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The responsiveness pyramid: Embedding responsiveness and interactivity into public relations theory

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ABSTRACT

Responsiveness and interactivity are two terms that play an important part in any communicative process. Nevertheless, both academic studies and daily conversations tend to merge or transfer their meanings. Drawing on Rafaeli's interactivity model (Rafaeli, 1988) the purpose of this paper is to clarify the complex relationship between responsiveness and interactivity and to present the responsiveness pyramid, a model that suggests a clearer theoretical distinction between these concepts. In addition, responsiveness and interactivity are presented as relational maintenance strategies that may contribute to organization–public relationship building. This study is based on a field experiment and a content analysis of 799 organizational responses of Israeli businesses and nonprofit associations. The study reveals that organizational representatives, from both businesses and nonprofit associations, do not utilize the interactive and dialogic potential of their online responses in order to promote organization–public relationship building.

During the past thirty years, the theory and research of public relations has undergone a major change from a functionalist to a co-creational approach. Relationship-building became a central issue, and various scholars have developed theories, models and measurement scales to analyze and define organization–public relationships. The emergence of the Internet and the World Wide Web opened up new opportunities for dialog and relationship-building between organizations and their publics. These technologies thus became an important means of implementing co-creational principles.

The current study embraces the co-creational perspective, since it emphasizes the importance of dialog and two-way communication to organization–public relationship-building. The study argues that although the public relations literature acknowledges the importance of two-way communication to the process of relationship-building, the literature does not sufficiently emphasize two important terms, responsiveness and interactivity (as a process related variable), although these notions provide the very basic conditions for the existence of two-way communication and relationship-building. This paper tries to clarify the complex relationship between responsiveness and interactivity. *Interactivity*, which is one of the main concepts of computer-mediated-communication, and *responsiveness*, which encourages the continuation of an interaction and reinforces commitment (Joyce & Kraut, 2006) are suggested by this work as important contributors to organization–public relationship building. Their contribution is explored while comparing businesses and nonprofit associations, since these organizational types differ in many important aspects (such as aims, structure and ownership), but they share similar public relations needs and they must build and maintain relationships with stakeholders in order to survive (Coombs, 2001;

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Mazzini, 2004; Smith & Ferguson, 2001). Whereas prior research focused on the presence or absence of organizational replies to external queries, this study goes a step further and analyses the *level of responsiveness* of organizational replies.

1. Literature review

1.1. The co-creational approach

The co-creational perspective put organization–public relationship (OPR) at the center of public relations research (Botan & Taylor, 2004). The perspective uses research in order to advance understanding between groups and organizations while it uses communication as a means of helping to negotiate changes in these relationships. According to Botan and Taylor (2004), the functional approach values the organization and its mission while the co-creational approach values relationships and publics. The co-creational perspective emphasizes the important role of communication in enabling publics to become co-creators of meanings. Following is a presentation of several co-creational theories.

One of the co-creational approaches is the *relational approach*. The relational approach emerged as a result of Ferguson's (1984) call to focus on OPRs. The relational approach saw the building, management, and maintenance of OPRs as the main purpose of public relations (Botan, 1992; Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Huang, 2001; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). According to Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, and Jones (2003), relationship theory in the last decade was the second most frequently used perspective in public relations research, while various attempts were made to define the concept of "relationships" (Broom et al., 1997; Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000) and to measure it (Broom et al., 1997; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hallahan, 2004; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Indeed, public relations itself was defined in relational terms as "the management of relationships between organizations and publics" (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000, p. 85). Ledingham (2003) proposed relationship management as a general theory of public relations, while Bruning and Ledingham (2000) argue that the relationship management perspective fundamentally shift the practice of public relations away from manipulation toward mutually beneficial relationships. In 2006 Kelleher and Miller developed and tested operational definitions of relational maintenance strategies appropriate to online public relations.

Another co-creational theory is the *dialogic communication approach*. The dialogic communication approach adds to OPR building the notion of dialog and "dialogic communication" as the theoretical frame guiding relationship building between organizations and publics (Taylor et al., 2001). The term dialog appeared in public relations literature more than four decades ago (Sullivan, 1965), but Pearson (1989) was the first to present dialog as a theoretical construct appropriate to public relations. He argued that dialog is the most ethical form to conduct public relations, suggesting that public relations should be seen as a tool for conducting interpersonal dialectics, while having a dialogic system rather than a monologist policy. Botan (1997) explained that traditional approaches to public relations saw the public as a secondary actor that had to meet the organization's policy and marketing needs, whereas a dialog lifted the public up to the status of a communication equal.

