JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

HYPOTHESIS OF INDIVIDUALISM AND EQUALITY?

CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS IN AMERICAN ORGANIZATIONAL MEDIA RELEASES

Master's thesis

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1 **JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO**

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Tiivistelmä

Aiemman tutkimuksen perustella organisaatioiden ulkoinen viestintä heijastaa amerikkalaisia kulttuurisia piirteitä. Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten nämä kulttuuriset piirteet heijastuvat tietyn amerikkalaisen organisaation, The Coca-Company, nettipohjaisissa mediatiedotteissa ja pohtia niissä sisältyvien diskurssien vaikutusta lukijan maailmankuviin.

Tässä kulttuurintutkimukseen perustuvassa tutkielmassa käytettiin kulttuurisen tranferenssin (cultural transference) lähestymistapaa selvittämään, miten tekstit pystyvät heijastamaan kulttuurisia piirteitä, kuten arvoja, normeja ja käyttäytymismalleja. Lisäksi vaikuttavuuden tutkimuksen näkökulmaa (effects research) käytettiin havainnoimaan diskurssien potentiaalisia vaikutuksia lukijoihin ja heidän maailmankuvaansa. Tutkimuskysymyksiksi muodostuivat: (1) mitkä kulttuuriset piirteet ovat havaittavissa mediatiedotteista? Ja (2) minkälaisia vaikutuksia mediatiedotteiden diskursseilla voi olla lukijan maailmankuvaan ja samalla jopa kulttuurimuutokseen?

Tutkielman aineisto koostui kohdeorganisaation kotisivujen mediaosiossa julkaistuista 24 mediatiedotteesta. Tutkimusmetodeina käytettiin teorialähtöistä sisällön analyysiä. Pääteoriana tutkielmassa käytettiin Althenin (1988) mallia viidestä amerikkalaisen kulttuurin erityispiirteestä: (1) korkea individualismi; (2) tasa-arvoisuuden painotus; (3) tulevaisuusorientaatio; (4) tarve toimintaan ja suoritukseen; sekä (5) suoruus ja itsevarmuus (Okigbo, Martin & Amienyi 2005: 315).

Tulosten perusteella mediatiedotteissa heijastuivat monet Althenin mallin amerikkalaisen kulttuurin piirteet. Erityisesti tarve toimintaan ja suoritukseen sekä diskurssien suoruus ja itsevarmuus olivat selkeästi havaittavissa. Toisaalta yllättävää olivat kollektiivisten piirteiden taso verrattuna individualistisiin piirteisiin sekä differentiaationäkökulma tasa-arvonäkökulmasta poiketen. Näillä ristiriitaisilla arvoheijastumilla voidaan nähdä olevan potentiaalista vaikutusta lukijoiden maailmankuvaan. Yhteenvetona tutkielma paljastaa mielenkiintoisia kulttuurisen trasferenssin tuloksia mediatiedotteista ja jatkotutkimukselle olisi tarvetta erityisesti tiedotteiden tavoitteiden vaikutuksen näkökulmasta.

Asiasanat

American culture, cultural transference, effects research, organizational press releases

Säilytyspaikka

Muita tietoja

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Abstract

According to previous research, American cultural values are reflected in the external communication of organizations. This study aimed to explore how cultural features are reflected in a specific American organization's, the Coca-cola Company's, web based media releases and to hypothesize what kind of effects the discourses could have on the viewers' perceptions of the world.

In this cultural studies oriented research, the notion of cultural transference was adopted to explore the way texts can carry and represent cultural features, such as values, norms and behaviour models. In addition, effects research was adopted to reveal the texts' potential effect on people's worldviews. Specific research questions included: (1) What American cultural characteristics (values, norms or behavior models) are represented in the discourse of media releases? And (2) what kind of general judgments can be made from these representations of the North American culture on the public's perception of "normality" (cultural change phenomena)?

The data consisted of 24 media news releases posted in the year 2009 on the target company's official website's Press Centre section targeted to North American press and audience. Theoretically based content analysis was used to study the data. Althen's (1988) five characteristics of American culture were used as the main theoretical background in the study: (1) high level of individualism; (2) emphasis on equality; (3) future orientations; (4) desire for action and achievement; and (5) directness and assertiveness (Okigbo, Martin & Amienyi 2005: 315).

According to the study findings, the media releases reflected many of Althen's model's American cultural characteristics at least on an average level. Especially desire for action and achievement and directness and assertiveness were strongly transferred in the discourse. On the other hand, surprisingly the results revealed more collectivist values instead of individualist values and a differentiation perspective was emphasized instead of equality. The contradictory values could have potential effect on viewers' cultural perceptions. In conclusion, the results reveal interesting cultural transference aspects of media releases which might need future research especially from the release objective perspective.

Keywords
American culture, cultural transference, effects research, organizational press releases

Depository

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1 INTRODUCTION

This study aims to explore how cultural features are represented in organizational external communication, more specifically media releases published by a specific American organization. The field of study chosen for the research is cultural studies and qualitative textual analysis. The main method used in the study is theoretically based content analysis.

Cultural studies is a young academic field which strives to explain and discover the ways in which meaning is generated, communicated, and produced through various practices, such as texts, within a given culture (Wikipedia 2010). Representation formation is seen as one of the most important strands of cultural studies and cultural formation in general. Representing something can generally refer to describing or portraying something in a certain way or it can be connected to symbolizing or substituting something with another (Hall 1997: 15). When people project their concepts, ideas and feelings with signs and symbols, different meanings are produced and consequently representations of culture are formed. Cultural studies is also concerned with the effects and consequences of representations. Shortly, discourse and representations formed through language and meaning formation can have the power of changing cultural practices, such as behavior regulation, attitudes and values. This phenomenon of cultural studies is also called cultural change. (Hall 1997.)

The object of the study will be an internationalized American organization, The Coca-Cola Company. The data of the study consist of 24 media news releases posted in the year 2009 on The Coca-Cola Company's official website's Press Center section targeted to North American press and audience. In the year 2009 altogether 74 media releases were posted on the website, segments including: Corporate, North America, Europe, Pacific, and Eurasia and Africa. By choosing only the North American targeted media releases as study objects helped the study to concentrate on a specific national cultural group and form a unified data for the study.

The Coca-Cola Company was incorporated in September 1919. The company distributes and markets nonalcoholic beverage concentrates and syrups consisting of sparkling and still beverages. The company manufactures these beverage concentrates and syrups and sells them to bottling and canning operations and also manufactures finished beverages which it sells to distributors. The Coca Cola Company owns licenses to approximately 500 brands. The most recognized of them is Coca-Cola and others include, for example, Diet Coke, Fanta and Sprite. (The Coca-Cola Company 2009: 1.)

The Coca-Cola Company's products are sold in over 200 countries. Operating areas include Eurasia and Africa, Europe, Latin America, North America and the Pacific. The product offering varies according to localized consumer demands. The worldwide headquarters of the company is located in Atlanta, Georgia. In addition, offices and operational units are located all over the world, mainly in North America. In the year 2008, the company had 92,400 employees. (The Coca-Cola Company 2009: 1-4, 12.) An American organization was selected as the study object because of the researcher's particular interest towards American culture. The Coca-Cola Company was specifically selected because it is considered to be a very American organization despite its internationalization. In addition, the magnitude of the company's operations and amount and quality of communications were seen as positive contributions to the study.

According to previous cultural and media research, American cultural values are reflected in the external communication of organizations. Especially individualism, low context communication patterns and action and achievement values have been noticed to be visible in popular magazine advertisements. (Okigbo, Martin & Amienyi 2005: 312.) The starting point of this research is that cultural values can be reflected, similarly, in all organizational releases, such as media releases, and that this is an important aspect of cultural studies whish has not gained much attention in earlier studies.

Two perspectives of social research, cultural transference and effects research, have similarities with cultural studies and are therefore included in this study. Cultural transference means the way texts can carry and represent cultural features, such as values, norms and behavior models of a specific unit, such as a country, so that they can be detected from the discourse of different texts (Okigbo et al. 2005). Effects research, on the other hand, strives to answer the question: "What do the media do to the individual?" (Jensen and Rosengren 2005: 54-55, 60). In other words, effects research focuses on how texts affect people's perceptions of what is considered to be normal. As it turns out, these cultural research perspectives are convergent, first, with the cultural studies representation formation point of view and, secondly, with its concern with the effects and consequences of the representations.

In general, the study of cultural transference and its effects regarding organizational texts is important and interesting because organizational cultures are significantly influenced by national cultures (Jung, Su, Baeza & Hong 2008: 625) and organizational cultures can similarly influence national cultures: texts and their discourse are at the same time a result of culture and also can potentially transform culture. Most of the previous cultural transference research on aspects of American culture and organizational communication has mainly focused on commercial aspects and advertisements. In this thesis the focus will be on media releases which are very informative and potentially reflect the organization culture as well as the dominant culture of the society. Unlike the advertisement materials studied in previous research, media releases do not only have a commercial objective. Instead they have different communicative objectives which make the research very interesting.

Nowadays one of the most common ways of informing the media, and at the same time the whole general public, of organizational matters is through media releases. Their objective is to inform the public of certain issues related to the organization and also usually to increase positive images of the organization. (Wells and Spinks 1999: 247.) Media releases can include information, for

example, about: organizational changes, projects, production or strategy related changes; changes in personnel; marketing information; research findings; and reports. (Juholin 2004: 184-203.) The media, nevertheless, has certain criteria for evaluating what kinds of news have enough interest value to be published. These news criteria include, for example: topicality, importance, interest value, drama level, newness, humanity, and human interest. (Juholin 2004: 186-187.) Thus, organizational media releases have differing objectives and criteria compared to advertisement and are, therefore, an interesting study objective when it comes to representations and cultural formation.

Althen's model of American cultural characteristics is adopted in the study to research the cultural representation in the media releases. The reason for choosing this particular theory is that it is specifically based on studies of American cultural features in publications, in this case advertisements. Althen (1988) divides American cultural characteristics in five dimensions: (1) high level of individualism; (2) emphasis on equality; (3) future orientations; (4) desire for action and achievement; and (5) directness and assertiveness (Okigbo et al. 2005: 315).

In conclusion, the study aims to explore whether the discourse of organizational media releases are reflective of American cultural features and to reveal the potential cultural representations' possible effect on the viewer. Specific research questions include: (1) What American cultural characteristics (values, norms or behavior models) are represented in the discourse of media releases? And (2) what kind of general judgments can be made from these representations of the North American culture on the public's perception of "normality" (cultural change phenomena)?

First in the study relevant background information to this study and its objectives is investigated and discussed. The second chapter concentrates on clarification of culture and national culture as study objects, cultural transference and effects research as methods of studying cultural phenomena. The third chapter goes deeper into the study subjects discussing American

cultural features, introducing different cultural theories and discussing their potential to be used in the study and, finally, looking at media releases and their functions as tools of organizational communication. Second, the methodology of the study is revealed. This section includes research objectives and questions, introduction of the data being used and introduction of the research methods. Third, the results of the study findings are presented and a summary of the results is provided. After this a more in depth discussion of the results is made by searching an answer to the research questions and, finally, conclusions of the whole study are made with future study possibilities.

2 CULTURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES

The present chapter concentrates on the theoretical framework of the study. Firstly, the concept of culture and the notion of national culture are discussed. Secondly, the focus will be on the main study field, cultural studies and its objectives. Thirdly, two related cultural research perspectives are introduced: cultural transference and effects research.

Culture and national culture

Firstly, it is important to discuss the meaning of culture. Culture is generally seen as a very complex matter to define. There are various different conceptualizations of culture and the meanings associated to culture vary from one field of study to another. In general, many scholars nevertheless agree that culture can be explained through human behavior, values, norms and basic assumptions of the world. (Groeschl and Doherty 2000: 12-14.) Graig, Douglas and Bennett (2009: 94) describe culture as a sum of factors, such as values, norms, daily used objects and communication, which affect people's attitudes and behavior. According to them, one of the most accepted definitions of culture is from the 19th century by Tylor: "culture or civilization is that complex whole which includes, knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [sic] as a member of society" (Tylor 1881: 1, as quoted by Graig et al. 2009: 94). In addition, culture is understood shortly by Yeniyurt and Townsend (2003: 379) as "a shared set of values and beliefs".

