5	2.3	1.4	2.2	2.5	---

Table 4-7. Amount of stories featuring and correcting Opus Dei controversies

<b>Percentage of Stories with Common Opus Dei Controversies</b>					
ABC	CBS	NBC	MSNBC	CNN	FOX
100.0%	80.0%	55.6%	100.0%	100.0%	---
<b>Percentage of Stories in which Controversies are Corrected</b>					
ABC	CBS	NBC	MSNBC	CNN	FOX
75.0%	75.0%	60.0%	83.3%	91.7%	---

The textual analysis also coded for stories featuring common Opus Dei controversies and whether or not these controversies were corrected. As outlined in the introduction, these controversies included gruesome corporal mortification, cult-like behavior, salary control, power-hungry, questionable recruiting techniques, etc. Table 4-7 shows that the majority of stories in the sample featured these controversies, with NBC having the lowest percentage. However, while these harmful rumors were repeated, the majority of all stories allowed Opus Dei members or other sources to correct the controversies, with CNN and MSNBC at the highest percentage. These statistics support the fact that Opus Dei successfully controlled the crisis in broadcast media coverage by employing key stories and messaging through its many utilized sources and by refuting commonly-held controversies about its organization.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

*RQ5: What were the strengths and weaknesses of Opus Dei's public relations campaign?*

After completing the textual analysis of web, print, and broadcast media, two in-depth interviews with Opus Dei's communications staff completed this study of Opus Dei's public relations campaign against *The Da Vinci Code*. As the director of Opus Dei's communications in the United States and a numerary member of the organization, Brian Finnerty was very much involved in Opus Dei's public relations campaign from its earliest stages. Marie T. Oates, also a numerary member of Opus Dei, provided Opus Dei members with extensive media training

during *The Da Vinci Code* crisis. She is the principal of the Boston PR Group, Inc., a public relations firm specializing in medical, educational and non-profit work in Boston and New York.

Major strengths and weaknesses of Opus Dei's public relations campaign appeared in the results from the in-depth interviews and crisis analysis research. One of the biggest weaknesses in Opus Dei's campaign was its initial response to the crisis and lack of preparedness. Brian Finnerty acknowledged the presence of two distinct phases during the course of the campaign—the initial Phase A in which Opus Dei was relatively silent, only responding to media requests and Phase B in which Opus Dei learned about *The Da Vinci Code* movie and took immediate action through coordinated communications efforts.

Finnerty noted that Opus Dei attempted to talk to other Catholic media and organizations during Phase A in an effort to “sound the alarm,” and was surprised that “Catholic leaders took a very long time to respond to the media.” Additionally, he admitted that no one at his organization anticipated the staying power of the book and initially dismissed it. However at this stage, Finnerty said that Opus Dei “wanted to avoid giving the book more publicity than it deserved” and more importantly, Opus Dei didn't want to be the story. “If other Catholic leaders would have responded earlier, that would have allowed us to have a more proactive role earlier on...but Catholic bishops don't want to be the cultural warriors in the United States.” As an organization within the Catholic Church, Opus Dei follows the lead of the Church. Finnerty established that Opus Dei would wait until it had the full support of the Catholic Church before launching a major public communications campaign. “If we had just come out blazing early on—it would have been like there's that Catholic organization trying to take on this book,” said Finnerty. Opus Dei wanted to avoid becoming the central figure of this crisis, as they believed the book was threatening to the foundations of Catholicism, not just their organization.

As mentioned earlier, Opus Dei's lack of a crisis management plan (CMP) was also a weakness during its situation with *The Da Vinci Code*. While the organization had dealt with its share of controversy in the past, it had never experienced the huge amount of publicity and attention it received from this crisis. In the in-depth interviews, Marie Oates and Brian Finnerty both confirmed that Opus Dei had no formal crisis plan in place prior to the situation with *The Da Vinci Code*. However, Opus Dei turned this potentially devastating weakness into a strength by looking internally to its membership and Catholic allies for the support it needed to carry itself through their campaign.

With 87,000 members and a direct link to one of the largest religious institutions in the world, Opus Dei certainly had an incredible number of devout allies to stand beside them during their crisis with *The Da Vinci Code*. Finnerty noted the importance of "working closely with the United Conference of Catholic Bishops" to combat the "unfair treatment of Christianity and the Catholic Church." As identified in the crisis analysis, the United Conference of Catholic Bishops created a Web site and documentary in support of Opus Dei. Opus Dei successfully mobilized their "network of volunteers around the country" to appear in the media as the real voice behind the organization. Oates confirmed that she led several media training sessions in order to prepare members for questions about the organization's beliefs and practices. She also reinforced Opus Dei's key messages that depicted the group as an ordinary, lay organization whose members look for holiness in everyday life. The textual analysis of broadcast news coverage revealed 25 different Opus Dei members and staff were quoted in major network stories. This wide representation of the organization's membership gave the organization credibility against the rumors in *The Da Vinci Code*. By rallying its members to stand up to the false portrayal of their organization, Opus Dei strengthened its relationship with its primary stakeholders. As Finnerty

explained, “Internally, it enabled people to laugh off the whole thing [the crisis]. This wasn’t going to be the tidal wave that knocked us over.”

In addition to making its internal publics partners in the fight against *The Da Vinci Code*, Opus Dei also made the media an ally. Oates and Finnerty both established Opus Dei’s strategy of being completely available to the media for any interviews or inquiries during the course of the crisis. Finnerty said that he “never refused to speak to a journalist who wanted to talk to me” and made it a priority to answer all media inquiries as soon as possible. This display of openness and accessibility directly contrasted with the organization’s image of being a secretive, manipulative cult. Additionally, he added that one of the greatest lessons he learned from the crisis was “to think in terms of the story.” Finnerty acknowledged that one of Opus Dei’s strategies was to “feed the media material and think like a reporter.” He posed the question, “How can I possibly give the media what they need and still get what I want?” Opus Dei wanted to make its dealings with the media mutually beneficial, giving them exclusive access to their headquarters and members while getting the opportunity to tell their side of the story on their own terms. Opus Dei suggested newsworthy, catchy stories to the media including their real Silas and the brochure box addressed to “The Fans of *The Da Vinci Code*.” These stories were covered in many news outlets, indicating that Opus Dei was successful in making the media its ally.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

### **Summary of Opus Dei's Campaign**

When *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown first hit bookshelves in 2003, a small, lay Catholic organization called Opus Dei had no idea what the next three years would bring. The best-selling, chart-topping fiction book cast Opus Dei as the central villain in its murder mystery that called the foundations of Christianity into question. Underestimating the selling power of the novel and its growth into a pop culture phenomenon, Opus Dei chose to initially keep quiet and not attack Brown for what he claimed to be true about Opus Dei: that it was a secretive, manipulative organization that would stop at nothing, even murder, to protect the foundations of Catholicism. While Opus Dei remained virtually silent, *The Da Vinci Code* found its way into the hands of over 60 million readers (Carr, 2006). Its extreme popularity garnered the attention of several major film studios, including Sony Pictures Entertainment.