The dialogic communication approach suggests that in order to create effective organization–communication channels, organizations must be willing to communicate with publics in honest and ethical ways (Taylor et al., 2001). The dialogic communication approach does not focus on conflict-solving; rather, it encourages participants to exchange ideas. Dialogic communication looks at the presentation of differences, with struggle and conflict perceived as natural states (Deetz, 2001). Therefore, the aim of dialogic communication is to reveal existing problems, conflicts, and disagreements and to address them without the compulsion to reach an agreement. In recent years, as the relational approach has gained popularity, it seems that the concept of dialog has been joining and even replacing the concept of symmetry as an organizing principle in public relations theory (Taylor et al., 2001). Furthermore, the frequent usage of the term "dialog" often results in confusion between dialogic communication and two-way symmetrical communication (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). Whether it is two-way symmetrical communication or dialogic communication, a basic requirement for both communication types is responsiveness.

1.2. Responsiveness

"Responsiveness" does not have a formal operational definition. Kelleher and Miller (2006) defined responsiveness as "an organization's willingness to respond promptly to customer inquiries and complaint." Stromer-Galley (2000) described responsiveness as "when the receiver takes on the role of the sender and replies in some way to the original message source" (p. 117). According to Davis (1982), responsiveness may be thought of as the probability to which each partner responds to the other, the proportion of relevant responses, and responses that match the demand for appropriate elaboration that the speaker intended to elicit. Davis argued that four factors affect responsiveness in an interaction: attention to the other partner, accuracy of understanding of one another's communication, possession of adequate response repertoires, and motivation to be responsive. The first three factors contribute to one's capacity for responsiveness, while motivation is a choice that is affected by the rewards of being responsive (Davis, 1982).

Various studies point to the importance of responsiveness to the continuation of an interaction. Kelleher and Miller (2006) suggested responsiveness to be one of the organization's relational maintenance strategies. Davis and Holtgraves (1984) argued that as an independent variable, responsiveness has a variety of consequences, both to the process and outcome of interaction. As a process, responsiveness affects the maintenance of the interaction and the focus on particular topics, communication efficiency, and accuracy; as an outcome, it affects the degree to which goals are achieved. Joyce and Kraut (2006) showed that receiving a response to an initial post in a newsgroup increases the likelihood that the poster will post again; hence, responsiveness encourages the continuation of an interaction and reinforces commitment.

A review of public relations literature reveals that the term responsiveness (in the sense of an organization being responsive to referrals by individual public members) is mentioned mainly in the context of organizational failure to respond to online inquiries. These studies found that businesses and nonprofit associations fail to respond to e-mails sent by external publics (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Hirsh, 2002; Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Matzler, Pechlaner, Abfalter, & Wolf, 2005; Newhagen, Cordes, & Levy, 1996; Taylor et al., 2001; Voss, 2000). In many cases, the failure to respond means a lack of responsiveness; in other cases, the response is not given in time or is only partial or unhelpful. Attempts to explain these gaps include such explanations as a lack of organizational resources and especially of time, staff, or budget (Kent & Taylor, 2002; White & Raman, 1999). Another term related to responsiveness is interactivity.

1.3. Interactivity

Interactivity's framework of definitions can be divided roughly into three types (McMillan & Hwang, 2002; Rafaeli & Ariel, 2007): interactivity as a *perception-related variable*, which focuses on participants' experiences and self reports (Newhagen, 2004; Wu, 1999); interactivity as a *medium characteristic*, which focuses on the technological features of the medium and the ability to generate activity (Markus, 1990; Rust & Varki, 1996; Sundar, 2004); and interactivity as a *process-related variable*, which focuses on the ways in which participants transfer information to one another (Kelleher, 2009; Rafaeli, 1988; Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997; Rogers, 1995; Stewart & Pavlou, 2002; Walther, Gay, & Hancock, 2005). Advertising and marketing research focusing on *perceptions* of interactivity usually place the customer in the middle and analyses how different variables (such as multimedia, speed, control elements for two-way communication, etc.) influence the way the customer perceives or experiences the level of interactivity of a medium (McMillan & Hwang, 2002). Other perceptual research focuses on the relations between the psychological and social characteristics of the participants and the way they influence their perceptions of the Web's interactivity (Sohn & Lee, 2005). Research focusing on *medium characteristics* tries to identify general characteristics (such as user control and two-way communication) or specific Web site characteristics that enhance interactivity (McMillan & Hwang, 2002). This type of interactivity, known also as "functional interactivity" (Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 2003) is popular mainly among public relations scholars who analyze organizational Web sites, looking for features such as e-mail addresses, user polls, contact forms, and other dialogic elements as indicators of the dialogic potential of a Web site (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2001). Research focusing on *process-related variables*, also known as "contingent interactivity" (Kelleher, 2009; Sundar et al., 2003) concentrates on the process of message transition and reciprocity in a communication setting, and mainly on responsiveness and interchange (McMillan & Hwang, 2002).