This study is viewed from the social science context. As Hall (1997: 2) puts it, culture refers to distinctive was of life and shared values of communities, people, nations and social groups. For example, Spitzberg and Changon (2009: 6-7) perceive culture as something concerned with "enduring yet evolving intergenerational attitudes, values, beliefs, rituals/customs, and behavioral patterns into which people are born but that is structurationally created and

maintained by people's ongoing actions." This understanding also corresponds with the cultural studies perspective of this study.

According to some scholars, culture can exist on various levels. One layer is the national culture which is defined by geographical boundaries. In addition to this, there are also many subcultures such as industry cultures, occupational cultures, corporate cultures, religious cultures and many more. (Groeschl & Doherty 2000: 14-16.)

Some scholars nowadays point out that more focus in cultural research and communication research should be placed on smaller units of analysis than national units such as countries (e.g. Blodgett, Bakir and Rose 2008: 339). Some scholars, on the other hand, agree that national cultures can reflect the cultural aspects of a certain area or a country as a whole. Nevertheless, there are always some problematic aspects in studying national cultural phenomena. These include, firstly, the difficulty of defining a nation because people might be affected by various cultures in the global world, and, secondly, the fact that national cultures usually include various subcultures. Thirdly, cultures can even be forcefully produced. Forcefully produced cultures occur, for example, during colonialism or war, when a new culture takes over the existing ones. In these cases it is possible that some of the previously existing culture remains or the existing culture blends with the new one. (Groeschl & Doherty 2000: 14-16.)

Despite these problems of doing research which concentrates on national culture, as it is not possible to include all the subcultures in this study, national culture can be seen as a sufficiently representative layer of culture. Yeniyurt and Townsend (2003: 379) support this statement by saying that national culture can be seen as a good representation of a certain culture because among people living in a country, there has to be some common agreement about values and behavior for them to survive. Research has revealed that, even in countries where there are several subgroups and cultures, there are various unifying factors. Nations, for example, share languages, histories, and religions (Yeniyurt and Townsend 2003: 379.) As a starting point to this study it is

presumed that nations reflect certain unifying cultures and that people living in a certain geographical area perceive values, norms and behavior models in a similar way. Consequently, as the study is focused on the North American targeted media releases published by the Coca-Cola Company (although a global company), the cultural audience can be seen as a unified group suitable for the study.

In addition, globalization and its effect on communication and people's perceptions of reality have been discussed by scholars. For example, according to Yeniyurt and Townsend (2003: 377-378), some scholars nowadays argue that globalization has homogenized the markets, meaning that consumers in many places all over the world have the same preferences. Yeniyurt and Townsend present an opposing view. According to them, empirical evidence shows that national culture still has a strong effect on people's preferences and this divergence is visible especially among industrialized countries. (Yeniyurt and Townsend 2003: 377-378.) These even more so validates the viewpoint of national culture in the study.

Cultural studies, meaning formation and representations

Cultural studies is an academic field which has its roots in critical theory and Marxist literary criticism. It generally concerns with the political nature of contemporary culture and its research concentrate on how a particular medium or message relates to matters like ideology, social class, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, and/or gender. Cultural studies is an extremely holistic field of study: it combines, for example, social theory, political theory, history, philosophy, literary theory, media theory, film and video studies, communication studies and political economy to study cultural phenomena in various societies. In conclusion, cultural studies strives to explain and discover the ways in which meaning is generated, communicated, and produced through various practices, beliefs, institutions, and political, economic, or social structures within a given culture. (Wikipedia 2010.)

According to Barker (2008: 5-6) cultural studies is a discursive formation which concentrates on ways of speaking about objects, concepts, ideas and concerns and their meanings. More specifically "cultural studies is concerned with all those practices, institutions and systems of classification through which they are inculcated in a population particular values, beliefs, competences, routines of life and habitual forms of conduct." (Bennet 1998:28, according to Barker 2008: 5-6.)

Hall (1997: 1) views representation formation as one of the most crucial "moments" of culture formation. The "circuit of culture" (Model 1) depicts the overall formation of culture (du Gay, Hall et al. 1997, according to Hall 1997:1). As is visible in the circuit model, representation produced via language use is with other aspects, identity, production, consumption and regulation, a very central moment in the production of culture.

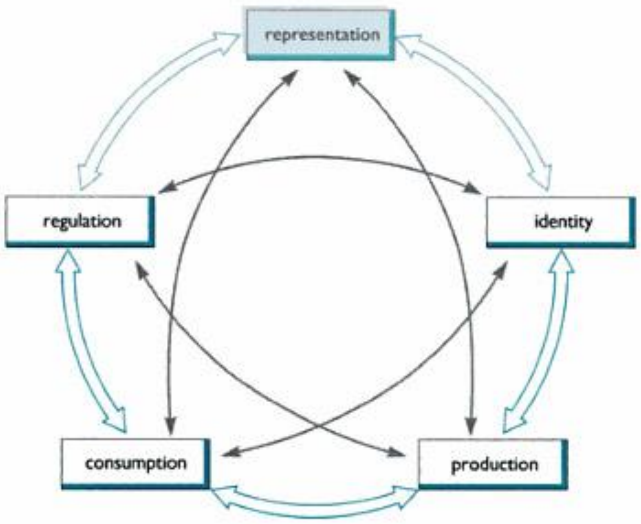

Figure 1. The circuit of culture. Du Gay, Hall et al. (1997), according to Hall (1997:1)

From the cultural studies perspective, culture (shared social meanings) are generated through language and meaning (Barker 2008: 7). In other words, shared meanings, produced via the medium of language, are the foundations of culture. More specifically, according to Hall (1997: 1), "language operates as a representational system" – with signs and symbols, people project their concepts, ideas and feelings and therefore produce meanings. Frameworks and

contexts guide the formation of meaning. In addition, the way things are represented, for example words, the way stories are told, emotions attached and classifications made, have an effect on meaning formation and understanding of the message. Meanings also guide the formation of identities. (Hall 1997: 3-4.) It is, nevertheless, important to keep in mind that cultural studies takes into consideration that meanings are not understood similarly by all audiences but instead actual meanings are always produced in the interplay between the producer and readers (Barker 2008: 11).

One of the most central strands of cultural studies is representations. Representing something can generally refer to describing or portraying something in a certain way or it can be connected to symbolizing or substituting something with another (Hall 1997: 15). According to Hall (1997: 1) representations are the central practices that produce culture. They connect meaning and language to culture and answer the question of how language is used to represent the world. (Hall 1997: 1.) Barker further explains that representation studies concentrate on the way "the world is socially constructed and represented to and by us in meaningful ways." Cultural representations are in a way embedded in all kinds of sounds, texts, objects, TV-programs. Thus, they are very context oriented. (Barker 2008: 7-8.)

Cultural studies is also concerned with the effects and consequences of representations. It examines the way language and representations produce meanings which are connected with power regulated conduct and generally affect culture, behavior and values of people and groups. (Hall 1997: 3-4.) In other words, Discourse and representations formed through it can be thought to have the power of changing cultural practices, such as behavior regulation, attitudes and values. This phenomenon of cultural studies is also called cultural change. The cultural representation do not, nevertheless, produce a so called "truth" of things but truths at a certain context, setting or period of time. (Hall 1997: 46-49.)

Cultural studies usually revolve around the concepts of ideology, hegemony and cultural negotiation. From the Marxist point of view, the groups that own

the means of producing media texts control the means of shaping the dominant ideology of the society. Another viewpoint is the formation of ideologies through complex social negotiations. In other words, media is seen as a playground where representations are in a way negotiated by the sender(s) and the readers. In the end, this negotiation defines what is taken as "real" in relation to cultural values and identities. (Hall 1997: 347-348.)

In conclusion, "representation is the production of meaning through language". Representation is the way people use language to refer to real world and imaginary world objects, people and events. Consequently, belonging to the same culture, in the end suggests, that people have quite similar conceptual maps which helps them to understand each other because they interpret the world in a somewhat similar way. In addition, representations are thought to have the power of changing cultural practices, such as behavior regulation, attitudes and values and this phenomena is generally called cultural change. (Hall 1997: 16-18, 46-49.)

Cultural studies is a wide approach in itself, but there are also other approaches to culture which view and research culture from similar premises and objectives. These include cultural transference and effects research which are presented in the next subsection.

Cultural transference and effects research

Previous research supports the view that national cultures can have an effect on organizational culture because of collective perceptions of reality in a certain geographical area. In addition, organizations are thought to have, to some extent, an effect on the national culture. There is, nevertheless, disagreement among scholars about the magnitude of the effect. (Groeschl & Doherty 2000: 15-16.) Consequently, it could be argued that since organizations can manifest cultures, also their publications can manifest cultural representations and affect readers of these publications. For example, Zhang and Neelankavil (1997: 135) state that "cultural values influence and are influenced by advertising".

Previous research on representations in organizational releases has concentrated, for example, on television commercials and print advertisements. Thus, the studies have focused on visual forms, signs and symbols, and in the case of advertisements also textual elements. According to research, advertisements are structured to reflect the dominant values of the society. This is due to the fact that copywriters who make the ads are guided by audience expectations instead of trying to copy what they consider to be reality. Magazine advertisements therefore have the potential of both reflecting cultural values and influencing the values of the readers. For example, American cultural values can be reflected in organizational external communication. Especially individualism, low context communication patterns and action and achievement values have been noticed to be visible in popular magazine advertisements. (Okigbo et al. 2005: 312-314.)

In this study cultural transference is understood to mean the way texts can carry and represent cultural features such as values, norms and behavior models of a specific unit, such as a country, so that they can be detected from the discourse of different texts. Texts can, thus, reflect the values of the community. In other words, culture has the potential to be transferred into (organizational) communication artifacts.

In addition to transference, many researchers have discovered that this transferred culture can influence the receiver's perception of "normality" (Okigbo et al. 2005: 313). Normality here refers to the way people perceive the world and how the world should be according to them. Gee (2005, 12), for example, uses phrases, such as normal, right, good, correct, proper, the way things are and the way things ought to be, to describe the communicative function of language in forming people's perception of how the world is taken to be. This view is similar to the cultural studies perspective of ideology formation in the society where media is seen as a setting where complicated negotiation between information senders and receivers defines what is taken as "real" in relation to cultural values and identities. (Hall 1997: 347-348).

As stated in the previous chapter, cultural studies is also concerned with the effects and consequences of representations. Jensen and Rosengren (2005: 54-55, 60) introduce effects research as one of the important research fields of mass communication. Consequently, the idea of effects research can be also implemented in this study because it is especially related to the context and target of the study. Effects research strives to answer the question: "What do the media do to the individual?" There are differing views on and conclusions about the strength and length of the media effects and the passiveness of the viewer. For example, the effects can be strong or weak, ranging from short-term to long-term and the viewer can be seen to be a passive receiver of information or a selective individual. One variety of the Effects Research is the agenda-setting function of media. (Jensen and Rosengren 2005: 54-55, 60.) It has been noticed that printed media can have an effect on people's perceptions of the importance of issues. Media has the power of setting certain issues to the public agenda and therefore can direct the thoughts of the public towards these issues. This phenomenon is called the media's agenda-setting function. (Harris, Kolovos & Lock 1999: 1117 and Fombrun & van Riel 2004: 14, 114.) In this study it is, consequently, presumed that organizational communication in the form of different texts and discourses can reflect values, norms and behavior models and simultaneously affect people's perception of the way the world ought to be.