When news reached Opus Dei that *The Da Vinci Code* would be made into a major motion picture starring Tom Hanks and directed by Ron Howard, the organization decided to reevaluate its communications strategy. Opus Dei mounted a full public relations campaign in response to *The Da Vinci Code* book and film. However, instead of attacking Brown and Sony Pictures, Opus Dei chose to inform the public about “The Real Opus Dei.” They rallied their members and other Catholic organizations across the world in an effort to show that they were nothing like the Opus Dei portrayed in *The Da Vinci Code*. Opus Dei also worked to make the media an ally during its crisis, allowing unprecedented access to its headquarters, centers, and members. The organization suggested key stories and messaging to journalists in an effort to define its position. When the movie was released on May 19, 2006 it received mediocre reviews but scored big in the box office, grossing over \$758 million worldwide (Variety.com). However, despite the

incredible popularity of the book and movie, Opus Dei's informational campaign was a success according to its communications staff. The organization achieved its main objective of establishing "an information effort to show that the real Opus Dei had nothing in common with the Opus Dei presented in the book: no monks, no murders, no masochism, no misogyny" (Carroggio, Finnerty & Mora, 2006).

### **Textual Analysis**

Drawing on crisis communications theory from Coombs (1999) and Fearn-Banks (1996), Opus Dei's situation with *The Da Vinci Code* was identified as a rumor crisis. According to Coombs (1999), "believability is essential" when dealing with rumors because the public must trust the organization in order to accept their side of the story. Rumors about Opus Dei did not first surface in *The Da Vinci Code*—the organization had a history filled with controversy. Fearn-Banks (1996) classified several rumor types including the nearly-true rumor and the birthday rumor—both of which afflicted Opus Dei. Since controversies surrounding the organization had appeared in the past, the public may have attached more credibility to the rumors purported in *The Da Vinci Code*—identifying them as nearly-true. Additionally, because these rumors had been repeated over and over again during Opus Dei's history, they were considered to be birthday rumors, as they were as regular as birthdays.

Coombs (1999), Fearn-Banks (1996) and Kimmel (2004) suggest several crisis management strategies for dealing with rumor. Opus Dei employed many of these strategies over the course of its crisis with *The Da Vinci Code*. The organization established a two-way line of communication with its stakeholders and kept them informed of any news or developments via its organizational Web site, [www.opusdei.org](http://www.opusdei.org). Opus Dei's Web site would also turn out to be a major resource for journalists and other interested parties who were curious about the organization from their exposure to *The Da Vinci Code*. The organization also took advantage of

the talents of outside expert John Allen, Jr., a respected CNN Analyst and author. Allen's book titled *Opus Dei: An Objective Look Behind the Myths and Reality of the Most Controversial Force in the Catholic Church* (2005) became the authoritative text on the organization and received praise and recognition in the media. As mentioned earlier, Opus Dei made the media an ally, a key strategy Coombs (1999) suggests an organization should follow. They gave priority to every media inquiry and opened their doors for the first time to cameras and on-site interviews. The organization did everything it could to portray an open, transparent image on its new-found public platform.

In addition to crisis communications theory, it is important to consider what equates to success in public relations when evaluating the effectiveness of Opus Dei's campaign against *The Da Vinci Code*. While there are many schools of thought on public relations evaluation, the researcher chose Hon's (1998, 1999) work for its relevance to this case. In *Demonstrating Effectiveness in Public Relations: Goals, Objectives and Evaluation*, Hon (1998) establishes that effective public relations occurs when an organization achieves its established communications goals through its communications activities in a cost-efficient manner. Opus Dei media professional Marie T. Oates described Opus Dei's campaign as "a grassroots media campaign carried out on a shoe string budget." She also notes that Opus Dei was "able to work with what little resources we had available, and then made the most of the opportunities that came our way or which we could create." Opus Dei's focus on opportunity and making the best out of a bad situation was a guiding force in their public relations efforts and served as a foundation for their goals and objectives. Hon (1998) notes that "achieving specific outcomes detailed in public relations program objectives is the yardstick by which success must be measured" (p. 107). While meeting goals is key, Hon (1999) points out that a truly effective public relations



campaign will not only achieve the communications objectives but also support the organization's mission. Based on the objectives as outlined by the organization in question and their mission as a religious organization, Opus Dei experienced success in its informational campaign against *The Da Vinci Code*.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Opus Dei's streak of publicity gave the organization many opportunities to get its message out to the public and, from their perspective, set the record straight. An analysis of broadcast media coverage from ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX and MSNBC over the three-year period of the crisis revealed three major frames. These frames played to Opus Dei's advantage when considering their objectives, making them the victim of *The Da Vinci Code* crisis as seen in the media.

### **Fact vs. Fiction**

The "fact vs. fiction" frame was the primary frame for 67.5% of the 40 original stories featured on the five major networks. This frame put the Opus Dei's version of the truth up against the preexisting controversies and new myths set forth in *The Da Vinci Code*. Stories with the "fact vs. fiction" frame used words including: myth, reality, truth, false, fact, fiction and rumor. Stories featuring this frame often gave Opus Dei a platform to correct the rumors from *The Da Vinci Code* and made a comparison of what was true and what was not. MSNBC utilized this frame the most often as it was in 83% of its stories, while ABC and CNN used it in 75% of its stories. Opus Dei encouraged the use of the "fact vs. fiction" frame repeatedly in their core messaging, focusing on "the Real Opus Dei" and contrasting their image against the work of fiction, *The Da Vinci Code*. Allen's book called *Opus Dei: An Objective Look Behind the Myths and Reality of the Most Controversial Force in the Catholic Church* also reinforced the "fact vs. fiction" frame with the comparison of commonly held myths about Opus Dei with his research

about the organization and in its title. The broadcast and cable media gave Opus Dei an opportunity to fight back against the rumors in *The Da Vinci Code* by letting them tell their side of the story through the “fact vs. fiction” frame.

### **War on Christianity**

The “war on Christianity” frame was the primary frame in 20% of the story sample. Using vocabulary such as battle, defend, rally the troops, fight and war, this frame depicted the battle between Catholicism and a pop culture phenomenon. The “war on Christianity” frame focused on how *The Da Vinci Code*’s allegations of Jesus being married to Mary Magdalene and fathering a child shook the foundations of Christianity. Although the book was marketed and acknowledged as fiction, many readers believed the claims because of Brown’s opening disclaimer that all historical facts and events within the book were true. The Vatican publicly denounced the book, saying that it had absolutely no basis in fact and that Christians should not believe anything in it. The frame also put a spotlight on modern culture’s current discontent with religious authorities and institutions (Freedom Forum, 1993). In light of the recent Catholic priest abuse scandals and other embarrassments in the Church, society has become more critical of religion. Sources from the Christian Church were often quoted in stories featuring this frame. The “war on Christianity” frame could also apply to *The Da Vinci Code*’s specific attack on Opus Dei, but generally referred to the Catholic Church as a whole. When each network was analyzed for the presence of this frame, it was determined that NBC used it as the primary frame in 44.4% of its stories with CBS following at 20% and CNN and MSNBC at 16.7%.