Interactivity, as responsiveness, does not have a formal operational definition. Ha and James (1998) defined interactivity as "the extent to which the communicator and the audience respond to, or [are] willing to facilitate, each other's communication needs" (p. 461). Miles (1992) suggested that "an interactive communication involves responsiveness of the displayed message to the message receiver" (p. 150). Hallahan (2003) emphasized the importance of interactivity in the relational process that brings to relational outcomes online. Rafaeli (1988) suggested that interactivity is "an expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to ever earlier transmissions" (p. 111). Rafaeli (1988) also suggested an interactivity model that makes a distinction among non-interactive, reactive, and interactive responses. According to Rafaeli and Ariel (2007), interactivity could be seen as a process of information exchange, while the transmission of information is in the center of the interaction.

Interactivity is one of the main concepts of computer mediated communication (CMC) and has been studied for almost three decades. Although it is widely recognized as a characteristic of the new media, interactivity can also be found in more traditional settings (McMillan, 2002) such as printed and electronic media, and the field serves as a point of confluence between mass and interpersonal communication.

Scholars argued almost a decade ago that research of interactivity contains mainly descriptions, classifications, and typologies of interactivity. According to Bucy (2004a, 2004b) both a coherent theory and empirical testing of interactivity were missing. Indeed, exploration of the literature reveals various attempts to categorize interactivity (McMillan, 2002; Newhagen, 2004; Rafaeli & Ariel, 2007; Stromer-Galley, 2004). Several years later, Bucy and Chen-Chao (2007) presented a mediated moderation model of interactivity. The model incorporated interactive attributes, user perceptions, individual differences and media effects measures to examine the definition, process, and consequences of interactivity on users.

Interactivity can be explored within various organizational settings. The next section will focus on two organizational settings: businesses and nonprofit associations.

1.4. Businesses, nonprofit associations and public relations

Businesses and nonprofit associations differ from each other in many aspects, but they share many similarities from a public relations perspective. Research even suggests that the attitude of public relations professionals toward public relations and the Web in both organization types is similar (Ryan, 2003). Both for-profits and nonprofits must build and maintain relationships with stakeholders in order to survive (Coombs, 2001; Mazzini, 2004; Smith & Ferguson, 2001). They need to get out their messages and to grab the attention of various publics, whether they are potential members, clients, volunteers, the media, customers, or donors, through the use of public relations strategies and tactics (Kent et al., 2003; Mazzini, 2004). According to population ecology theory and institutional theory (Hatch, 1997), organizations compete for publics from the same resource pool, while the environment makes the choice which organizations will succeed and which will fail (Mazzini, 2004). Taylor et al. (2001) add that activist groups even compete with corporations for the attention of publics and the media. From this aspect, the World Wide Web and the Internet are very powerful and useful tools, especially for nonprofit associations, which usually have fewer resources (time, money, and manpower) than do larger, more powerful organizations and, therefore, find it harder to get their voices heard (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Mazzini, 2004). Organizational Web sites, in addition to social media platforms, enable organizations to empower themselves, to increase the effectiveness of their communications by being more visible and more widely heard, and to contact various publics more easily (Coombs, 1998). Nonprofit associations can use the Internet in order to reach out to publics and potential members, to organize members and friends in order to promote an issue or influence organizational actions. Nonprofit associations can make their voices heard on issues that previously did not receive media attention or were censored, level the field with corporations, and contact and inform stakeholders around the world without any regard to the group's size, power, or financial ability (Heath, 1998; Kent et al., 2003; Marken, 1995, 2005; Mazzini, 2004). As Heath (1998) acknowledged, "Deep pockets do not play a key role in getting information out to interested readers" (p. 273).