When considering the effects of different discourse on people, it should be noted that the receivers of information are not always considered to be just objective receivers but instead subjective editors of meanings. Empirical studies nowadays have started to concentrate on how different audiences actually in real life use and interpret various texts. Audiences are, thus, viewed as designers of the meanings of the texts. (Burn and Parker 2003: 65.)

Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2003: 119) describe discourse shortly as "language in use". According to van Dijk, individuals' interpretations of discourses are dependent on their own cognitive processing. People are not just objective receivers of discourse but instead subjective processers of the discourse

features. In other words, people formulate their own meanings of how the world is presented to them. Discourse comprehension and understanding is based on individuals' past experiences, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and values, as well as future expectations. The subjective understanding takes place both on the level of single discourses, such as concepts, and on the higher level of themes, topics, events and episodes. For example, readers of news stories process the discourse according to their past experience, knowledge and beliefs and according to the new information presented on the news content. (van Dijk 1982: 35-38.) According to Gee (1999: xii), for example, people easily create their own meanings to things, such as discourse, based on their cultures, identities and fears instead of pursuing to interpret the actual meanings or objectives of the sender of the message. Because of this individual processing, it is difficult to study the effects of cultural transference on individuals without actually studying the individuals' beliefs after processing the discourse. Nevertheless, many researchers have found it valuable enough to speculate on the potential effects of cultural transference on people.

As a conclusion of this chapter and a starting point to this research, it can be argued that dominant cultural features can be reflected in organizational communication. These reflections of culture could also be described as types of cultural representations. Vice versa, this communication can have an effect on the receiver's perceptions of cultural norms, values and behavior models, in other words, perception of "normality". It should be, nevertheless, noted that individuals perceive the communication differently. American culture, for example, can be viewed as a very varied and complex culture. According to many theories, there are nevertheless unifying factors which are representative of the whole nation and these are discussed in the next chapter. Overall in the next section we focus on the American culture, cultural theories and media release communication aspects.

3 DEEPER INSIGHT INTO STUDY TARGETS

The third chapter aims to focus more deeply on the study targets. Firstly, American cultural features are presented. Secondly, cultural theories are introduced and their relevance to the study is discussed. Finally, media releases as tools of organizational communication are conceptualized.

American culture

The United States of America is the fourth largest country in the world. It is composed of 48 states and has a population of over 263 million inhabitants. Nearly all citizens in America are descendants of immigrants. On average 75 percent of the population are of European descendent, about 12 percent are African Americans, 9 percent are Hispanic Americans, 3 percent are Asians and Pacific Islanders, and less than one percent are Native Americans. (Engel 2001: 8-10.)

Although the population in the USA is enormously varied, there are still some common features which Americans usually agree upon themselves and can even be said to be proud of. Engel, for example, describes Americans from a very non-academic perspective in the following manners. Firstly, Americans value individuality and "individual freedom" very highly. They perceive themselves more as individuals rather than as a part of some community, such as a family, religion or organization. (Engel 2001: 18-23, 74.) Zhang and Neelankavil (1997: 134, 136) also support this view by estimating USA as a highly individualistic culture in which people favor independent relationships to each other and value individual goal achievement. (ibid.) Secondly, Americans also believe in each person's equal chance of achieving their goals in life. This has also been called the "American dream". In addition to equality, Americans also value democracy and perceive too much intervening from officials as threatening. When it comes to communication, Americans tend to be very direct and forward. In other words, communication manners do not

change much according to context and Americans prefer to know the other person's intentions, even when good manners are at stake. (Engel 2001: 18-23, 74.)

In addition, Willower (1994, 17) points out that in a Western democracy, as the United States, schools are meant to teach young people the dominant values of the society. According to Willower, these values in the United States include tolerance, honesty, co-operation, responsibility, willingness to work hard and respect for the rights of the individual. (Willower 1994: 17.)

In conclusion, due to centuries of immigration, the USA is a melting pot of people from all over the world. Nevertheless, in spite of increasing multiculturalism, common cultural values are still shared and have an effect on publications in the American society. (Okigbo et al. 2005: 315.) In the next subsection both general and more specific cultural theories will be introduced and their relevance to the study explained.

Cultural models and categorizations

There are many theories generated to understand cultural differences worldwide. It is important to explore different general and specific theories to be able to clarify the theory field and also find a suitable theory to be used in this particular study.

Firstly, Engel (2001: 7) describes cultural differences from a somewhat non-academic point of view. In his comparison of values across cultures, Engel divides value aspects into two categories presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Engel's (2001: 7) value comparison across cultures

One Culture	Another Culture
• Values change • Favors specific communication • Values analytical linear problem solving • Places emphasis on individual performance • Considers verbal communication most important • Focuses on task and product • Places emphasis on promoting differing views • Emphasizes competition • Prefers informal tone • Is flexible about schedules	• Values tradition • Favors ambiguous communication • Values intuitive, lateral problem solving • Places emphasis on group performance • Considers context and nonverbal communication most important • Focuses on relationship and process • Places emphasis on harmony and consensus • Emphasizes collaboration • Prefers formal tone • Emphasizes rigid adherence to schedules

Engel's value comparison across cultures serves as a good starting point and an example of differing views on cultural value differences. It presents the variety of differences between cultures in everyday communication and collaboration. More specific theories, nevertheless, need to be considered for this study.

Secondly, as Engel's theory is very general, Hofstede's and Trompennaars and Hampden-Turner's theories regard specifically national cultural factors. Trompennaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) describe national culture according to seven dimensions which include:

1. Universalism/Particulism. Universalism refers to people's habit of looking for general rules while particulism relies on exceptions.

2. Analysing culture/Culture with integrating orientation. The first emphasizes detailed analysis of things while the former emphasizes big pictures.
3. Individualism/Communitarianism
4. Inner directed/Outer-directed
5. Time as sequence/Time as synchronization
6. Achieved status/Ascribed status
7. Equality/Hierarchy (Jung et al. 2008: 623.)

Hofstede's (1980) cultural study, on the other hand, comprised of over 80,000 workers in 70 countries. The study aimed at identifying distinct work-related cultural dimensions. (Garcia-Sordo & Baren 1999: 315.) The cultural framework based on this study has been widely used to understand cultural differences, for example, in economic research. The cultural framework consists of four dimensions:

(1) Individualism/Collectivism

(2) Uncertainty Avoidance

(3) Masculinity/Femininity

(4) Power Distance (Blodgett, Bakir and Rose 2008: 340.)

The first dimension is **individualism/collectivism**. In individualistic cultures people place personal goals and self-interest before group interest. In contrast, in collective cultures people respect traditions and place group interest before their own because they see themselves as a part of a certain extended family. (Blodgett et al. 2008: 340.)

The second dimension is **uncertainty avoidance**. The dimension explains the amount of uncertainty and ambiguousness people can face without feeling uncomfortable and threatened. Belief systems, for example are a way to increase conformity and decrease insecurity. In high level uncertainty

avoidance cultures people value security, feel the need for rules and do not like deviations from the norm. In low uncertainty avoidance cultures people are more risk oriented and do not need strict rules. (Blodgett et al. 2008: 340.)

The third dimension is **masculinity/femininity**. The dimension explains male and female role domination in the society. In masculine societies value is placed on success, money and accomplishment which are considered male features. In feminine societies emphasis is placed on caring for others and quality of life. (Blodgett et al. 2008: 340.)

The fourth dimension is **power distance.** The dimension describes power distribution in organizations. People in cultures of higher levels of power distance hesitate to disagree with their superiors and tend to follow norms and codes. People in cultures of low power distance feel more free to disagree with their superiors because they are not as constrained by status, power and position. (Blodgett et al. 2008: 340.)

Thirdly, Hofstede's model has received some criticism due to its lack of representativeness, suitability and accuracy of presenting some cultures, and for example, its applicability to smaller units of study, such as subcultures (Blodgett et al. 2008: 340). Althen, on the other hand, has studied particularly American cultural features in publications. According to Althen (1988) there are at least five dominating cultural features present in American publications:

(1) high level of individualism;

(2) emphasis on equality;

(3) future orientations;

(4) desire for action and achievement; and

(5) directness and assertiveness (Okigbo et al. 2005: 315).

Individualism is a strong feature of American people. Where collectivist cultures are dominated by consensus-building decision-making and group

harmony, in individualistic cultures individual goal achievement is the usual goal. (Okigbo et al. 2005: 316.)

Equality is also important to Americans. Equality studies concentrate, for example, on power distance and masculinity dimensions. Power distance measures power relations in societies. For example, in the USA power distances in the work place are not great because the culture encourages subordinates to voice their differening opinions to their superiors. Masculinity dimensions, on the other hand, compare the gender roles in different cultures. Low masculinity cultures, such as Norway, encourage and give women freedom to take non-traditional roles. (Okigbo et al. 2005: 316.) According to Hofstede's (1983) conclusions, USA is considered to be on an average level in the masculinity dimension comparison (Okigbo et al. 2005: 316). From the perspective of this study, this means that average levels of equality results can be considered to support the validity of the theory when compared to the results.

When it comes to time management, Americans are argued to have **a future time orientation.** This means that they place more value on future action (what will happen) instead of past events (what has happened). Hence, tradition is not strongly emphasized. Discussions about time usually refer to the present or the future. In cultural artifacts this can be visible through features such as newness, creativity and modernity of topics, themes or phrases. (Okigbo et al. 2005: 316.)

Desire for action and achievement are high in American culture and people are commonly interested in immediate improvements in the quality of life. Time is viewed as a valuable resource and, consequently, deadlines and schedules are taken seriously. People are in the end judged by their measurable achievements. (Okigbo et al. 2005: 317.)

Americans also tend to be **direct and assertive** in their discourse. Hall (1973) describes USA as a low-context society (Okigbo et al. 2005: 317). In low-context societies interpersonal communication is usually direct and explicit. These low-context features can also be visible in other communication means in addition

to interpersonal communication. For example, low-context communication is present in advertisements when they include a lot of information and they are factual, analytic and logical. (Okigbo et al. 2005: 317.)

Althen's model of the five American cultural features serves as a good basis for this research because it is particularly representative of American cultural features which is the research target of this study. The model will especially be used in the content analysis of the media releases In other words, the model is used to categorize cultural representations visible in the release texts.

The theory will be used to research organizational texts. Organizational communication and its one mode, internet based media releases, differ from other human communication, among other things, by their technological, design, objectives and news criteria. In the next subsection media releases as tools of organizational communication are discussed in more depth.

Media releases as tools of organizational communication

According to Burn and Parker (2003, 8) digital media is generally different from other media such as television and movies: it looks different, can be re-designed at any point, is continuous and has its own cultural conventions with certain rules and conventions. In addition, according to Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2005: 165), all information online is guided by the author(s)' political decisions of including and excluding information. Accordingly, there is no "neutrality" online, only decisions made by the presenters of information. (Thurlow et al. 2003, 165.)

Almost all organizations have the need to inform their surroundings about their actions. This information sharing is communication. Organizational communication is a term used to describe all communicative functions and actions directed by organized units (work community, organization, company or any organized society) to their stakeholders when trying to achieve their goals. The primary division of organizational communication is done according to internal and external audiences. Accordingly, internal communication is

targeted at employees, investors and employers and external communication to clients, co-operative partners and, for example, state officials. (Juholin 2004: 18–19, 29.) All the groups mentioned are classified as stakeholders of an organization. According to Freeman's (1984) original definition, stakeholders are groups which can have an effect on the organization's operations, can be affected by its operations or are in any form involved in the operations of the organization (Lehtonen 2002: 14–15).

This study focuses on organizational external communication. Media is one of organizations' important external stakeholders. It is a medium through which organizations aim to reach many other stakeholders, such as the general public and more specific groups. Media publicity can help organizations, among other things, to: inform people about themselves; raise awareness of issues important to the organization; try to influence their own image among different groups; and get (free) publicity, for example to products. The media, nevertheless, has certain criteria for evaluating what kinds of news have enough interest value to be published. In other words, they guide the journalists to evaluate what the public is interested in. News criteria include, for example: topicality, importance, interest value, drama level, newness, humanity, and human interest. (Juholin 2004: 186-187.)