### **Opportunity**

The “opportunity” frame was the primary frame for 12.5% of the story sample (n=40) and the secondary frame for 60% of the sample. ABC utilized the “opportunity” frame as a primary frame in 25% of its stories with CBS following at 20%, NBC at 11.1%, and CNN at 8.3%. As a

secondary frame, ABC featured the “opportunity” frame in 66.7% of its stories, CBS in 100%, CNN at 33.3% and MSNBC at 100%. Stories featuring the “opportunity” frame often focused on how Opus Dei’s crisis with *The Da Vinci Code* was actually an opportunity for the organization to get its message out to the public on a stage that it never had before. This frame contained words and phrases such as: making lemonade out of lemons, new-found publicity, opening doors, opportunity, benefit and increased interest. Opus Dei certainly contributed to the creation of this frame when they nicknamed their communications campaign “Project Lemonade.” Stories with the “opportunity” frame quoted several Opus Dei sources and presented a positive image of the organization in that they were a small, often misunderstood religious group that made the best out of a very difficult and potentially catastrophic situation.

### **Messaging**

Opus Dei presented its key messaging in media coverage in a variety of ways. When the broadcast news stories’ sources were analyzed and categorized into Opus Dei representatives, Christian Church representatives, and other outside experts, it was found that Opus Dei had 25 unique sources quoted. Opus Dei’s opposition which included former members and cult experts, only had six unique sources quoted. This disparity reflects how Opus Dei effectively mobilized its members and staff to present their viewpoints and the beliefs of their organization.

Additionally, the analysis coded for the presence of key Opus Dei messaging and stories that included: the real Opus Dei, the real Silas, the brochure box for *Da Vinci* fans, Father Wauck’s blog and others. When each network was analyzed for the presence of Opus Dei messaging in its stories, it was found that ABC had 87.5%, CBS 60%, NBC 55.6%, MSNBC 83.3% and CNN 91.7%. Based on the definition of effective public relations as outlined by Hon (1999), these percentages attest to Opus Dei’s success in getting their ideas and messages out to the media.

Additionally, all stories were coded for the presence of common Opus Dei controversies and

whether or not these controversies were corrected. The results showed that ABC's stories corrected 75% of the controversies, CBS 75%, NBC 60%, MSNBC 83.3% and CNN 91.7%. While rumors and common controversies about Opus Dei were repeated in media coverage, the majority of stories corrected the rumors, allowing Opus Dei to get accurate information about its organization out to the public—its core public relations strategy.

### **Interviews**

The textual analysis was strengthened with two in-depth interviews of Opus Dei's communications staff. When the organization's media campaign was analyzed for major strengths and weaknesses, the results could be tied back to prior research. For example, in the textual analysis it was determined that Opus Dei's initial strategy of silence was not a good one when dealing with a rumor crisis. This was later identified as one of Opus Dei's central weaknesses because the initial response in a crisis is often the most important and creates the first impression of the organization in the mind of the public (Coombs, 1999). The interviews revealed that while Opus Dei underestimated the power of the book, they also did not act earlier on because the Catholic Church was late in its response. This point reinforced Coombs' (1999) theory about the importance of an organization's relationship with its stakeholders in times of crisis. Another weakness was Opus Dei's lack of preparedness and having no crisis management plan (CMP). The importance of a CMP was earlier identified in the textual analysis. Without a formal strategy outlined before the crisis took place, Opus Dei was more vulnerable to the media storm surrounding *The Da Vinci Code* and was unable to respond in a quick, unified manner to the rumors.

However, the strengths in Opus Dei's public relations campaign against *The Da Vinci Code* made up for its weaknesses. As suggested in the crisis communications theories of Coombs (1999) and Fearn-Banks (1996), Opus Dei successfully made allies internally and externally.

Effective relationship building with key publics is an additional measure of successful public relations efforts (Hon, 1999). With over 87,000 members across the world, the organization had a built-in support system that could help carry it through the crisis. Opus Dei turned to its membership for support and gave many members speaking opportunities in the media and kept them updated on the campaign's progress through its Web site. The organization also turned to its Catholic allies, including the United Conference of Catholic Bishops, for guidance and support. Opus Dei benefitted from a full-length documentary and several other Web sites and online forums through its partnerships with other Catholic organizations.

Another key component of a successful public relations campaign is the promotion and fostering of good media relations (Hon, 1999). Externally, Opus Dei did everything in its power to make the media one of its allies. The interviews revealed that Opus Dei fed the media stories and provided them with exclusive access to Opus Dei headquarters for the first time. Opus Dei's communications staff wanted to create a mutually beneficial relationship with the media in order to get their point across while allowing the media to be the first to access the organization. Opus Dei also made every media inquiry a priority and never refused an interview. These strategies certainly led to the success of Opus Dei's informational campaign against *The Da Vinci Code*.

### **Implications for Public Relations**

This study of Opus Dei's public relations campaign against *The Da Vinci Code* shows how a relatively unknown, miscast religious organization was able to utilize public relations practices and crisis management strategies to fight off its false portrayal from a pop culture phenomenon. In particular, the case shows the power of a nearly-true rumor and how difficult it is to combat through a communications plan. However, this case also reveals a religious organization's unique advantage that many big corporations and publicly-owned companies don't have—a unified internal public. Religious organizations should turn to their membership and other

religious allies in order to survive through a crisis. Yet, this unique advantage also comes with unique challenges. A religious organization is also accountable to its internal publics and key stakeholders, no matter how big or small. Hon (1999), Coombs (1999), and Fearn-Banks (1996) all suggest for an organization to regularly engage in a two-way communication with these groups and to take their expectations and needs into consideration when deciding on a crisis management strategy.

Opus Dei's crisis also shows how important it is for any organization, big or small, to have a crisis management plan in place. While there was no way for this organization to predict the hailstorm *The Da Vinci Code* would bring, they would have been better served if their communications staff had identified potential crises early on and assigned responsibilities to ensure that when a crisis did occur, Opus Dei could respond in a quick, unified manner. Yet, by making the media an ally, the organization succeeded in its informational campaign and set an example for other non-profit and religious organizations to follow. In a study published by the Freedom Forum (1993) on how the media and religious organizations can work together to improve religion coverage, two main points reinforce Opus Dei's effectiveness in fostering good media relations. The study advises religious organizations to "learn the basics of media relations and support efforts to work with the news media" and "make sure religious leaders are accessible to the media for interviews, information and comments" (pg. 4). Whether facing a crisis or not, religious organizations should strive to create long and lasting relationships with media to the benefit of both.