In spite of the advantages of online public relations, various studies indicate that both businesses and nonprofit associations fail to utilize the Internet's advantages as a tool for relationship building. Research on nonprofit organizations points to the fact that in many cases the organizations are not responsive and do not create a dialog with their publics (Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009; Kang & Norton, 2004, 2006; Kent et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2001; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). Studies on businesses come up with similar findings (Esrock & Leichty, 2000; Ha & James, 1998; Ha & Pratt, 2000; Kim, Park, & Wertz, 2010; Leichty & Esrock, 2001). Whereas the above studies mainly focus on the presence or the absence of organizational replies to external queries, the current study goes a step further: this study tries to reveal the *level of responsiveness* of organizational replies. In other words, this study explores whether responses of businesses and nonprofit associations encourage the continuation of an interaction and promote OPR building.

2. Hypothesis and research question

The study reported here is exploratory in that it attempts to identify the role of responsiveness and interactivity in the process of organization–public relationship building. The author of this study argues that it is important that organizational representatives know and understand various levels of responsiveness in order to reply to external queries in a way that will promote OPR building. Drawing upon Rafaeli's interactivity model (Rafaeli, 1988), which makes a distinction between *non-interactive*, *reactive*, and *interactive* responses, this study suggests that all messages sent as a reaction to a previous message are responsive, while at the same time they can be *non-interactive* (a response that does not refer to the request), *reactive* (a response that refers to the request), or *interactive* (a response that refers to the request and initiates an additional turn[s]). This categorization resembles Barron and Yechiam's (2002) categorization of: (1) no response, (2) a response without the requested information, (3) a helpful response with the requested information, (4) a very helpful response that in addition to the requested information contains additional information thought by the recipient to be helpful.

2.1. Operationalization of variables

In this study the level of responsiveness is measured using a scale ranging from 0 to 6 points. The scale measures the relevance of a response to the requested information and the number of interactive elements found in a single response (a more detailed explanation is presented in the Method section). Hence:

0 points – The response does not refer to the request and does not contain interactive elements.
1 point – The response refers to the request and does not contain interactive elements.
2 points – The response refers to the request and contains 1 interactive element.
3 points – The response refers to the request and contains 2 interactive elements.
4 points – The response refers to the request and contains 3 interactive elements.
5 points – The response refers to the request and contains 4 interactive elements.
6 points – The response refers to the request and contains 5 interactive elements.

Thus, 0–2 points represent a response with a *low level of responsiveness*, 3 points represent a response with a *medium level of responsiveness*, and 4–6 points represent a response with a *high level of responsiveness*.

2.2. Hypothesis

As discussed earlier, research suggests that organizational representatives of both businesses and nonprofit associations fail to utilize the dialogic potential of the Internet: in many cases both organizational types fail to respond to external queries, fail to build a dialog with their publics, and often when providing a response in their electronic communication, refer solely to the requested information (Leichty & Esrock, 2001). Hence, this study tests the following hypothesis:

H1. Organizational representatives of both businesses and nonprofit associations will mainly use a medium level of responsiveness in their responses to online external inquiries (whether a "yes" or "no" answer or a short, specific answer that refers to the request).

3. Method

This study is based on a field experiment conducted among 600 Israeli businesses and 600 Israeli nonprofit associations and a content analysis of 799 organizational replies.

3.1. Sampling frames

In 2009 there were approximately 400,000 businesses in Israel and 25,000 registered nonprofit associations. In the absence of an official and validated directory of Israeli businesses and nonprofit associations, two alternative sampling frames were constructed. The first sampling frame consisted of 32,348 businesses collected from the Israeli Yellow Pages (Dapey-Zahav) (www.d.co.il) and Tguvot (www.t.co.il). The two are similar Web sites, but Tguvot contains user rankings of businesses. The second sampling frame consisted of 6049 Israeli nonprofit associations collected from The Israeli Yellow Pages (www.d.co.il) and other online directories.

Hence, the two sampling frames consisted of businesses and nonprofit associations from all types, fields and sizes; the businesses were held in private ownership and partnerships; they included service providers, manufacturers, and retailers, and they were online businesses as well as brick and mortar ones. Since the sampling frame was very heterogeneous, a large sampling frame (approximately 65% of all the Israeli businesses that maintained a Web site) was used in order to reduce the sampling error (Babbie, 1989).

The sampling frame of nonprofit associations consisted of an alphabetical listing of nonprofit associations from the fields of education, religion, culture and leisure, welfare, and others (sport, immigrant absorption, environment, and philanthropy). The sampling frame consisted of approximately 24% of all Israeli nonprofit associations.

Since sampling frames of both businesses and nonprofit associations contained duplications of various types (such as duplicate names and name variations) the data were "cleaned," and each organization was assigned a single number (Babbie, 1989).