Nowadays one way of informing the media, and at the same time the whole general public, of organizational matters is through media releases. According to Wells and Spinks (1999: 247) news releases, or media releases, are news stories produced by an organization. Their objective is to inform the public of certain issues related to the organization and also usually to increase positive images of the organization. (Wells and Spinks 1999: 247.) Most organizations today have a website where one can find a section called "media" or "media releases". Just placing the releases on the website, however, does not insure that the information is picked up by the press. The organization can usually only hope that the press publishes the release placed on the website or sent to a journalist (Wells and Spinks 1999:247). Consequently, according to Juholin

(2004: 184-203), communication officers usually build relationships with journalists and inform them about important issues concerning the organization.

Overall, media releases published on the Internet are a fast and convenient way to inform the public. Media releases can include information about: organizational changes, projects, production or strategy related changes; changes in personnel; marketing information, for example about new products; research findings; and reports. Generally media releases should contain information about current and interesting issues for them to have enough news value. (Juholin 2004: 184-203.) Media releases should at the minimum answer the questions: "Who?, What?, Where?, When?, Why, and How?" (Wells and Spinks 1999: 247). Even though not all releases ever reach the newspapers, they can still have informative significance by simply being represented on the organization's website.

These general news criteria and objective categorizations mention in this sub section will be used in this study to quide the initial content analysis of the media releases (see chapter 4.3). This subsection ends the theoretical part of the study. In the next chapter the methodology of the study is explained in detail.

4 METHODOLOGY

In the present chapter the overall methodology of the study is explained. Firstly, we will go through the research objectives and questions, secondly we will concentrate on the data, media releases, and, finally, we will go through the research methods thoroughly.

Research objectives and research questions

According to Burn and Parker (2003: 3), all texts all produced by someone, interpreted by people and their meanings reproduced by individuals. Thus, a good research of media texts needs to be reflected from at least three perspectives: the producer's, the text's and the reader's perspective. (Burn and Parker 2003: 3.) In other words, this means that the producer (always) influences the media texts, the text (always) conveys some kind of meaning and the reader (always) makes some kind of interpretation of the media text. This study aims to adapt this vision of media text research partially by concentrating on the last to perspectives: text and reader.

The study will concentrate on the text from the cultural studies representation perspective by describing what kind of cultural representations are transferred in the text discourse. The reader perspective will be examined more loosely from the cultural studies "cultural change" phenomenon perspective. In short, this phenomenon examines the way language and representations produce meanings which are thought to have the power of changing cultural practices, such as behavior regulation, attitudes and values.

In conclusion, the study explores American cultural representations in organizational communication. The specific aim is to discover whether the discourse of organizational media releases targeted to a specific national audience, North America, are reflective of American cultural features. The research questions include: (1) What American cultural characteristics (values,

norms or behavior models) are represented in the discourse of media releases? And (2) what kind of general judgments can be made from these representations of the North American culture on the public's perception of "normality" (cultural change phenomena)?

The case organization analyzed in this study is The Coca-Cola Company. The company's web based media releases form the data of this study which will be briefly introduced in the next subsection.

Data - The Coca-Cola Company's web based media releases

The data of this study consist of 24 media news releases posted in the year 2009 on the Press Center section of The Coca-Cola Company's official website. Media releases on the company website have been divided according to location. Thus the Coca-Cola Company has a localized communication strategy. Instead of sending messages in a globalized manner, the organization focuses the messages to specific audiences in specific cultural areas. The media release audience segments include: Corporate, North America, Europe, Pacific, and Eurasia and Africa. In the year 2009 altogether 74 media releases were posted on the website. Of these 74, 24 were directed to the North American press and audience. (The Coca-Cola Company 2010.) The 24 North American segmented press releases form the data of this study. North American segmented releases were specifically selected because they form a national cultural area suitable for this study. In addition, the amount of North American segmented releases were the second highest after Corporate segmented releases. A time period of one year was selected because the amount of releases published in the year 2009 was sufficient enough for this study.

It would have been interesting also to compare the North American segmented media releases and the representations of a national culture to the other media segments. Nevertheless, this objective was rejected in this study for a few reasons. Firstly, most of the targeted releases from the year 2009 consisted of the corporate segment which, in the end, can be thought to be too similar in cultural

reflections compared to North American segmented releases because the corporation is originally American to be compared. On the other hand, only a few releases were focused on the other segments and their numbers and content was not seen sufficient enough to be compared with the data of the study. Overall, the objective of this study is not a comparative approach but instead a descriptive approach to cultural representations. Thus, in the resources of this thesis, it is not possible to adopt both of the approaches regardless of how interesting they would appear.

The North American targeted releases are on average one to two pages long. Each media release on the official website includes a topic, place and date information, release text and the same informative organizational description:

> About The Coca-Cola Company
>
> The Coca-Cola Company is the world's largest beverage company, refreshing consumers with nearly 500 sparkling and still brands. Along with Coca-Cola®, recognized as the world's most valuable brand, the Company's portfolio includes 12 other billion dollar brands, including Diet Coke®, Fanta®, Sprite®, Coca-Cola Zero®, vitaminwater, POWERADE®, Minute Maid® and Georgia® Coffee. Globally, we are the No. 1 provider of sparkling beverages, juices and juice drinks and ready-to-drink teas and coffees. Through the world's largest beverage distribution system, consumers in more than 200 countries enjoy the Company's beverages at a rate of nearly 1.6 billion servings a day. With an enduring commitment to building sustainable communities, our Company is focused on initiatives that protect the environment, conserve resources and enhance the economic development of the communities where we operate. For more information about our Company, please visit our website at www.thecoca-colacompany.com. (The Coca-Cola Company 2010.)

Some releases also include other additional information. This will be further discussed in the results chapter. An example of a media release can be found from the appendix (Appendix 1).

Research methods

The study is mostly qualitative in nature. The goal of qualitative research is to describe real life phenomena in verbal form as comprehensively as possible (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2000: 152). A thorough analysis of the data is considered to be very important in qualitative research and therefore the amount of materials studied cannot be very large (Eskola & Suoranta 1999:

13–24). Qualitative research is seen as a very subjective field of research. The researcher has a central position in the research and his or her impact is always present. Subjectivity is, thus, one of the aspects criticized in qualitative research. Nevertheless, the subjectivity of qualitative research is not a problem because the methodology is well suited for certain studies and problems, such as cultural studies. (Eskola & Suoranta 1999: 13-24, 162.)

Some aspects of the data will also be quantified when needed to provide more information. For example, the amount of different cultural representations is valuable information when judging their overall representativeness in the media releases. In addition, cross-tabling of the results enables comparison between results that can have an effect on each other.

Cultural studies does not have specific methodologies. Instead its traditions are varied and methodologies vary from traditional discourse analysis to presentation analysis of pictures and films. This study is descriptive in nature and does not utilize any traditional method, such as discourse analysis, but instead categorizes the content and examines the representations from an already existent theoretical perspective.

It has been stated that "cultural studies is concerned with all those practices, institutions and systems of classification through which they are inculcated in a population particular values, beliefs, competences, routines of life and habitual forms of conduct." (Bennet 1998:28, according to Barker 2008: 5-6). One of the most central strands of cultural studies is representations, that is, the way things are described or portrayed. Representations answer to the question of how language is used to represent the world. (Hall 1997: 1.)

Content analysis is used as a research method in this study. Content analysis is textual analysis which studies written and visual data and aims at describing their content in a verbal form. The focus of content analysis can be on words, clauses, themes, paragraphs, and whole texts. In addition, content analysis can be executed firstly, by examining the data and forming the theory based on it,

secondly by using a theory as an assistance to analyze the data, or thirdly by analyzing the data solely based on a theory. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2003: 95-116.) In this study, theory is quite strongly utilized to assist the analysis of the data. Thus the method is theoretically based content analysis.

As a first step in the study, simple content analysis will be completed to assess general information about the media releases. This will be carried out by classifying the data according to general organizational media communication modes introduced in chapter 3.3: organizational media objectives and news criteria which dictate what kind of information the organization can potentially get through in media. The first category, Objective, is divided into five different subcategories: (1) information about the company, (2) information about a product, (3) raising awareness to an issue (CSR), (4) increase image, and (5) other objective. The other category, News criteria, is divided into eight subcategories: (1) topicality, (2) importance, (3) interest value, (4) drama level, (5) newness, (6) humanity, (7) human interest, and (8) some other. Thirdly, also possible additional information, such as links, pictures and so on, are researched and analyzed.

As a second step, theoretically based content analysis will be used to review the cultural representations in the media releases. The main theoretical categorizations used in this analysis are Althen's (1988) five characteristic of American culture which include: (1) high level of individualism; (2) emphasis on equality; (3) future orientations; (4) desire for action and achievement; and (5) directness and assertiveness (Okigbo et al. 2005: 315. The objective and news criteria findings will also be compared and cross-tabled with the cultural feature findings. By comparing the objectives to the cultural features, it is possible to critically view what objectives emphasize the cultural features and to hypothesize what is, for example, commercialism and what actually culture. On the other hand, by comparing the news criteria findings to the cultural features, it is possible to examine the cultural change perspective.

The focus of this study will not be on specific linguistic aspects but instead on the overall texts and their representations. In addition, extra information, such as links to information or images, will not be studied exhaustively. Only their effect on the overall representations will be concentrated upon. The next section will present the results of this study.

5 RESULTS

The results of this study according to specific content categories will be presented in the following chapters. The results will be validated by short references from the media releases and some of the information will be in numeric form.

Firstly, we will concentrate on the topic of objectives in the media releases. Secondly we will concentrate on the topic of news criteria, and thirdly, on the most important theme, cultural feature representations in the media releases. Further more; also the results of additional information will be presented. In the summary of the results chapter, the significance of the media release objectives and news criterions to the main study target, cultural features, will be explored by cross-tabling all the results.

Objective representations in the media releases

Under the objective category there were five options according to which the aspects of the news releases could be categorized: (1) information about the company, (2) information about a product, (3) raising awareness to an issue (CSR), (4) increase positive image of the company or product, and (5) some other objective. The specific content of these options developed throughout the research process and will be explained within each result.

Firstly, *information about the company* specifically refers to releases in which specific information about the company, its processes or changes were represented. Altogether six of the 24 releases included this kind of information about the company.

> The Coca-Cola Company and United Resource Recovery Corporation (URRC) joined government leaders and environmental experts today to celebrate the grand opening of the world's largest plastic bottle-to-bottle recycling plant in Spartanburg, S.C. (Release 1)

Secondly, *information about a product* specifically refers to releases presenting product features, new products or changes to old products, including all kinds of marketing related to different products. Altogether 10 of the 24 releases included specific product information.

> Fanta Orange, the #1 fruit-flavored sparkling beverage in the U.S., will now feature 100 percent natural flavors. But that's not all the news – the entire Fanta line is also getting a bold new look that includes vibrant packaging with colorful illustrations and contemporary graphics. Both the new formulation and look for Fanta will roll out in the United States this month. (Release 4)

Thirdly, *raising awareness to an issue* refers to media releases in which important issues, such as environmental protection, recycling, human rights and so forth, were strongly represented. Altogether six releases included topics which were aimed at raising awareness of an important issue.

> Aquarius Spring!™ natural spring water is on a mission this summer to promote watershed conservation and encourage people to take action in their local communities.(Release 15)

> "Our goal is to make a positive difference in the lives of Alabama's youth by addressing declining trends in physical activity," said Ingrid Saunders Jones, chair of The Coca-Cola Foundation, which granted more than $82 million in 2008 to improve global communities relating to water stewardship, active healthy living, community recycling and education. (Release 12)

Although organizations hardly ever want to increase negative image, the fourth aspect of *increasing image* refers those media releases of which objective was clearly or solely to promote the image of the company or its products. Most of the releases, altogether 14 of 24 presented features aimed at increasing image.