### **Limitations of Study and Recommendations for Future Research**

In any framing analysis, the frames identified by the researcher might not be the same frames identified by another researcher and frame definition can be subjective. Another potential limitation of this study could be the reliability of Opus Dei's organizational information.

Membership statistics, organizational structure, and other facts about Opus Dei are all reported by the organization and cannot be verified by other outside sources since many of Opus Dei's records are not made available to the public.

This study could be expanded in several ways in future research. The final step in the public relations process is evaluation and this campaign would certainly benefit from an in-depth evaluation of its core tactics and strategies. Opus Dei's communications plan could be evaluated through a quantitative survey of its membership measuring their recognition of key components from the campaign. Additionally, interviews with members quoted in the broadcast media coverage could add another layer of depth to the study. Understanding the viewpoint of the other side of *The Da Vinci Code crisis* could also greatly inform this research. While they may be difficult to get, interviews with Dan Brown and producers and staff at Sony Pictures Entertainment could present a conflicting viewpoint that has been relatively unheard.

Another recent development also creates a perfect opportunity for future study. An article from *The Guardian* reveals a possible project Opus Dei might be involved in:

Now one of the world's most controversial spiritual organisations is poised to strike back, using the same media weapons as its critics. A spokesman in Rome said yesterday that Opus Dei was collaborating in the production of a full-length feature film on the life of its founder, Saint Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer. The producers said they were hoping to enlist Antonio Banderas and Robert De Niro for the leading roles (Hooper, 2007, February 17).

A spokesperson from Opus Dei said that the organization would not be funding the film, but would be consulting on the project. If this movie does get made, it would be an interesting study to compare its release to the release of *The Da Vinci Code*. Additionally, Opus Dei's communications efforts surrounding this future release could be analyzed and compared to their efforts from *The Da Vinci Code*.

APPENDIX A  
OPUS DEI'S COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

*Marc Carroggio, Rome Media Relations*

*Brian Finnerty, U.S. Media Relations*

*Juan Manuel Mora, Rome Department of Communications, Opus Dei\**

## **Introduction**

In the New York communications office of Opus Dei, we first learned about *The Da Vinci Code* only weeks before the novel's publication, through an article in *Publishers Weekly*. Brian Finnerty recalls alerting a colleague about the novel's extravagant premise: the Church has always kept secret the existence of a line of descendents of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene, and an Opus Dei albino monk runs around killing people in a search for the Holy Grail. The colleague's response was "Brian, don't worry, the novel sounds so silly that nobody will ever buy it."

That prediction, of course, did not turn out to be true. Since its publication in 2003 by Doubleday, *The Da Vinci Code* has become one of the best-selling works of all time with its many million of copies sold. An undoubted hit in terms of sales, although accompanied by negative literary criticism.

On 17 May the film will be launched in Cannes. Produced by and marketed by Sony Pictures, it is being promoted with one of the biggest marketing budgets in the history of the silver screen: 40 million dollars just for the USA market, according to the "Wall Street Journal". In the cover story that "Newsweek" devoted to the end of 2005, it was presented as *the* event of the year 2006.

Perhaps the fundamental characteristic of *The Da Vinci Code* is that it mixes fact and fiction in a misleading manner. The novel begins with a "Fact" page that makes the false claim that "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate." Christianity and the Catholic Church are falsely portrayed as a hoax invented by the fourth-century Roman emperor Constantine. The novel also presents a bizarre caricature of the Catholic Church institution Opus Dei, complete with the character of Silas, the murderous albino monk. However, as Amy Welborn has written, in reality "*The Da Vinci Code* is a mess, a riot of laughable errors and serious misstatements".

*The Da Vinci Code* phenomenon poses questions that go beyond the specific case, and which it would be interesting to discuss in this seminar. What responsibilities does the entertainment industry have to be sensitive and fair in the portrayal of different religious, ethnic and social groups? And how can offended parties respond, defending their own rights, while respecting freedom of expression and the freedom of the market-place?

---

\* Paper presented on 27 April 2006, in the 5th Professional Seminar for Church Communications Offices, which took place in the University of the Holy Cross, in Rome. The definitive version will be published in the proceedings of the seminar.



Catholics and other Christians have expressed their concerns about the novel in numerous different ways. Some examples among many:

- Especially significant was the launching of the “Jesus Decoded” website, sponsored by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, together with a documentary of the same name. Other bishops’ conferences have also launched clear responses to the book, e.g. Mexico, Poland and Brazil.
- A coalition of Catholics in the U.S. has formed an initiative called “DaVinci Outreach” ([www.davincioutreach.com](http://www.davincioutreach.com)) which is also the source for the “The Da Vinci Deception”, a concise but excellent Q&A book.
- The DVC has also been the occasion for other serious books, such as Amy Welborn's “Decoding Da Vinci”, and “The Da Vinci Hoax” by Carl Olson. The same could be said of documentaries like, for example, “Solving the 2000 Year Old Mystery” by Grizzly Adams Productions. Many books and essays have been published in other countries.

At the appropriate time it would be interesting to study all these responses from the communications point of view. Here is a summary of the work of the Information Offices of Opus Dei, above all in Rome and New York.

## **Communications Plan**

### **Chronology**

#### 1. The novel:

We found the novel “in our hands” in early 2003, already published, without having heard before of the writer Dan Brown. Our first response was to ignore the book to the extent possible, responding to inquiries, but trying to avoid giving additional attention to it by over-reacting.

In September 2003, after receiving numerous requests for information, we posted a statement at the website [www.opusdei.org](http://www.opusdei.org), stressing that the DVC is a fictional work and not a reliable source. There we also collected other resource material, which was useful for answering the many questions we were receiving.

From the beginning our attitude was to be helpful and open in providing information about Opus Dei. It was in this phase, for instance, that a book dedicated entirely to Opus Dei was started, by Vatican expert John L. Allen.