3.2. The sample

A table of random numbers was used in order to select a simple random sample of 600 businesses and 600 nonprofit associations. In order to be included in the sample, a business or a nonprofit association had to meet the following criteria:

A. The organization enables online two-way communication (it contains at least one dialogic element such as e-mail address, contact form, blog, forum, etc.).
B. The organization is oriented toward external-publics. Although public relations professionals work with both internal and external publics, this study focuses on external publics that try to approach the organizations online. Therefore the sample includes organizations that have an interest in two-way communication with customers, members, or volunteers rather than organizations that do not have such an interest in the first place (such as wholesalers or business-to-business).

Hence, the final sample consisted of businesses and nonprofit associations that enable online two-way communication with external publics.

3.3. The characteristics of the sample

The Web sites of 600 businesses and 600 nonprofit associations were randomly sampled, analyzed, and coded. An analysis of the sample revealed that while 93.17% ($n = 559$) of the businesses had a Web site, only 80.83% ($n = 485$) of the nonprofit associations did. Thus, 19.17% ($n = 115$) of the sampled nonprofit association and 6.83% ($n = 41$) of the sampled businesses had only an e-mail address or a contact form hosted by an online directory, portal, or another Web site. The sampled businesses were categorized in one of 14 branches of the Israeli economy, as suggested by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (1993). The categorization of nonprofit associations was based on a study that divided the nonprofit sectors' field of activity into education, welfare, culture and leisure, and religion (The Israeli Center for Third-Sector research, 2005). A comparison among the sampled businesses and nonprofit associations and the data provided by the two sources revealed that the sampled businesses and nonprofit associations were distributed properly among the various branches.

3.4. A field experiment

The first part of the study consisted of a field experiment in which an online request for information was sent to 600 businesses and 600 nonprofit associations. In various studies, a request for information was sent to organizations in order to reveal their responsiveness rates (Barron & Yechiam, 2002; Shani, 2006; Taylor et al., 2001). In this study numerous rhetorical strategies that were reported by other studies to increase the odds for a response were implemented in the request for information (Burke, Joyce, Kim, Anand, & Kraut, 2007; Joyce & Kraut, 2006). Since the same message was sent to all the sampled businesses and nonprofit associations, it had to be general enough to be relevant to all 1200 businesses and nonprofit associations. The request had a subject line ("a question") and the translation from Hebrew is as follows:

Hello,
My name is (name). I saw your e-mail address on the Internet, and I would like to know more about you.
How can I receive additional information?
Thanks,
(Name and Surname)

3.5. Sending procedure

The request for information was sent during a period of two weeks to the 600 businesses and 600 nonprofit associations. The testing days were regular Israeli working days (Sunday–Wednesday) within regular working hours (9:00–16:00, one time zone) and there were no holidays or special national events on those days. On each day, approximately 150 messages were sent to both businesses and nonprofit associations. The messages were sent to each organization's main e-mail address or contact form and they contained the researcher's name, home e-mail address and cell phone number.

Approximately one month after sending the request for information the replies were collected and analyzed. Organizations that did not respond to the message or had e-mail messages that bounced back received the same message again.

3.6. A content analysis

Approximately a month after sending the second message the organizational responses were content analyzed using a novel codebook. The codebook contained various interactive elements (elements that encourage the continuation of an interaction) that were considered by previous researchers to contribute to a higher level of responsiveness (Davis & Holtgraves, 1984; Joyce & Kraut, 2006; Leichty & Esrock, 2001; Patterson, 1994). The codebook assigned one point for each of the following elements when they were present in a response: (a) referring to the request, (b) containing any contact details of the representative and/or the organization, (c) containing a request for information, (d) containing an invitation to visit the organization, (e) containing a suggestion to join a mailing list, and/or a customer/membership club, and/or to volunteer, and/or to receive additional material, (f) containing positive expressions of happiness/appreciation/thankfulness/anticipation (for example: "thank you for approaching us"). Since the codebook contained six elements (A–F) the possible score for each response ranged from 0 to 6 points. In addition, the length of the response (defined in this study as "the number of words in a message") and a suggestion to communicate also/only by phone, were also coded separately.

Two independent coders conducted the content analysis. Intercoder reliability was established using Krippendorff's Alpha index measure (Krippendorff, 1980), considered reliable when Alpha > 0.67, and Holsti's correlation coefficient (Holsti, 1969), considered reliable when Holsti's >0.9. The reliability test revealed that all variables achieved either Krippendorff's Alpha > 0.69 or Holsti's correlations coefficient >0.93.