> "Coca-Cola is committed to making a positive difference in the world by rethinking the way we live and work," said Bill Kelly, senior vice president, Coca-Cola Trademark Brands, Coca-Cola North America. "As a presenting partner of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Torch Relay, we are using this opportunity to recognize some outstanding teens who personify positive living and serve as sources of inspiration to their friends, family and community." (Release 10)

Finally, there were also other objectives that were not directly or clearly in accordance with any of the earlier aspects. This is a significant results in itself because it shows that the categories selected based on earlier research are not comprehensive and do not correspond, at least, with the visible objectives of the case organization of this study. Altogether 12 of the 24 releases included these

additional features. Their objectives were: advertisement of ads, campaigns and events (4), reach a new target audience, (2), increase visibility and gain publicity, for example, via charity or events (4), and to engage people to interact with the company (2). The first reference is an example of reaching a new target group and the second an example of a campaign to engage people to interact.

> The fully integrated Hispanic adaptation includes new point of sale, enhanced shopper experiences, consumer promotions, television, radio, print and out of home advertising, mobile, digital and music components. (Release 3)

> People may speak different languages, but everyone understands the universal language of Coca-Cola. It's the "ahh" sound you make after taking the first sip on a hot day or the "phsst" sound of the bubbles being released. If you can mimic those sounds, you may find yourself in a starring role alongside other Coca-Cola fans from around the world. (Release 22)

In addition to the media release objectives, also news criteria are important background information in the study for the cultural feature research. The news criteria results are presented in the next chapter.

News criteria representations in the media releases

Under the news criterion category there were eight options of categorizing the media release criteria usually assigned by journalists to value the worthiness of publishing news: (1) topicality, (2) importance, (3) interest value, (4) drama level, (5) newness, (6) humanity, (7) human interest, and (8) some other criterion. The specific content of these options also developed throughout the research process and will be explained under each category below.

Firstly, *topicality* especially refers to the presentation of topical themes in various contexts. For example, environmental protection due to climate change or conflict situations could be examples of topical themes interesting to publics. Altogether three media releases of the 24 presented themes that could be considered to be newsworthy because of their topicality.

> COCA-COLA, URRC OPEN WORLD'S LARGEST PLASTIC BOTTLE-TO-BOTTLE RECYCLING PLANT (Release 1)

> Coca-Cola is going green in Washington, D.C. The Coca-Cola Company and Coca-Cola Enterprises will demonstrate their environmental leadership through a series of

> innovations designed to reduce the Coca-Cola system's environmental footprint at each step in the manufacturing, distribution and sales processes. These efforts include climate-friendly beverage coolers, hybrid electric delivery trucks and trailers, and a recycling program for the National Mall and Memorial Parks. (Release 8)

Secondly, *importance* refers to topics that could be considered to be important and therefore newsworthy according to many people. These include environmental protection, helping underprivileged or poor people or topics considered important by certain groups (fashion, friends, free items and new technology). Altogether six media releases of the 24 presented topics that could be considered to be important.

> The World of Coca-Cola will reward 2000 dedicated fans with the opportunity to purchase specially priced tickets for $2 as they celebrate their second anniversary this Saturday, May 23rd. Gates to Pemberton Place will open at 7:30 am for early risers to be among the lucky ones to purchase these tickets and join over 2 million people who have already visited the attraction since it opened in its new location two years ago. (Release 11)

> "Our goal is to make a positive difference in the lives of Alabama's youth by addressing declining trends in physical activity," said Ingrid Saunders Jones, chair of The Coca-Cola Foundation, which granted more than $82 million in 2008 to improve global communities relating to water stewardship, active healthy living, community recycling and education. (Release 12)

Thirdly, *interest value* refers to any kind of themes that could be seen as interesting to various publics. These interesting aspects include, free events, items and products, significant changes in products or their accessibility or perhaps opportunities to participate or get involved in some activity. Altogether 12 of the 24 media releases represented the interest value aspects. Involvement and taking part were represented in most of the releases, for example in the following topic:

> PHSST... CLINK, CLINK... GLUG, GLUG, GLUG... FIZZZZ... GULP... AHH. MAKE THOSE SOUNDS AND YOU COULD STAR IN THE NEW 'SOUNDS OF COCA-COLA' COMMERCIAL (Release 22)

Nevertheless, the releases were interestingly targeted to different groups. Four of the interest value releases addressed specific groups: Hispanic (1), African American women (1), African American teens (1) and generally teens (1). The next release especially pursuits to engage Hispanic Americans.

> Coca-Cola, the #1 sparkling beverage brand among Hispanic Americans, invites the more than 45 million U.S. Hispanics to take a break, open a Coke, unleash their dreams and enjoy one of life's simple pleasures. (Release 3)

Fourthly, *drama level* refers to topics which could be considered to be amazing, huge and unprecedented. Altogether three of the 24 releases presented topics that reach the drama level. These included an opportunity to be in a campaign, an opportunity for teens to join the 10 teen torchbearers in Calgary Olympics and the Coca-Cola "quarter-mile cookout":

> Requiring more than 7,000 pounds of Kingsford® Charcoal, the monster-sized ring of fire will measure an astonishing 1,320 feet – spanning more than four football fields in length if stretched end to end. The colossal grill will be used to cook up a feast for fans attending the "Coca-Cola Quarter-Mile Cookout" on Friday, May 22. (Release 9)

Fifthly, *newness* refers to new materials, products, changes in production and, for example, innovative communication means. Altogether nine of the 24 releases included some newness factors. Examples of these include multimodal technology which people can use to watch, for example, new miniseries online and novelties in environmental production and delivery means.

> The new climate-friendly Coca-Cola coolers use carbon dioxide (CO2), a natural refrigerant gas and HFC-Free insulation, eliminating 99 percent of the direct green house gas (GHG) emissions. (Release 8)

Sixthly, *humanity* refers to actions towards underprivileged people or depressed people or groups. Altogether four releases included humanity themes.

> THE COCA-COLA COMPANY ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF THE 2009-2010 GOIZUETA SCHOLARS FUND AWARD (Release 17)

Finally, *human interest* refers to stories about people and their problems, concerns, or achievements in a way that arouses interest, emotions or sympathy. Only one of the 24 releases presented a human interest theme by recognizing African American women and their valuable contribution to the community by offering them complementary Mother's Day spa services.

After the objectives and news criterion results, it is important to present the main study target: cultural representations in the media releases.

Cultural aspect representations in the media releases

The cultural aspects were divided according to Althen's (1988) five characteristics of American culture which include: (1) high level of individualism; (2) emphasis on equality; (3) future orientations; (4) desire for action and achievement; and (5) directness and assertiveness (Okigbo et al. 2005: 315). In addition, there was an added, other cultural values aspect, which could include reflections other than mentioned in the theory. The theory strongly guided the study of the media releases' cultural transference perception but also the researcher's effect on the value of these features is strong because the analysis is inevitably guided by individual perceptions and knowledge of the characteristics.

The first cultural aspect, *high level of individualism*, refers to people's value of individual goal achievement instead of committing to pursue the community's shared goals and wellbeing. According to the analysis results, only six of the 24 media releases reflected values and behavior (politics) of individualism. These included the highlighting and emphasis of people's uniqueness and appealing to people's individual desires, as visible in the next example's inquiry for teens to make video pieces of themselves which express their "formula", i.e. what makes them special.

> Beginning June 1 and running for 13 weeks, teens tuning in to watch 106 & Park will be asked "What's Your Formula?" Teens will be encouraged to submit video entries to www.bet.com/mycokerewards describing their "formula"... in other words, how they express themselves and what makes them unique. (Release 14)

Interestingly, there were more results signaling/reflecting collectivistic culture values: community and family values. Altogether 19 media releases reflected values and behavior (politics) related collectivistic values. Most of these reflected family values (8):

> "We know that during these difficult times, shoppers want to bring home products that the entire family will enjoy, we are pleased to invest in our products and offer the same great taste of Fanta now with 100 percent natural flavors," said Santiago Blanco, vice president of Sprite and flavors, Coca-Cola North America. (Release 4)

> "Our brands are part of the fun and celebrations that friends and families experience when they gather to enjoy big events," said Katie Bayne, chief marketing officer, Coca-Cola North America. (Release 2)

Second most reflected communality in general including collective actions such as learning programs (6):

> "Coca-Cola is committed to making a positive difference in the world by rethinking the way we live and work," said Bill Kelly, senior vice president, Coca-Cola Trademark Brands, Coca-Cola North America. "As a presenting partner of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Torch Relay, we are using this opportunity to recognize some outstanding teens who personify positive living and serve as sources of inspiration to their friends, family and community." (Release 10)

> "Our goal is to make a positive difference in the lives of Alabama's youth by addressing declining trends in physical activity," said Ingrid Saunders Jones, chair of The Coca-Cola Foundation, which granted more than $82 million in 2008 to improve global communities relating to water stewardship, active healthy living, community recycling and education. "Our funding creates access to sustainable, innovative programs where teens will learn the benefits of exercise and nutrition." (Release 12)

> "Communities are at their best when businesses and local governments work together to solve problems," said Alabama Governor Bob Riley. (Release 12)

Also united environmental protection values were present (5):

> The "Give it Back" program is designed to remind consumers that Coca-Cola bottles and cans are valuable recyclables. The new multi-million dollar marketing effort supporting recycling will produce nearly one billion impressions in 2009 through billboard, print and television advertising, online messaging and promotional activities nationwide and at 600 college campuses across the United States "…"Our brands are inspiring people to join us in the act of recycling as we encourage consumers to 'Give it Back' and help us achieve our goal to recycle and reuse all of our bottles and cans." (Release 1)

In addition, one of the releases reflecting collectivistic values was oriented specifically to Hispanic communities by emphasizing their family values.

> For Hispanics, meals with family are one of the most important times of the day…(Release 3)

The second cultural aspect, *emphasis on equality*, refers to equality within different groups, such as class, gender, demographics and stature. According to Althen's model, USA should be on the average level when it comes to equality values and behavior. The results show that eight releases of the 24 clearly reflected this value of equality by, for example, allowing equal opportunity to participate and take action to all people and groups, some cases even globally. In addition, in three of these eight releases women were granted extra attention.

> THE COCA-COLA COMPANY ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF THE 2009-2010 GOIZUETA SCHOLARS FUND AWARD… Each year, the program awards undergraduate scholarships of up to $25,000 per student. Over the past nine years, 66 students have been awarded Goizueta Scholars Fund awards, totaling more than $2.75 million. Recipients are selected on the basis of their academic record, community service, honors, work experience, career goals and financial need. Awards are renewable for three additional years, or until the student earns a bachelor's degree. (Release 17)

> "Coca-Cola is a universal language, connecting and refreshing people around the globe who have different interests and backgrounds," said Katie Bayne, chief marketing officer, Coca-Cola North America (CCNA). "Our new spot demonstrates this by showing how a simple pleasure such as enjoying a Coca-Cola together can help people look beyond what's on the outside and celebrate what makes them unique." (Release 18)

Interestingly, four releases, included in the eight mentioned, reflected equality but in a slightly different manner. They separated demographics, such as African American and Hispanic, from the general public and provided them specific targeted campaigns and activities. This phenomenon of separating different demographic or other groups from the general North American group is referred to as *differentiation* in this study.

> Coca-Cola, the #1 sparkling beverage brand among Hispanic Americans, invites the more than 45 million U.S. Hispanics to take a break, open a Coke, unleash their dreams and enjoy one of life's simple pleasures. (Release 3)

> The 30-second animated spot titled "Do You Speak Coke?" is designed to bring to life the message that Coke not only refreshes, but helps African American teens find the commonalities in each other. (Release 18)

The third cultural aspect, *future orientations*, refers to American people's habit of placing more value on future action (what will happen) instead of past events (what has happened). These values can be visible in texts through features such as newness, creativity and modernity. According to the results, 10 out of the 24 releases reflected features of future orientations. These included missions of caring for the environment for future generations, community actions to secure good futures for children and new versions of old ones including new approaches to technology among other things.