#### 2. The film:

The film was a future event, which we learned about when it was publicized that Sony Pictures had bought the rights of the novel. Therefore we could be proactive; we did not wish to wait

passively, and we decided to take the initiative. In this more proactive period we can distinguish two phases:

- Phase A (2004-2005): In this phase we aimed to avoid all forms of polemics, because as is well known in Hollywood, controversy generates box office sales. We attempted a direct dialogue with Sony, sending them three letters. In the first, in January 2004, the U.S. Vicar of Opus Dei, Fr. Tom Bohlin, noted with regret the unfair treatment of the Catholic Church, and requested that the name of Opus Dei not be used. We also requested an interview with Amy Pascal, the head of Sony's motion pictures division. Later in 2004 Ms. Pascal replied to us in a letter with polite but vague assurances. We were never given a meeting with her, nor with the people working on the movie. Sony never provided us with information about the movie. It was only through the media that we learned that Sony planned to go ahead with their false and bizarre portrayal of the Catholic Church and Opus Dei.
- Phase B (2006): This phase, which we are in now, began on 26 December 2005, with a declaration by Ron Howard in Newsweek in which he affirmed the complete faithfulness of the film to the book, and explicitly said that Opus Dei would be part of the movie. This information implied a new scenario. >From this moment we would have to present our point of view to the opinion of the general public. Therefore on 10 January 2006 communications staff for Opus Dei met in Rome, including people from the information offices of New York, London, Paris, Madrid, Cologne, Lagos and Montreal. In this meeting they studied the many suggestions received, from journalists, communications professionals, and other colleagues. The plan would be coordinated by the Department of Communication in Rome, after being approved by the responsible authorities. At this meeting we described our strategy as "converting lemons into lemonade", as Time Magazine has reported.

We now go on to describe the plan.

## **Diagnosis**

1. During the meeting in Rome, the essential characteristics of the situation were identified, from the communications point of view:
  - a. Both products affected mainly Christians, more specifically Catholics, and only secondarily Opus Dei.
  - b. They are both negative products for Christians. They could be considered a case of a communications crisis (although a particular kind of crisis).
  - c. The novel and the film are phenomena of the world of communication, in the field of fiction, with a strong element of marketing.
  - d. At the time of the diagnosis, the book and the film were already phenomena on the global stage, not merely the American one.

2. Therefore the work program should be fitted to these characteristics: to implement a communications plan that would be worldwide in its scope, Christian in its content and positive in its tone, in order to neutralise the negative effects. Of the three possibilities (the way of silence, the way of the Law, the way of communication) the third was chosen. The response should always be well-mannered and friendly. Therefore style and language were not secondary matters.

## Objectives

There were two principle objectives of the plan:

1. To take advantage of the opportunity to spread information about the reality of Jesus Christ and of the Church, and in this context of Opus Dei. Making lemonade would mean taking advantage of the “teaching moment”, to promote the reading of reliable sources such as the Gospels. Together with this, there was to be an information effort to show that the real Opus Dei had nothing in common with the Opus Dei presented in the book: no monks, no murders, no masochism, no misogyny, but ordinary Catholics, who with all their virtues and defects, try to live out their faith in the secular world or, as Pope John Paul II put it, try “to live the Gospel in the world.”

2. To ask Sony respectfully and the team making the movie, to avoid giving offense to Christians, by a free decision, not through pressure or threats. To tell them in public what it had not been possible to say in private. To remind them that that it is possible to uphold freedom of expression at the same time as showing respect. Nobody would utter words of censure or make threats. Sony Pictures would have an opportunity make a contribution to harmony, with a gesture of respect towards religious beliefs.

## Means

How have we been trying to communicate these objectives? How have we been working to transmit our point of view?

1. In the first place, we have tried to **promote a kind of “response before its time”**. In other words, instead of avoiding the crisis we have tried to bring it forward, to anticipate it. With these aims in mind, the declarations of our office have attracted the attention of the media. The three most notable declarations have been the following:

a) 12 January 2006: The interview of Marc Carroggio with the international “Zenit New's Agency”. This interview was the first official answer to Ron Howard's words published in “Newsweek”, saying that the film would be completely faithful to the book. Zenit's interview dealt with the key points: the offensive character of this story for Christians, the importance of respect for beliefs, and the request for a gesture of respect. Many international news agencies (and after that many other media) reproduced parts of that interview. The New York Times referred to it on 7 February 2006.

b) 14 February 2006: Perhaps the most widely publicized action directly promoted by ourselves was the statement released on 14 February, to answer many questions that we were receiving about our position on the Da Vinci Code film. The statement was also a response to Sony Pictures, who, as reported in the New York Times of 9 February, had announced the launch of another website controlled by them, [www.davincichallenge.com](http://www.davincichallenge.com) as a venue for Christians to express their views. In a statement we reminded Sony that, while there was time, it was not sufficient to give the offended party an opportunity to defend itself, rather than avoiding the offence itself. We refused to join this “mediated” dialogue on their sponsored website, and instead continued the dialogue on our own terms.

c) 6 April 2006: The Communications Office of Opus Dei in Tokyo wrote a letter to the officials of Sony Corporation in Japan. The Office offered to give information about the real Opus Dei, and petitioned the directors of Sony about the possibility of including a disclaimer in the soon-to-be-released film to clarify that it is a work of fantasy and that any similarity with reality is purely coincidental. This action, says the letter “would be a gesture of respect toward the figure of Jesus, to the history of the Church and to the religious beliefs of viewers.” One week later, the letter was put on the official website in Japanese, and from there it was picked up by news agencies worldwide.

The aim of this “anticipated response” was that when the movie arrived everyone should recognize it as a “comedy of errors” as far as Christianity is concerned. To indicate the errors (at times grotesque) without lacking respect for the author, the director of the film, or any of the actors or producers. The public declarations showed the existence of an unresolved problem, and therefore found a place in the news.

2. A second point has been **to treat the media as an ally**, to give priority to demand, and generate a worldwide dialogue in public. The launching of a film is normally preceded by a marketing campaign, which in this case reached enormous proportions. The producer communicates through these means: classical publicity, such as street hoardings, television advertisements; new forms of marketing, through mobile phones and the internet. Huge investments, which are impossible to combat. Therefore the Information Office decided to respond to marketing with information: with open conversations with journalists, to rebut the heavily cosmeticised marketing messages, which hide the offensive aspects of the movie; to respond with imagination to the financial investment.

Giving priority to demand means responding to all requests from journalists. Taking this decision was easy, as it has been the usual practice of the Office. But the numbers of requests from the media have been very high, and also their reach, e.g. the *New York Times*, *Associated Press*, *Time Magazine*, *Chicago Tribune*; broadcasters such as *Channel 4 (UK)*, *The History Channel*: programs such as *Good Morning America* and the *Today Show*. When we left New York to be present at this seminar, we were dealing with forty requests simultaneously. It has been necessary to reinforce the offices in New York and Rome, but in general we have worked with our normal resources.

3. Another important means in this period has been to make available lots of information in order to **show the real Opus Dei**. Specifically:

a) To promote more “news”. As well as the three statements already mentioned, in recent months we have put greater effort into the diffusion of different news items to help show the real Church, the real Opus Dei. It seemed to us that this was a service to help those who were preparing a story or report about the Church and Opus Dei in the “Da Vinci Code era”.

We have been trying to give more visibility to some activities that might pass unobserved at other times but that now, when everyone is writing stories about the “real Opus Dei”, appear more attractive. For instance, “Harambee 2002”, a charity started at the time of the canonization of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, to foster local health and educational projects in sub-Saharan Africa ([www.harambee2002.org](http://www.harambee2002.org)).