4. Findings

4.1. Responsiveness rate and the level of responsiveness

The combined responsiveness rate of businesses and nonprofit associations was 66.6% ($n = 799$), categorized as follows: 62.2% ($n = 373$) of the businesses and 71.0% ($n = 426$) of the nonprofit associations responded to the request. A cross tabulation and a Chi-square test revealed that nonprofit associations were significantly more responsive than businesses ($\chi^2(3) = 36.23$, $p < 0.001$).

The 799 responses of businesses and the nonprofit associations were content analyzed using the codebook (Table 1). Six responses were excluded from the analysis since it was impossible to code them (Gibberish). A total score for the level of responsiveness was calculated for the 793 responses by summing up the points each response received for items A–F in the codebook. The possible scores ranged from 0 to 6 points.

The responses differed according to their level of responsiveness. Out of 370 responses of businesses, only two (0.5%) did not refer to the request and were labeled as *non-interactive*. The other 368 (99.5%) responses were labeled as *reactive* or *interactive*, depending on their usage of interactive elements. Out of 370 responses of businesses 150 (40.5%) responses received 0–2 points (low level of responsiveness), 160 (43.2%) responses received 3 points (medium level of responsiveness) and 60 (16.2%) responses received 4–6 points (high level of responsiveness). As for the nonprofit associations, similarly to the businesses, out of 423 responses only 2 (0.5%) did not refer to the request and were labeled as *non-interactive*. The

Table 1
Findings of a content analysis of the responses.

Items from the codebook that measure the level of responsiveness	Percentage of positive responses of businesses ($n = 370$)	Percentage of positive responses of nonprofit associations ($n = 423$)	Chi-square results	(p<) df = 2
A. Refers to the request	99.5%	99.5%	0.01	NS
B. Contains any contact details	94.9%	97.4%	3.48	NS
C. Contains a request for information	30.8%	27.9%	0.81	NS
D. Contains an invitation/suggestion to visit	5.4%	4.7%	0.18	NS
E. Contains a suggestion to join a mailing list	2.2%	11.6%	26.26	(0.001)
F. Contains positive expressions	43.0%	40.9%	0.34	NS

Note: Out of 799 responses 6 cases were "missing".

Table 2
Examples of organizational responses with various levels of responsiveness.

Level of responsiveness	Example of a response
0–2 points (low level)	Hi (Name), You are invited to call me. Sincerely, (contact details)
3 points (medium level)	Hi, You can find additional information in our Web site (Web site address). You are also invited to call me (phone number). I'll be happy to assist, (contact details)
4–6 points (high level)	Hi (Name) and thank you for your query, Our web site address is (Web site address), we send an update every two weeks, and you can subscribe to it here (link to the mailing list). We'll be glad to send you also information by post, if you would like our reports please call me or call (a name). All the best, (contact details)

other 421 (99.5%) were labeled as *reactive or interactive*, depending on their usage of interactive elements. Out of 423 responses of nonprofit associations 166 (39.2%) responses received 0–2 points (low level of responsiveness), 173 (40.9%) responses received 3 points (medium level of responsiveness) and 84 (19.8%) responses received 4–6 points (high level of responsiveness).

Although nonprofit associations received average higher scores ($M = 2.82$, SD = 0.84) than businesses ($M = 2.76$, SD = 0.77), an independent samples t-test did not reveal a significant difference in the level of responsiveness among businesses and nonprofit associations ($t(791) = 1.09$, $p > 0.05$). In addition most responses had a medium level of responsiveness (3 points). The responses usually referred to the request and included at least one contact detail of the organization or the representative, but they were missing many other interactive elements. Most responses did not contain a request for information, an invitation to visit the organization, a suggestion to join a mailing list, a customer/membership club or to receive additional information, and did not include any positive expressions. Except for item E (a suggestion to join a mailing list) in which nonprofit associations scored significantly higher than businesses, for all other items, there were no significant differences among the levels of responsiveness of nonprofit associations and businesses.

An additional Chi-square test was conducted in order to reveal which items from the codebook were responsible for the differences found among organizations that received high scores (4–6 points) and low scores (0–2 points) for their level of responsiveness. The comparison revealed that the main differences among organizations that received high and low scores for their level of responsiveness related to item F (positive expressions) and item C (request for information). Replies with a low level of responsiveness (0–2 points) contain fewer requests for information and positive expressions than replies with a high level of responsiveness (4–6 points).