> "Coca-Cola Freestyle brings to life the refreshingly positive outlook that has always been associated with Coca-Cola," said Chandra Stephens-Albright, Senior Director of Marketing and Business Development for the brand. "It brings back the magic of the fountain of the past, re-imagines it for the future and then takes it a step farther by celebrating the idea that consumers can truly have their say at fountain -- with choices tailored completely for them." (Release 7)

> "As one of our valued 'Proud Partners,' Coca-Cola is stepping up to help us preserve, enhance and ensure the sustainability of our country's beautiful National Parks and recreation areas for generations to come," said Peggy O'Dell, Region Director, National Capital Region, National Parks Service. "Through Coca-Cola's support for the new recycling program, we hope to achieve the Interior Department's goal of diverting 50 percent of solid waste from landfills through recycling by 2010." (Release 8)

> The new Coca-Cola bottle will be constructed in Coca-Cola Sky Field later this summer. A special rendering of the new design will be revealed at an upcoming game before the bottle makes its official debut. Promising to be a more high-tech version of the beloved original bottle, the new bottle will offer even more ways to entertain Braves fans. "We can't wait to build on the legacy of our Braves partnership and share our new bottle with Atlantans later this summer," said Bayne. (Release 16)

Interestingly, there were also two other releases featuring this theme but instead of future orientations, they reflected past orientations. In the two reflections, emphasis was based on respecting the old, although it would be replaced by new versions.

> Fans are encouraged to visit the original bottle for one last photo and to post these photos and their memories on the Coca-Cola Bottle Facebook page, http://tinyurl.com/kt4hoc, created especially for the bottle's official retirement. In honor of the famous bottle's retirement, the first 15,000 fans to enter the stadium on July 2, will receive a commemorative 8-oz bottle with a depiction of Coca-Cola Sky Field. (Release 16)

The fourth cultural aspect, *desire for action and achievement*, refers to people's proneness to be active, achieve things and pursue objectives such as immediate improvements in quality of life. According to the results, altogether 12 releases reflected aspects of action and achievement values.

> The 30-second ad, entitled "Portal," informs consumers that, "if you've had a Coke in the last 40 years, you've played a part in one of the largest beverage recycling efforts in the world." (Release 1)

> "With a great tasting water like Dasani, women can maintain their active lifestyles while also balancing their rigorous schedules." (Release 5)

Interestingly two of these reflections were also demographically separated from the other. They reflected and were targeted especially for the segment of African American teens.

> "For Hispanics, happiness means pursuing and achieving their dreams, and Coca-Cola has always been there to provide them with the simple pleasure of refreshment during their journey," said Reinaldo Padua, assistant vice president, Hispanic Marketing, Coca-Cola North America. "For many, achieving their dream means seeing their children graduate from college, owning their own business, learning to speak English or meeting

> their favorite celebrity or sports figure. This year, our message will inspire Hispanic consumers and our programs will help them achieve some of those dreams." (Release 3)

The fifth cultural aspect, *directness and assertiveness*, refers to direct and explicit communication patterns common for low-context societies. In the media releases this value was especially reflected through high quantity of quotes from high-ranking professionals and managers to add credibility and value to the releases. Altogether 20 of the 24 releases included one or several quotes from highly valued individuals. Some presented outsiders:

> "I commend The Coca-Cola Company for its substantial investments in worthy nonprofit organizations promoting healthy, active lifestyles in the state of Alabama," said Congressman Artur Davis (D-Ala), who represents Alabama's 7th congressional district, where several programs will be funded by The Foundation. (Release 12)

But most of them presented insiders:

> "From hybrid delivery trucks to climate-friendly coolers to support for recycling at our National Parks, we are showcasing our innovative approach to going to market in an environmentally responsible way," said Steve Cahillane, president, Coca-Cola Enterprises North America. (Release 8)

Although most of the releases were quite commercial, four of the 20 releases reflected high confidence and assertive selling which can be evaluated as very direct communication and commercialism.

> "Communities are at their best when businesses and local governments work together to solve problems," said Alabama Governor Bob Riley. "This contribution offered by The Coca-Cola Foundation will go a long way to help empower Alabamians to live healthier, more active lifestyles. I want to thank Coca-Cola for its investment in Alabama. Together, we will not only fight the problem of obesity in this state -- we will win." (Release 12)

In addition to Althen's model's cultural aspects, five of the releases clearly reflected one *additional value*: positive living. This value refers to balanced living which entails positive living habits like exercise and lifestyle choices such as eating and beverage consuming habits.

> For the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Torch Relay, Coca-Cola is seeking potential torchbearers who champion positive living, which is defined in the following ways:
>
> - Balanced Living -- staying active and physically fit while having fun with family and friends
> - Community -- working to make good things happen for people throughout the community

- Recycling -- helping the planet by recycling or donating time to a recycling program in the community or school (Release 10)

"Our goal is to make a positive difference in the lives of Alabama's youth by addressing declining trends in physical activity," said Ingrid Saunders Jones, chair of The Coca-Cola Foundation, which granted more than $82 million in 2008 to improve global communities relating to water stewardship, active healthy living, community recycling and education. "Our funding creates access to sustainable, innovative programs where teens will learn the benefits of exercise and nutrition." (Release 12)

In addition to objective, news criterion and cultural aspects research, also additional information in the news releases were researched. These results are presented in the next section.

Additional information in the media releases

The study also aimed at viewing what kind of additional information, such as images or links, were present in the media releases and what kind of effects these could have on the viewer's perception. Altogether 14 releases of the 24 included some additional information. The additional information appeared always after the Coca-Cola Company presentation chapter at the end of the media release.

Four of the 14 releases included information about organizations and institutions cooperating with The Coca-Cocal Company.

About AMERICAN IDOL

AMERICAN IDOL is created and executive-produced by Simon Fuller, founder of 19 Entertainment; and executive-produced by Cecile Frot-Coutaz, CEO, FremantleMedia North America; and Ken Warwick, Executive Producer, FremantleMedia North America. (Release 1)

The media releases did not include any illustrations or images. Nevertheless, 10 of the 14 releases included links to images and extra information, such as commercials, videos and, for example, recipes.

FOR DOWNLOADABLE BROADCAST QUALITY VIDEO CLICK HERE: http://kefmediastream.com/2009/0617.2/ (Release 16)

Additional information results only offer new corporate information and directions of how to visit other pages, access extra information and images. No visual elements, or other worthy elements, which can have a direct effect on the

viewer's perception were present in the releases. Thus, the results of additional information do not reveal anything significant and need not a more depth discussion.

Summary of results

As a summary of the results, a cross-tabling (Table 2) is utilized to clarify relationships and amounts of presentations. The quantitative amounts were gathered by searching and counting what objective and news criteria features were visible in each media release representing a specific cultural feature. Firstly in the table, the cultural features of Althen, in addition to the other features found from the releases - collectivism, differentiation and past orientation - are presented in the left column, and the amount of representations are displayed in each column. The purpose of this is to summarise the results of the cultural representations in the media releases. The other columns represent objectives and news criteria according to the cultural features with amounts of presentation per feature. The purpose of the tabling is to help detect if the objectives and news criteria are affected or related to the cultural features. One interesting question, for example, is what could be considered to be corporate advertisement or commercialism, what actual representation of culture?

Table 2. Cross-tabling of the study results

Cultural features	**Objectives**	**News criteria**
Individualism **6/24**	Inform. about a product (2) Increase image (2) Other (2) Inform. about the company (2)	Interest value (3) Importance (1) Human interest (1)
Collectivism **19/24**	Increase image (9) Other (6) Race awareness of an issue (5) Inform. about the company (4) Inform. about a product (2)	Interest value (7) Importance (5) Newness (4) Topicality (3) Drama level (3) Humanity (3) Other (1)

Equality **4/24**	Increase image (3) Other (3) Inform. about the company (1)	Interest value (2) Importance (1) Drama level (1) Humanity (1)
Differentiation **4/24**	Increase image (3) Other (3) Race awareness of an issue (2) Inform. about a product (1)	Importance (3) Interest value (3) Topicality (1) Human interest (1)
Future orientation **10/24**	Increase image (6) Race awareness of an issue (5) Inform. about the company (4) Inform. about a product (3) Other (3)	Importance (5) Interest value (4) Topicality (3) Newness (3) Humanity (1)
Past orientation **2/24**	Inform. about the company (2) Increase image (2)	Interest value (2) Newness (1)
Desire for action and achievement **12/24**	Increase image (8) Other (5) Inform. about the company (4) Inform. about a product (4) Race awareness (4)	Interest value (7) Importance (4) Topicality (3) Newness (3) Humanity (3) Drama level (1)
Directness and assertiveness **20/24**	Increase image (11) Inform. about a product (8) Other (7) Race awareness (6) Inform. about the company (5)	Interest value (11) Newness (8) Importance (6) Topicality (3) Humanity (3) Drama level (2) Human interest (1)
Positive living **5/24**	Other (4) Increase image (3) Race awareness of an issue (2) Inform. about a product (2)	Importance (3) Interest value (3) Topicality (1) Newness (1)

The cross-tabling of the main results should help to visualize the results more effectively, at least when looking at the highest figures. The cross-tabling indicates, for example firstly, that those media releases featuring collectivism

emphasized image boosting and could be considered interesting from the audience viewpoint. This relationship hinders the emphasis of media releases reflecting collective cultural values as the objective indicated corporate aspirations. Second, the results show that those media releases featuring future orientation could be considered important and have interest value, increase image, issues and company awareness. In other words, this cultural feature could be related to marketing and company goals instead of cultural representations. In addition, directness and assertiveness according to the results is correlated with high image and product selling objectives and interest value and newness. Thus, the indicated cultural feature of directness and assertiveness might be due to marketing tactics and language use instead of a specific cultural representation indicating something about the entire North American culture. In the next chapter, all the results are discussed in more depth.

6 DISCUSSION

This chapter aims at discussing the study results in more depth. The discussion follows the arrangement of the research questions by firstly concentrating on the representation of American cultural characteristics in the media releases and, secondly, on the potential effects of these representations on the public's perception of "normality" which is recognized in the cultural studies field as cultural change. The objective presentations' and news criteria findings' relevance to the other results becomes clear through and withal the cultural reflection results.

The research combined communication and cultural studies to investigate the phenomenon of cultural transference and its potential effect on the viewer. More specifically, the study aimed to explore whether the discourse of organizational media releases are reflective of American cultural features and to speculate the potential cultural representations' possible effect on the viewer. More specific questions included: (1) what cultural characteristics (values, norms or behavior models) are visible in the discourse of media releases? And (2) what effects can the discourse of these media releases have on the public's perception of "normality"?

It should be noted that especially in the cases of objectives and news criterion, the researcher's own views of what is interesting and important have had a great effect on the results. In the case of the cultural features, the results are, nevertheless, seen to be quite valid and straightforward because they were guided by a specific theory. Qualitative research, after all, always is somewhat subjective. Next the results of American cultural characteristic representations in the media releases are discussed.

Representations of American cultural characteristics in the media releases

According to researchers, organizational external communication has the potential of both reflecting cultural values and influencing the values of the readers (Okigbo et al. 2005: 312-314). Cultural transference in this study means the way texts can carry and represent cultural features of values, norms and behavior models of a specific unit, such as a country, so that they can be detected from the discourse. Accordingly, in this study media release texts were studied from a cultural studies perspective to see if they reflected specifically assigned American cultural values.

According to Althen's (1988) theory, American culture can be characterized by five cultural features. More specifically, according to this theory four characteristics, high level of individualism; future orientations; desire for action and achievement; and directness and assertiveness, should be quite strong in American publications, and one characteristic, emphasis on equality, should be on the average level (Okigbo et al. 2005: 315-317).