Together with this, many ordinary activities have been converted into “news” in this period; the re-design of our website, the appearance of a blog by Fr John Wauck about Opus Dei and the Da Vinci Code ([www.davincicode-opusdei.com](http://www.davincicode-opusdei.com)), the launch in New York of a new edition of “The Way”, a collection of points for personal meditation on Christian life written by Josemaría Escrivá in 1934, by Doubleday, which will be distributed to all bookshops in America.

Another news item has been the documentary produced by the Saint Josemaría Institute and the Cresta Group (Chicago) entitled “Passionately Loving the World”. This 28 minutes movie shows Americans from around the country whose lives have been transformed by the spirituality of St. Josemaría Escrivá: a Los Angeles fire-fighter, a college student, an entrepreneur, and a family on a farm, among others. After the premier of the documentary in New York, hundreds of news items appeared in the American media talking about the “other movie”. The video itself was news, and excerpts from it were shown on ABC, CNN and other north American stations.

b) Offering contacts, people, faces. In these times of high demand, we consider it fundamental that journalists have been able to speak with hundreds of contacts and witnesses.

The “media system” always needs an authorized voice. It has been possible to count on the full availability of institutional sources (authorities of the Prelature), and on many other people (students, older people, members of Opus Dei and friends) who have helped by recounting “their story”.

Also, through the website we have been offering the possibility to arrange presentations on Opus Dei in parishes, associations, clubs, etc. A text on the site says: “Do you need someone to speak about Opus Dei for a panel or other event about The Da Vinci Code? Contact at [press@opusdei.org](mailto:press@opusdei.org).”

c) Discovering stories. Every news item has its own narrative. In this sense journalists need little stories that they can put into their narration. Working together, many little stories have occurred to us that have been useful to the media professionals. Two examples:

When the media started to increase their interest in the real Opus Dei, it turned out that there was a real person named Silas in Opus Dei. Silas Agbim is not a murderous albino monk, but a stockbroker from Biafra (Nigeria) who lives in Brooklyn with his wife Ngozi. A picture of the

real Silas appeared in the New York Times on 7 February, and since then he has been interviewed by many other media outlets such as Time Magazine, CNN, CBS, ABC, and international media.

Another example. Last 12th of February we installed a little box offering literature at the entrance of our headquarters in Manhattan, called Murray Hill Place, with the inscription: “For fans of The Da Vinci Code: If you are interested in the ‘real’ Opus Dei, take one”. The box cost \$10 but pictures of it have been reproduced in more than 100 newspapers and filmed by film crews from around the world. A “low-cost” information resource.

The Murray Hill Place building mentioned in the novel as the “worldwide headquarters of Opus Dei” has been converted into an essential part of many narratives in which the journalists joke that they have not found the “torture chambers” mentioned in the book. Dozens of journalists have been able to visit the “real Murray Hill Place”, a multi-purpose facility located in Manhattan at the corner of Lexington Avenue and 34<sup>th</sup> Street. It contains the offices of the Regional Vicar of the United States, a 30 room conference center, a center with activities for university students and young professionals (Schuyler Hall), and an area for the hospitality team that manages the facility. Every year about 10,000 people take part in different activities there, such as retreats, classes on Catholic doctrine, practical classes on the spiritual life, educational and cultural lectures, preached spiritual conferences and week-long formational workshop for lay people. “La Stampa”, one of the leading newspapers in Italy, headlined our efforts inviting people to Murray Hill as “Opus Dei: Operation Transparency”.

d) The Website, and other information resources. The official website, [www.opusdei.org](http://www.opusdei.org), has proved to be an amazing instrument in a period such as this. The site is of its nature global, like the Da Vinci phenomenon. There we have offered the most extensive and detailed answer to the Da Vinci Code in 22 languages. During the year 2005, the American section of the website received more than a million different visitors (that’s visitors, not visits); and the total more than three million. The day that these reflections were finalised in New York, there had arrived 156 messages by 9 in the morning. One curious effect is the scholar-novelist Umberto Eco’s recommendation of the official Opus Dei website. Exhausted by continuous questions about the veracity of the DVC, Eco tells his readers, “Besides, if you want up-to-date information on all the matters in question, go to the site of Opus Dei. Even if you are atheists, you can trust it.”

4. Together with the means themselves, we have tried always to maintain **a style and tone of respect**. This was something obvious, that we had decided from the start: while asking for respect, we should act with respect. This means never employing aggressive language, no attacks or threats, and never judging the intentions of others. We have tried to act within the coordinates marked by these three concepts: freedom, responsibility, dialogue. As one friend advised us, “Never lose your sense of humor... particularly with movies and ‘floating world’ of entertainment, your good nature and humor is your best defense”.

The blog started by Father John Wauck has been trying to poking a little light-hearted fun at the novel and the movie. It has been a good resource for maintaining morale at a high level. Countering a novel and a movie is a little bit like fighting against smoke. If you swing at it with boxing gloves, you wind up looking a little silly. Good humor works.

## Provisional balance sheet

Only after the launch of the film will it be possible to draw up a complete balance sheet. For the moment we might mention three positive results of this information effort:

- 1) Ecclesial co-operation. A climate of co-operation has been generated among many ecclesial institutions, and many resources have been produced to assist in the effort to make the Church and the person of Jesus Christ better known. In reality co-operation has extended outwards to many other Christians.
- 2) Co-operation with journalists. The media coverage during the first quarter of 2006 has been huge. While the promoters have invested massive sums of money “to sell their movie”, Catholics have tried “to tell their story”, supplying information to journalists.
- 3) The response has worked. The anticipatory action of many Christians has already created a general and growing awareness that the Da Vinci Code is unfair in its portrayal of Christianity, the Catholic Church, Opus Dei and history itself. Public opinion is putting the Da Vinci Code phenomenon “in its place”, as just the most recent product of a kind of “pseudo-pop culture” without any connection with reality. Medieval historian Sandra Miesel considers the book so full of errors that, “I’m actually surprised when The Da Vinci Code is correct about anything at all.”

Faced with this clamor, the author of the book has had to post four different revisions of the DVC “fact” page of his website. The statements all come from Dan Brown’s website and are the succeeding answers to the same question: How much of this novel is based on fact?

- 28 August 03: “All of it. The paintings, locations, historical documents, and organizations described in the novel all exist (...)”.
- 17 January 04: “The paintings, locations, historical documents, and organizations described in the novel all exist (...)”.
- 11 May 04: “The Da Vinci Code is a novel and therefore a work of fiction. While the book’s characters and their actions are obviously not real, the artwork, architecture, documents (...)”-
- Current (30 January 06): “The Da Vinci Code is a NOVEL and therefore a work of fiction (...)”.