Table 2 presents a translation from Hebrew of three responses that were received during the field experiment and that differ in their level of responsiveness. It is important to note that the responses may be seen as "equally nice," but the differences that were measured are regarding only their level of responsiveness as presented in the codebook. As for the table, the interactive elements are in bold, and in order not to reveal organizational details, a bracket with a description of the information is provided.

4.2. Additional characteristics

Two additional items were measured in order to compare the level of responsiveness of businesses and nonprofit associations. The first of these items was the length of the response. A cross-tabulation and a Chi-square test revealed that although most organizational responses (56.6%, $n = 449$) contained 0–20 words (short responses), most responses of businesses contained 0–20 words (66.8%, $n = 247$) and most responses of nonprofit associations contained 21+ words (52.2%, $n = 221$). A Chi-square test revealed a significant difference between the length of responses from businesses and nonprofit associations ($\chi^2(1) = 94.16$, $p < 0.001$), with nonprofit associations providing longer responses than businesses. Referring to Joyce and Kraut's (2006) notion that writing a longer post might be a reflection of a pre-existing commitment or willingness to engage, these findings may suggest that nonprofit associations have a higher willingness to engage in a conversation than businesses. Indeed, previous studies suggested that businesses are more "target oriented," while nonprofit associations are more "conversation oriented" (Avidar, 2011; Avidar & Rafaeli, 2009).

The second item explored whether the response contained a suggestion/invitation to continue the interaction only/also by phone. A frequency table revealed that most responses (62.4%, $n = 495$) did not contain such an invitation/suggestion.

Nevertheless, more businesses (43.8%, $n=162$) than nonprofit associations (32.2%, $n=136$) included such an invitation/suggestion in their responses, and a Chi-square test found these differences to be significant ($\chi^2(1)=11.38$, $p<0.01$). Indeed, the importance of the phone and the cellular phone, mainly for businesses, was demonstrated in a previous study revealing that businesses inserted into their Web sites significantly more toll-free telephone numbers than nonprofit associations (Avidar & Rafaeli, 2009). In addition, the current study revealed that the telephone and the cellular numbers were the second most often provided contact details among businesses after the representative's name and surname. It seems as if businesses use their online presence mainly to enable the initiation of an interaction, but as soon as an interaction begins, they prefer to switch to the phone in order to promote a preferable organizational outcome, which is probably an economic transaction. Similar findings were reported by Waters et al. (2009) who found that for-profits use social media mainly to help launch products and strengthen their brands. It is also noticeable that many businesses in this study use the phone and the cell phone in a "traditional" way in the sense that businesses use them simply to *talk* and not as modern devices that may enable them to have a more sophisticated interaction while using Web 2.0, multimedia and social media applications.

4.3. Hypothesis

H1 was supported. A content analysis of 799 organizational replies revealed that both businesses and nonprofit associations used mainly a medium level of responsiveness (3 points); most replies of both businesses and nonprofit associations referred to the request and contained organizational contact details. Most replies did not contain a request for information, an invitation to visit the organization, nor positive expressions. The only variables that scored significantly higher among nonprofit associations were a suggestion/invitation to join a mailing list and the length of the response. In addition, significantly more businesses than nonprofit associations suggested continuing the interaction only/also by phone.

5. Discussion

One purpose of the current study was to clarify the complex relationship between responsiveness and interactivity and to suggest a clearer theoretical distinction between these concepts. The distinction made here between low, medium and high levels of responsiveness resembles a pyramid: the higher the level of the pyramid the higher the contribution of a response to the continuation of an interaction and to OPR building. The basic level of the pyramid contains *non-interactive* responses. These responses do not refer to the request and therefore have a minimum contribution to the continuation of an interaction and OPR. The second level of the pyramid contains *reactive* responses. These responses refer to the request and provide the requested information, although they do not initiate an additional turn and do not encourage the continuation of an interaction. Hence, they have a medium contribution to OPR. The third and highest level of the pyramid contains *interactive* responses. These responses refer to the request and contain various interactive elements that encourage the continuation of an interaction. Hence, they contribute the most to OPR. For example, they contain a request for information, a suggestion to join a mailing list, a suggestion to visit the organization and alike. As can be seen from the pyramid, "interactivity" and "responsiveness" are two different phenomena that have a special connection between them: an interactive response is a highly responsive type of message. In other words, "responsiveness" exists as soon as participant B reacts to participant A's message although the response does not have to be interactive. In order to have "interactivity," however, there must also be responsiveness; otherwise, there is a breakdown in the communicative process. Relating to Miles' (1992) notion that "an interactive communication involves responsiveness" (p. 150), this study argues the converse, that responsiveness does not necessarily involve interactivity (Fig. 1).