Firstly, only six of the 24 media releases reflected clear values and behavior of individualism, such as emphasis of people's uniqueness and appealing to people's individual desires. On the other hand, altogether 19 media releases reflected values and behavior related to family values (8), united environmental protection (5), communality in general including collective actions (6), and Hispanic family values (1). Accordingly, the results indicate that the media releases reflect more collective values instead of individual values. These results can be considered to be very unusual since the theory, and other information available about American culture, strongly identify individualism as one of the strongest characteristic of the American society.

One reason for high collectivist values and emphasis on community and family could be that the Coca-Cola Company has branded their products as family products to be enjoyed together. Nevertheless, this arguing does not completely override the presentations of collective actions towards environmental

protection and the wellbeing of communities and people living in them. One might also argue that this is, however, merely an act to boost the company's image by presenting the company as being active in the collective issues.

In addition to the criticism, in this study, and in Althen's model, the individualistic and collectivist values and behavior models were perceived as opposite values. In other words, no intermediary values that could be placed between these two were considered. Some people's individual values and behavior models could still, for example, correspond with some of the collective values. For example, if an individual goal is to have a big family which one provides for, this could also be considered as a collective goal.

It should also be taken into consideration that compared to advertising the objectives of news releases are very different. Consequently, one result of this study can be the realization that the theory designed by observing advertisement texts does not automatically correspond with the study results of media release research because of differing objectives of organizational advertisement and communicating through releases. Advertisements usually aim at producing emotions or feelings of need while media releases, for example, distribute information, boost image and create awareness to the company.

Secondly, eight releases of the 24 clearly reflected the value of equality by representing equal opportunity to participate and take action. In addition, gender equality became visible through extra attention to women in three media releases. This result indicates that news releases represent a somewhat average level of equality in the American society. However, it is even more noteworthy that four releases out of these eight separated demographics, such as African American and Hispanic, from the general public and provided them specific targeted campaigns and activities. The results, thus, almost correspond with the theory by reaching nearly the average level of equality representations. Nevertheless, half of the representations were targeted to specific groups. Differentiation was adopted here to refer to this phenomenon which could be

seen both as an attempt to increase equality by presenting opportunities for underprivileged or minority groups or, on the contrary, as a feature decreasing equality by separating these groups from the general public and in a way making them more submissive.

In the light of these study results, the statement that national culture can be seen as a sufficient enough study object can, thus, be criticized. In other words, although Yeniyurt and Townsend (2003: 379) support the statement that national culture can be seen as a good representation of a certain culture, the notion of scholars such as Blodgett et al. (2008: 339), that more focus in cultural and communication research should be placed on smaller units of analysis rather than national units such as countries, might need more emphasis.

Thirdly, 10 out of the 24 releases reflected features of future orientations such as caring for the environment for future generations, community actions and new versions of old ones. There were also two releases which reflected past orientation such as respecting the old. Accordingly, less than half of the media releases had representation of future orientation, which can again be seeing to be on the average level. The results still present more future than past orientation which supports the theory.

Fourthly, altogether 12 releases reflected aspects of action and achievement values. Accordingly, the action and achievement characteristics present an average or a slightly high level compared to the other presentations. Two of these reflections were also demographically separated from the other, which validates the differentiation characteristics even further.

Fifthly, the cultural aspect of directness and assertiveness was especially reflected in the media releases through high quantity of quotes from high-ranking professionals and managers to add credibility and value to the releases. In addition, there were few releases reflecting high confidence and assertive selling almost resembling election or religious speeches. Altogether 20 releases reflected this value. Thus, according to the results, the characteristic of

directness and assertiveness is very highly represented in the media releases as is stated also in Althen's model.

Sixthly, five of the releases clearly reflected one additional value which was identified in the study as positive living. The value refers to balanced living which entails positive living habits like exercise and lifestyle choices, such as eating and beverage consuming habits. Although the value was presented only in five releases, the releases containing this value were very strong and the whole releases handled the subject. Although it cannot be claimed that the presentation of this value is sufficient enough for it to be added in any theory, it is significant enough to be considered. After all the value of good and balanced living is a great part of many Eastern cultures nowadays and could be becoming a strong characteristic of the American culture as well.

Finally, by viewing and comparing the cultural feature presentations with objective observations, it is possible to accentuate the reliability of the cultural findings or to criticise the difference of actual cultural characteristics from something that could be considered to be merely commercialism or image boosting. Media releases most of the times are commercial and their objective is to promote the entire organization or specific products. According to the results, it is evident that most of the objectives of the releases were to give company and product information and, most of all, increase image of the previous. Nevertheless, the releases also included objectives such as raising awareness of important human and community well being issues and environmental issues. In addition, the objectives also seemed to validate the differentiation of groups by targeting subgroups, for example, to engage with the company. When it comes to individualism, there were more information about the product and company, and in comparison, when collectivism was emphasized there were more issue concern objectives and differentiation present. The objective results, thus, correspond with the emphasis of the cultural findings. In addition, the results provide a change to criticise the cultural characteristic findings of the results. In other words, objectives of the

releases, mainly image boosting, are factors that have to be taken into account when discussing values because, for example, collective value representations can be merely a result of an image boosting campaign of a corporation. Next the potential effects of the cultural representation findings on the public's perception of "normality" are discussed.

Potential effects on the public's perception of "normality"= cultural change?

Effects Research strives to answer the question: "What do the media do to the individual?" In other words, effects research focuses on how texts affect people's perceptions of what is considered to be normal. According to the effects view, the different cultural representations of values, norms and behavior models in media release texts, thus, can have potential effects on the viewers' worldview.

Many of Althen's cultural characteristics seem to be presented in the discourse of the Coca-Cola Company's media releases. This could indicate that the releases are to some extent representative of the North American culture. On the other hand, many of Althen's cultural characteristics were only on an average level, such as equality, future orientation and desire for action and achievement and some very low (individualism), representing the opposite values, such as collectivism. If a company as large as Coca-Cola uses the kind of discourse that emphasises this kind of cultural characteristics - values, politics and behaviour models - , in its publications targeted at the North American segment, it could be a presentation of cultural change. Especially strong representation of collectivist values in the texts might signal this kind of a change.

When it comes to effects on the public's perception of normality, one can only make speculations. The results indicate that the media releases reflect more collective values instead of individual values. Altogether 19 media releases reflected values and behavior related to family values, united environmental protection, communality in general and specific Hispanic family values.

Accordingly, these representations and emphasis of communality could affect the viewer's perception of normality by shifting their attention from individual goals to societal wellbeing. Especially giving attention to important subjects like underprivileged groups, environmental protections and youth issues can have potential effect on people's perception of what is important.

In addition to collectivistic values, also the differentiation of specific groups from the general North American segment can have an effect on people's notions of a united North American culture. By separating these groups, the releases, on one hand, can make the nation more separated and decrease people's perception of cohesion and, on the other hand, give more attention to these groups. If the discourse, nevertheless, implies that the groups need more attention, this could in any case be understood as separation from the others and have differentiating outcomes when it comes to perceptions. Also the presence of positive living values can affect the notions of normality by giving emphasis to these behavior models that reinforce people to take better care of themselves and others.

Because of the speculative nature of this study part, some criticism is needed. As mentioned earlier, for example, Juholin (2004: 186-187) points out that media has certain criteria for evaluating what news has enough interest value to be published. In other words, journalists have to evaluate what the public is interested in, similarly as the researcher has aimed to do in this study. News criteria results show that the media releases did not rise to a very high level according to the criteria. According to the results, especially humanity, human interest, drama level and topicality news criteria were observed to be low. Thus, the emphases of these collectivistic features on the cultural representations have to be criticised. On the other hand, interest and newness factors which can be associated with individualistic values were much stronger. Thus, as the news criteria did not ascend to a high level in most of the criteria areas, the effects of the cultural representations on the public should be criticized. In other words, the public can not be affected if the release content is not interesting enough for

them. Even if cultural characteristics, such as collectivism, were present in the news releases, it would not, thus, have much effect on the viewers.

In addition, it is very important to remember that people are not just objective receivers of discourse but instead subjective processers of the discourse features. In other words, people formulate their own meanings of how the world is presented to them. (van Dijk 1982: 35-38.) People living in certain cultures are habituated to particular cultural values, beliefs and behavioral models (Zhang & Neelankavil 1997: 135). This could imply that people might reject cultural features presented to them in different discourses and texts if they disagree with their accustomed perceptions of the way the world should be. In this case, the effects of the discourses on the viewers are strongly decreased.

The speculation of this study aimed at discovering the potential effect of cultural features representation on the viewers. As a conclusion, it could be argued that the representations of the cultural transference in the media releases of the Coca-Cola Company have potential effects on the viewer's perception of normality. This is especially valid from the aspects that are differing from Althen's model: collectivism and differentiation. The other aspects supported by the study results might not have a strong potential effect on the viewers because they support the theories of present North American cultural features and are, thus, already a part of people's perception of normality, that is, the way the world ought to be. The final chapter provides conclusions to this study.

7 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the objective of the study was to explore whether the discourse of organizational media releases are reflective of American cultural features and to speculate the potential cultural representations' possible effect on the viewer. More specific questions included: (1) What American cultural characteristics (values, norms or behavior models) are represented in the discourse of media releases? And (2) what kind of general judgments can be made from these representations of the North American culture on the public's perception of "normality" (cultural change phenomena)?

As stated in the second chapter, in this research, culture is understood in the manner of Yeniyurt and Townsend (2003: 379) as "a shared set of values and beliefs". The shared set of values and beliefs form the way people think the world ought to be like, that is, their perception of normality which include values, norms and behavior models. The research target of this study, Internet based media releases of the Coca-Cola Company, were studied from the perspective of cultural transference and effects research. Firstly, objective and news criterion and Althen's model of American cultural features were used to identify how the releases represent organizational external communication features and specific cultural features. Secondly, these results were used to speculate the potential effects of the cultural representations to the public's perception of "normality" and the potential of cultural change.

The first objective of this study was to find out if organizational media releases are reflective of American cultural characteristics. Althen's (1988) five characteristics of American culture: (1) high level of individualism; (2) emphasis on equality; (3) future orientations; (4) desire for action and achievement; and (5) directness and assertiveness (Okigbo et al. 2005: 315) were used to study the discourse of the media releases. Some aspects of the results corresponded with Alhen's theory of American cultural features. First of all, future orientation and desire for action and achievement were presented on an average or a slightly

high level in the media releases. In addition the value of directness and assertiveness was strongly presented in the media releases. A new value of positive living was also present in the releases.

There were also aspects in the results that were differing from Althen's American cultural features. According to Althen's model, USA should be on the average level when it comes to equality values and behavior. The results revealed that only eight releases of the 24 clearly reflected this value of equality. Interestingly, four releases included in the eight mentioned reflected equality but at the same time separated demographics, such as African American and Hispanic, from the general public and provided them specific targeted campaigns and activities. In other words, North American targeted releases were segmented to different demographics. This representation does not support a unified North American public but instead categorizes the nation according to subgroups. If the North American targeted media releases have had to be segmented this way by the Coca-Cola Company, one conclusion of this study, thus, could be that culture can not be studied only from a national culture perspective with merely geographical boundaries, such as North America. In stead, at least all the main subgroups should be considered in a study like this one.

One of the most interesting and noteworthy findings of this study is the representation of individualistic values in the media releases. Only six of the releases specifically presented individualistic values as altogether 19 presented collective values. The presence of strong family, environmental and other collective wellbeing values can be considered to be very interesting since individualism is identified as one of the strongest characteristic of the American society. One could criticize the results by saying that this representation is related to corporate objectives of product branding and image boosting. In addition, the cultural aspects of individualism and collectivism were in the theory, and in this study, perceived as extreme ends and there is the possibility that people value combinations of these two or perceive the world as something

in between the two extreme values. Nevertheless, the strong presence of collective values could indicate cultural change and potentially can affect culture and people's perceptions of the world in the future.