This provisional balance sheet cannot avoid one fundamental matter: will the movie cause offence? After all this time we have not managed to maintain a personal or direct communication with Sony Pictures. In this sense the communications action should be considered a provisional failure. We do not know whether the friendly insistence of so many Christians will have made some impact among the directors of this company and the team of professionals who have made the movie.

## Conclusions

The Da Vinci Code has given us many headaches which, certainly, we would have preferred to avoid. Together with this we have to recognize that the decision to communicate our point of

view openly and positively, in a proactive way, has generated a wonderful time to talk about Christianity, the Catholic Church and the little part of the Catholic Church that is Opus Dei. Therefore we would like to summarise the conclusions in the form of one lesson that we have learned, and one wish that we would like to express.

1. The lesson: the importance of taking care of communications strategies, both as regards what to communicate, and how to communicate it. We have confirmed the efficacy of what could be called the “strategy of the three ‘P’ s’ : positive, professional and polite. From this position it is possible to be listened to and understood, especially by the media, which in this kind of situation are not adversaries, because they understand that the Church is not a threat but a victim. The right strategies – positive, professional, polite – help to get rid of the sterile dynamic of confrontation.

I think that some words of the Prelate of Opus Dei in *Le Figaro Magazine* summarise this lesson: “Ignorance is always bad, and information is a good thing. Communication is not a game for amateurs. One learns with time to let oneself be known and also to know oneself. Some patience is also needed in this area.” (Le Figaro, 21-IV-04) Patience could be considered as the fourth “P”.

2. The wish: that the powerful may be more respectful. That they may freely decide to improve their strategies and become less arrogant and more open, on discovering that upholding respect does not reduce business, or lower the quality of art. The powerful in our society are often the big communications corporations. With more power comes more responsibility. And in the field of communications, the profit motive cannot be made absolute, to the detriment of the work of journalists, or creative writers, or the audience, especially young people. An African writer, Margaret Ogola, describes maturity as the realization that we are capable of offending, of wounding others, and acting in consequence. Christians do not make their requests with threats, but out of freedom. They do not have prejudices, nor do they label others: they are prepared to applaud from their heart the maturity of politicians, of businesses, or artists who decide to work for a society at once free and respectful of others.

###



APPENDIX B  
THEMATIC ANALYSIS SHEET

1. Story code:  

Story	1	Promo/Short Mention	2	Repeat	3	No relevance	4
-------	---	---------------------	---	--------	---	--------------	---
2. Transcript type:
3. Name of show:
4. Air date:
5. Time show aired:
6. Opus Dei representatives quoted? Yes 1/No 2
  - a. If yes, name them and their affiliation:
7. Christian Church representatives quoted? Yes 1/No 2
  - a. If yes, name them and their affiliation:
8. Other sources quoted? Yes 1/No 2
  - a. If yes, name them and their affiliation:
9. Was there a scene depiction from the DVC book or movie? Yes 1/No 2
  - a. If yes, briefly describe scene:
10. Presence of key Opus Dei messages/stories covered in transcript? Yes 1/No 2
  - a. If yes, how many?:
  - b. Describe:
11. Key words and phrases describing Opus Dei:
12. Key words and phrases describing *The Da Vinci Code* book/movie:
13. Common Opus Dei Controversies mentioned:
  - a. Were these controversies corrected or rebutted by Opus Dei or interviewer?  
Yes 1/No 2

14. Primary Frame:

Fact vs. Fiction 1      War on Christianity 2      Opportunity 3

15. Secondary Frame (if any):

Fact vs. Fiction 1      War on Christianity 2      Opportunity 3

APPENDIX C  
THEMATIC ANALYSIS BOOK

1. Story code is a letter followed by a number signifying the network and transcript number (i.e., B06 is the sixth transcript from CBS).

ABC: A	MSNBC: D
CBS: B	CNN: E
NBC: C	FOX: F

2. Transcript type refers to the content of the transcript and its relevance to the research topic. Some broadcasts will be repeated at different times and should be noted as such. Additionally, any mention of Opus Dei not related to the topic being researched should be omitted from the analysis.

If transcript is not relevant, stop coding at number two. If transcript is a promo, brief mention or a repeat, code through number five. If transcript is a story, code entire transcript.

3. Name of show is the name of the specific network show that the story aired on.
4. Air date is the date the story aired on that particular network.
5. Time show aired is the EST the show aired on the network.
6. Opus Dei representatives quoted asks if any members of Opus Dei were quoted in the story and who they are.
7. Christian Church representatives quoted asks if any people from the Christian Church, whether Catholic or not, were quoted in the story and who they are.
8. Other sources quoted asks if any other people were quoted in the story and who they are.
9. The scene depiction could be either quotes from the book or movie or a paraphrasing or mention of a particular scene or character from the book or movie.
10. Presence of key Opus Dei messages/stories refers to several key points that Opus Dei focused on its communication with the media including but not limited to:
  - “Converting lemons into lemonade”
  - Taking advantage of the opportunity as a “teaching moment”
  - The real Opus Dei had “no monks, no murders, no masochism, no misogyny”
  - Members are “ordinary Catholics”

- Opus Dei is “open and transparent”
- Redesign of Opus Dei Web site
- Fr. John Wauck’s blog on Opus Dei and *The Da Vinci Code*
- New edition of “The Way”
- “Passionately Loving The World” documentary on Opus Dei
- The real Silas in Opus Dei
- Brochure outside Opus Dei’s Headquarters
- Opus Dei’s open letter to Sony

Opus Dei focused on these messages and stories in its information-driven public relations campaign, which is detailed in the document, “Three Years with *The Da Vinci Code*.”

11. Key words and phrases describing Opus Dei can be found throughout the story and are significant to the story’s overall tone towards the organization.
12. Key words and phrases describing *The Da Vinci Code* book and/or movie can be found throughout the story are significant to the story’s overall tone towards the book and/or movie.
13. Common Opus Dei controversies mentioned refers to several rumors and stereotypes often made about Opus Dei. These rumors have been repeated many times throughout the organization’s history and include but are not limited to the following:
  - Questionable recruiting techniques
  - Brainwashing/Manipulative
  - Absolute control
  - Gruesome self-mortification
  - Secrecy
  - Forcing members to give up salaries/Wealthy
  - Close ties with the Pope
  - Cult-like
  - Power-hungry
  - Murderous

If any of these common Opus Dei controversies appear in any broadcast transcripts, note the particular controversy and also note if the controversy was corrected or rebutted within the transcript.

14. Primary Frame is the central frame found in the story. The possible frames are:
  1. Fact vs. Fiction: This frame is defined by vocabulary such as: fact, fiction, myth, reality, real, untrue, true, false, etc. Stories featuring the fact vs. fiction frame

often present the rumors about Opus Dei and then compare them to the facts, often given by members or Opus Dei staff.