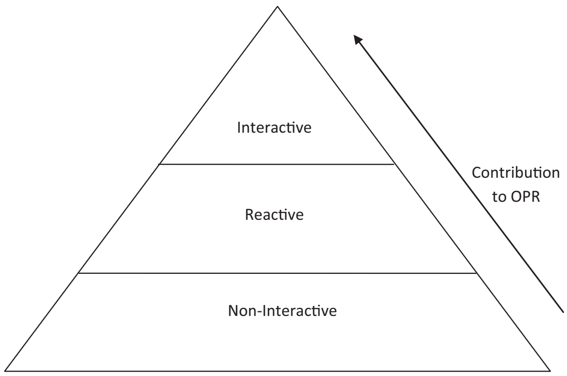

Fig. 1. The responsiveness pyramid.

The current study measured the level of responsiveness as a scale. The findings of the field experiment indicate that the vast majority of responses, both among businesses and nonprofit associations had a low to medium levels of responsiveness (0–2 and 3 points). Most organizational replies referred to the request, provided the requested information and contained two interactive elements; a very few responses did not refer to the request and a small group of responses contained three to five interactive elements. In other words, the comparison of the level of responsiveness among businesses and nonprofit associations revealed that the *type* of organization did not play an important role in the organizational representatives' decision what level of responsiveness to use. The small number (18.1%) of responses that contained a high level of responsiveness (4–6 points) might suggest that representatives from both organizational types either were not interested in using interactive responses or were not aware of the dialogic and relational potential of the organizational responses. Indeed, in both organizational types most responses provided the requested information but did not put an effort in encouraging the continuation of an interaction. Thus, these representatives actually signaled to the sender of the message that from the organizational perspective the request for information was just a single transaction and not a part of an ongoing relationship. This conduct stands opposite to the perception of relationship-building as an ongoing process of mutual adaption and contingent responses (Broom et al., 1997; Grunig & Huang, 2000). Of course, organizations have to identify their most strategic publics and prioritize their communication efforts (Hon & Grunig, 1999), but when a potential customer or member approaches an organization voluntarily, a minimum effort is required from an organizational representative, that already took the time to respond, to promote OPR building by asking the sender to join a mailing list or to visit the organization.

Referring to Kelleher and Miller (2006) the author of this study argues that *responsiveness* and *interactivity* should be seen as part of online relational maintenance strategies. According to Kelleher and Miller (2006) there are two key online relational maintenance strategies. One is *communicated relational commitment* and the other is *conversational human voice*. According to the researchers these strategies significantly correlate with trust, satisfaction, commitment and control mutuality. Kelleher (2009) suggests that communicated relational commitment indicates a type of communication in which members of an organization work to express their commitment to building and maintaining a relationship. Indeed, interactivity includes several elements that resemble the item index suggested by Kelleher and Miller (2006) as indicator of the two relational maintenance strategies: (a) invitation to conversation, (b) The organization communicates its desire to continue to maintain and/or build a relationship with the sender, and (c) The organization implies that the relationship has a future/is a long-term commitment. Interactivity combines several characters of both communicated relational commitment and conversational human voice. When an organizational representative uses interactive elements in his response, he actually invites the sender of the query to continue the interaction and to build relationships. Indeed, other researchers suggested that interactivity is an important strategy in online communication that leads to positive relational outcomes (Kelleher, 2009; Rafaeli, 1988; Sundar et al., 2003; Walther et al., 2005) and may foster dialog (Bruning, Dials, & Shirka, 2008; Gronstedt, 1997). Since interactivity requires responsiveness, responsiveness should also be seen as part of the online relational maintenance strategies (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

The findings of this study indicate that most organizational representatives do not promote the continuation of an interaction with a potential customer or member that approaches the organization voluntarily, and thus do not encourage OPR building. The author of this study argues that the burden of relationship building should be placed on organizational representatives: it is up to organizations to enhance individuals' perceptions of their mutual relationships and to move to closer interactive and dialogic communication. Hence, it is important that organizational representatives understand the relational potential of interactive responses. They have to understand how to use more interactive elements in their responses and to improve their relationship maintenance strategies in order to promote relational outcomes and OPR building. Future research may further develop the responsiveness pyramid by exploring how organizational representatives and online publics perceive the potential contribution of various levels of responsiveness to OPR building.

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