Consequently, the results could be used to speculate the validity of Althen's model in the case of corporate news releases and their representativeness of the American culture. Conversely, one realization of this study could be that Althen's model designed by observing particularly advertisement texts does not automatically correspond with the study results of media release research. Instead other theories which take into account the particular objectives and news criteria of organizational media releases should be considered as an option in a study similar to this one. This, nevertheless, does not entirely overrule the interesting findings of this study which include low individualism and differentiation cultural characteristic representations and transference in the media releases.

The second objective of this study was to speculate the cultural representations' potential effect on the viewer and his/her perception of how the world ought to be. As a conclusion it could be argued that the representations and discourse of the cultural transference in the media releases of the Coca-Cola Company have potential effects on the viewer's perception of normality. This is especially valid from the aspects that are differing from Althen's model – collectivism and differentiation. The other aspects supported by the study results do not have a strong potential effect on the viewers because they support the theories of present North American cultural features and are, thus, already a part of people's perception of normality. Criticism to these results is, nevertheless important because, firstly, the news criteria of the releases in this study might not have been significant enough for people to be interested in the releases in the first place and, secondly, people form their own meanings of discourse and, thus, might reject the cultural features presented to them because their own accustomed values, norms and behavior models guide their worldviews.

In the end, it must be noted that corporate media releases usually always have commercial and image oriented objectives. This becomes evident partly by viewing and comparing the cultural feature presentations with objective observations (see cross-tabling results in page 49-50). Thus, the organizational objectives have a great effect on the results of this study, especially the representation of American cultural features in the media releases. The cultural features, nevertheless, according to previous studies should be to some extent present and transferred in the organization media releases. This study, consequently, reveals some aspects of American cultural transference in certain organizational texts, media releases, which potentially need more research.

As a follow up research it would be interesting to study Althen's model in other corporate texts and see how the cultural features are reflected in them or use a different theory or no theory at all to study the cultural representations in media releases. In addition, different national subcultures could be taken into account in the study to examine their significance to the results. It would also be interesting to compare releases targeted to other nations or groups to the North American segmented ones and see what kind of different cultural representations they transfer.

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Release 2: COKE ZERO AND COCA-COLA TO DEBUT NEW ADS DURING TELECAST OF SUPER BOWL XLIII - ATLANTA, January 26, 2009

Release 3: DESTAPA LA FELICIDAD AND ENJOY LIFE WITH COCA-COLA - ATLANTA, March 26, 2009

Release 4: FANTA ORANGE NOW WITH 100 PERCENT NATURAL FLAVORS - ATLANTA, April 16, 2009

Release 5: DASANI RECOGNIZES AND REFRESHES AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN FOR MOTHER'S DAY - ATLANTA, April 22, 2009

Release 6: THE COCA-COLA COMPANY ANNOUNCES REFRESHING LINE-UP OF FOUNTAIN AND BOTTLED BEVERAGES FOR McDONALD'S® U.S. RESTAURANTS - ATLANTA, April 27, 2009

Release 7: THE COCA-COLA COMPANY INVITES CONSUMERS TO EXPERIENCE "FREESTYLE" - ATLANTA, April 28, 2009

Release 8: COCA-COLA LAUNCHES THE GREENING OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL - WASHINGTON, D.C., April 29, 2009

Release 9: COCA-COLA DROPS GREEN FLAG ON SUMMER WITH "QUARTER-MILE COOKOUT" AT LOWE'S MOTOR SPEEDWAY - CONCORD, N.C., May 6, 2009

Release 10: COCA-COLA LAUNCHES SEARCH FOR TEEN TORCHBEARERS IN THE U.S. FOR VANCOUVER 2010 OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY - ATLANTA, May 15, 2009

Release 11: WORLD OF COCA-COLA KICKS OFF SECOND ANNIVERSARY WITH $2 TICKETS FOR FIRST 2000 GUESTS - ATLANTA, May 20, 2009

Release 12: THE COCA-COLA FOUNDATION AWARDS $100,000 TO ENCOURAGE ALABAMA'S YOUTH TO BE ACTIVE THIS SUMMER - ATLANTA, May 27, 2009

Release 13: NESTEA® AND THE NBC UNIVERSAL DIGITAL STUDIO ANNOUNCE NEW ORIGINAL WEBISODE SERIES "CTRL" - ATLANTA, Ga. and UNIVERSAL CITY, Calif., June 2, 2009

Release 14: COCA-COLA PARTNERS WITH BET THIS SUMMER TO ASK AFRICAN AMERICAN TEENS "WHAT'S YOUR FORMULA?" - ATLANTA, June 3, 2009

Release 15: AQUARIUS SPRING!™ LAUNCHES $500,000 WATERSHED CONSERVATION PROGRAM - ATLANTA, June 11, 2009

Release 16: ICONIC TURNER FIELD COCA-COLA BOTTLE BIDS FAREWELL - ATLANTA, June 19, 2009

Release 17: THE COCA-COLA COMPANY ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF THE 2009-2010 GOIZUETA SCHOLARS FUND AWARD - ATLANTA, June 24, 2009

Release 18: COCA-COLA ASKS AFRICAN AMERICAN TEENS: "DO YOU SPEAK COKE?" WITH TV SPOT DEBUTING ON THE "BET AWARDS '09" THIS SUNDAY, JUNE 28 - ATLANTA, June 26, 2009

Release 19: COCA-COLA "OPENS HAPPINESS" AT THE 2009 ESSENCE MUSIC FESTIVAL PRESENTED BY COCA-COLA - NEW ORLEANS, July 2, 2009

Release 20: COCA-COLA TO UNVEIL NEW BOTTLE AT TURNER FIELD - ATLANTA, July 13, 2009

Release 21: THE FOURTH FANTANA® HAS BEEN FOUND! - ATLANTA, September 10, 2009

Release 22: PHSST... CLINK, CLINK... GLUG, GLUG, GLUG... FIZZZZ... GULP... AHH. MAKE THOSE SOUNDS AND YOU COULD STAR IN THE NEW 'SOUNDS OF COCA-COLA' COMMERCIAL - ATLANTA, September 22, 2009

Release 23: STYLE SERIES PRESENTED BY DIET COKE RETURNS FOR SECOND SEASON - ATLANTA, September 24, 2009

Release 24: COMING SOON: THE POWER AND TASTE OF MINUTE MAID ENHANCED JUICES AND JUICE DRINKS IN SINGLE-SERVE PACKAGES - ATLANTA, November 4, 2009

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1:

Example of a Coca-Cola Company's media release from the official website

News Release

COCA-COLA, URRC OPEN WORLD'S LARGEST PLASTIC BOTTLE-TO-BOTTLE RECYCLING PLANT

Coca-Cola launches multi-million dollar marketing effort in support of recycling expected to achieve nearly one billion impressions

SPARTANBURG, S.C., January 14, 2009 - The Coca-Cola Company and United Resource Recovery Corporation (URRC) joined government leaders and environmental experts today to celebrate the grand opening of the world's largest plastic bottle-to-bottle recycling plant in Spartanburg, S.C. As part of the celebration, Coca-Cola announced the launch of a multi-million dollar marketing effort supporting recycling called "Give it Back."

"Today we turn our commitments into action as we mark a key milestone in our goal to recycle and reuse 100 percent of our bottles and cans in the U.S. and ensure the sustainability of our packaging," said Sandy Douglas, president of Coca-Cola North America. "The opening of the Spartanburg plant, coupled with our investment in recycling businesses, programs and a new marketing effort, underscores our belief that our packaging has value and we want it back -- both for our own supply chain and to support the myriad of other uses for recycled aluminum and plastic."

When fully operational, the plant will produce approximately 100 million pounds of food-grade recycled PET plastic each year -- the equivalent of nearly two billion 20-ounce Coca-Cola bottles. Recycling PET for reuse yields significant environmental benefits. Over the next ten years the plant will prevent the release of one million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions -- the equivalent of removing 215,000 cars from the road. In addition to environmental benefits, the 30-acre Spartanburg plant has created 100 new jobs in the local community. View the video.

"We have been working with Coca-Cola for more than 10 years to help accelerate the development and commercialization of new, sustainable recycling technology," said Carlos Gutierrez, president of United Resource Recovery Corporation (URRC). "Today, we are not only proud to be part of the opening of the largest plant of its kind in the world, but also hopeful that Spartanburg can serve as an example of how investing in recycling infrastructure can have both environmental and economic benefits."

"Give it Back" Program
The "Give it Back" program is designed to remind consumers that Coca-Cola bottles and cans are valuable recyclables. The new multi-million dollar marketing effort supporting recycling will produce nearly one billion impressions in 2009 through billboard, print and television advertising, online messaging and promotional activities nationwide and at 600 college campuses across the United States "

Coca-Cola has the unique ability to connect with millions of consumers every day through refreshment," said Katie Bayne, chief marketing officer, Coca-Cola North America. "Our brands are inspiring people to join us in the act of recycling as we encourage consumers to 'Give it Back' and help us achieve our goal to recycle and reuse all of our bottles and cans."

Coca-Cola debuted a new television ad promoting recycling yesterday during the season premiere of American Idol on FOX, reaching millions of viewers. The 30-second ad, entitled "Portal," informs consumers that, "if you've had a Coke in the last 40 years, you've played a part in one of the largest beverage recycling efforts in the world." "Portal" will air during American Idol and other prime time programming during the first and second quarters. To view the ad and learn more about "Give it Back" please go to: www.livepositively.com.

New Year's Eve revelers at Times Square in New York City witnessed the "Give it Back" themed creative on Coca-Cola's iconic Times Square billboard. The animated billboard ad reminded people to recycle through the mantra "Recycle, Reuse, Repeat" and featured a series of "Give it Back" logos inside a Coca-Cola contour bottle.

"Give it Back" was first introduced on recycling bins and outdoor advertising during the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, where Coca-Cola Recycling, LLC, a joint venture between The Coca-Cola Company and its largest bottler, Coca-Cola Enterprises, served as the official recycling provider for both events. Similar outdoor advertising will run in Washington, D.C., New York City, Charlotte, N.C., and other major markets throughout this year. College students at more than 600 campuses also will participate in "Give it Back" themed recycling programs.

About The Coca-Cola Company
The Coca-Cola Company is the world's largest beverage company, refreshing consumers with more than 450 sparkling and still brands. Along with Coca-Cola®, recognized as the world's most valuable brand, the Company's portfolio includes 12 other billion dollar brands, including Diet Coke®, Fanta®, Sprite®, Coca-Cola Zero®, vitaminwater, POWERADE®, Minute Maid® and Georgia® Coffee. Globally, we are the No. 1 provider of sparkling beverages, juices and juice drinks and ready-to-drink teas and coffees. Through the world's largest beverage distribution system, consumers in more than 200 countries enjoy the Company's beverages at a rate of 1.5 billion servings a day. With an enduring commitment to building sustainable communities, our Company is focused on initiatives that protect the environment, conserve resources and enhance the economic development of the communities where we operate. For more information about our Company, please visit our website at www.thecoca-colacompany.com.

About URRC
United Resource Recovery Corporation (URRC), headquartered in Spartanburg, S.C., is a leader in PET recycling technology. In 1994, URRC completely revolutionized the PET recycling industry by developing and patenting the world renown Hybrid UnPET process for chemically super-cleaning PET flake for cost efficient food grade packaging. In 1996, the company entered into a five year development program with The Coca-Cola Company to commercialize the process by producing food-grade quality PET chip for bottle-to-bottle recycling. URRC provides manufacturing in the U.S. and offers licensing opportunities and engineering services for clients worldwide. For more information about URRC, please visit www.urrc.net.

About AMERICAN IDOL
AMERICAN IDOL is created and executive-produced by Simon Fuller, founder of 19 Entertainment; and executive-produced by Cecile Frot-Coutaz, CEO, FremantleMedia North America; and Ken Warwick, Executive Producer, FremantleMedia North America.