2. War on Christianity: This frame is defined by vocabulary such as: war on Christianity, war on Catholicism, attack, defend, rally the troops, battle, Holy War, etc. Stories featuring the war on Christianity frame often feature experts from the Christian Church and refer to the Vatican's discontent over The Da Vinci Code.
  3. Opportunity: This frame is defined by vocabulary such as: making lemonade out of lemons, opportunity, new-found publicity, opening doors, increased interest, etc. Stories featuring the opportunity frame focus on how the crisis is actually an opportunity for Opus Dei to spread its message across the world and set false information straight.
15. Secondary frame refers to the subframe of the story, if there is one present.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Allen, J. L. (2005). *Opus Dei: An objective look behind the myths and reality of the most controversial force in the Catholic Church*. New York City: Doubleday.
- Ansen, D. (2006, May 18). A disappointing Da Vinci Code. *Newsweek*. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/12853397/site/newsweek/>.
- Austin, E., Pinkleton, B. (2000) *Strategic public relations management: Planning and managing effective communications programs*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Biema, D. (2006, April 24). The ways of Opus Dei. *Time*, 52-63.
- Blitzer, W. (Anchor). (2006, May 18). Debate swirls over “Da Vinci Code” movie. CNN The Situation Room [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.
- Brown, D. (2003). *The Da Vinci Code*. New York City: Random House.
- Brown, D. The Da Vinci Code FAQ. DanBrown.com. Retrieved April 15, 2006 from [http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci\\_code/faqs.html](http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/faqs.html).
- Buddenbaum, J. (1998). *Reporting news about religion*. Iowa State University Press.
- Carr, D. (2006, May 29). Studios turn thumbs down on film critics. *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 26, 2007 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/29/technology/29Carr.html?ex=1306555200&en=8249eb2c64bf164d&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss>.
- Carroggio, M., Finnerty, B., Mora, J.M. (2006, April 27). Three years with the Da Vinci Code. Fifth Professional Seminar for Church Communications Offices.
- Coombs, W. T. (1999). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Cooper, A. (Anchor). (2006, May 26). Breaking the Code. CNN Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.
- Dooley, T. (2006, April 10). Opus Dei tries to break Code's spell on American public's imagination. *The Houston Chronicle*.
- Ehrman, B. (2004). *Truth and fiction in The Da Vinci Code*. New York City: Oxford University Press.
- Eisenberg, C. (2006, March 20). Religious group hopes to make lemonade out of 'Da Vinci Code' lemons. *Newsday*.

- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, autumn, 51-58.
- Estruch, J. (1995). *Saint and schemers: Opus Dei and its paradoxes*. New York City: Oxford University Press.
- Fearn-Banks, K. (1996). *Crisis communications: A casebook approach*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Freedom Forum. (1993). A truce over truth. *American Journalism Review*, 15(9), 4-8.
- Goodstein, L. (2006, February 7). Catholic group says 'Code' film is mere fiction. *The New York Times*.
- Hall, S. (1975). Introduction. *Paper voices: The popular press and social change, 1935-1965*. Ed. A. C. H. Smith. London: Chatto & Windus, 11-24.
- Hallahan, K. (1999). Seven models of framing: Implications for public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 11(3), 205-242.
- Hammer, A. (Anchor). (2006, May 22). "The Da Vinci Code" a box office success. CNN Showbiz Tonight [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.
- Havill, A. (2001). *The spy who stayed out in the cold*. New York City: St. Martin's Press.
- Hertog, J. K., & McLeod, D. M. (2001). A multiple approach to framing analysis: A field guide. In S.D. Reese, O. H. Gandy Jr. & A. E. Grant (Ed.), *Framing public life* (pp.139-162). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hooper, J. (2007, February 1). De Niro may have role in Opus Dei's film fightback. *The Guardian*. Retrieved March 1, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.
- Kimmel, A. J. (2004). *Rumors and rumor control: A manager's guide to understanding and combating rumors*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lule, J. (2005). The rape of Mike Tyson: Race, the press and symbolic types. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12, 176- 95.
- Matthews, C. (Anchor). (2005, June 8). Opus Dei is a controversial, some say secretive, even cult-like part of the Catholic Church. MSNBC Hardball [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.

- McFadden, C. (Anchor). (2006, April 18). Faith matters: Da Vinci backlash. ABC Nightline [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.
- Miller, M., & Riechert, B. (2001). The Spiral of Opportunity and Frame Resonance: Mapping the Issue Cycle in News and Public Discourse. In S. Reese, O. Gandy and A. Grant (Eds.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World* (107-121). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- A new documentary from the USCCB's Catholic Communication Campaign. JesusDecoded.com. Retrieved April 15, 2006 from <http://www.jesusdecoded.com/tvspecial1.php>.
- Phillips, M. (Reporter). (2006, May 17). Opening of "The Da Vinci Code" movie draws protests from Christians worldwide. CBS The Early Show [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.
- Roy, A. (1995). Marion Barry's road to redemption: A textual analysis of ABC's news story aired on 14 September 1994. *Howard Journal of Communication*, 7, 315-327.
- Sawyer, D. (Reporter). (2006, April 18). Inside the mystery: Opus Dei. ABC Good Morning America [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.
- Sawyer, D. (Reporter). (2006, April 18). Opus Dei: The real Silas. ABC Good Morning America [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.
- Sodos, S. (Reporter). (2006, February 8). How much controversy will "The Da Vinci Code" movie generate? MSNBC Scarborough Country [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.
- Troxler, H. (2006, May 16). Hollywood never lets facts get in the way of fiction. *St. Petersburg Times*.
- Vargas, E. (Anchor). (2006, April 18). Inside Opus Dei: Religious counter-attack. ABC World News Tonight [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.
- Watkins, D. (2006, February 13). Opus Dei makes the PR running. *The Guardian*.
- What is Opus Dei? OpusDei.org. Retrieved April 15, 2006 from <http://www.opusdei.us/sec.php?s=8>.
- Whitfield, F. (Anchor). (2006, April 22). Catholic group decries "The Da Vinci Code" movie. CNN Live Saturday [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.



Wimmer, R., Dominick, J. (2006) *Mass media research: An introduction*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Zahn, P. (Anchor). (2006, May 19). "Da Vinci Code" controversy. CNN Paula Zahn Now [Television broadcast]. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/universe>.

Zoll, R. (2006, February 8). Opus Dei aims to improve its public image ahead of 'Da Vinci Code' movie. *The Associated Press*.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kirsten Biondich was born in Fort Myers, Florida. While in high school, she developed an interest in English and communications. Biondich received her B.A. in English from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2003 and completed several internships during this time including positions with CNN, *Atlanta Magazine* and the Atlanta Press Club. After graduating from college, she worked as an editorial coordinator for a statewide preservation organization and as an editorial assistant for a major publisher. It was during these two years that Biondich cemented her interest in public relations and decided to pursue a Master of Arts in Mass Communication at the University of Florida.

After completing her master's degree, Biondich plans to move to Chicago and pursue a career with an international public relations agency.