
Guest editorial: History of public relations

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Introduction

The papers included in this special issue were mostly presented and discussed at the 12th International History of Public Relations Conference held at Bournemouth University in July 2022. The diversity and breadth of accepted submissions signals a common challenge that academics and practitioners face when attempting to frame the field. Public relations has colonised several fields and the historical evidence presented testifies the integral relationship between PR and each field.

In attempting to prepare a cogent Introduction, the editor(s) have clustered the submissions into three very broad groups: The first connects with tourism, politics and sport; the second cluster addresses the history of public relations education in the second half of the twentieth century and since 2000; Finally, the third cluster considers methodological approaches to the historical study of public relations.

Napawan Tantivejakul's paper, *The State Railway of Siam and the Origin of Tourism Public Relations in Thailand (1917–1941)* looks at the central role that governmental public relations played in the development of rail services and tourism in Siam (Thailand) during the first half of the 20th century, a period of global economic and political uncertainty. The State Railway performed the role of the government's public relations division, in promoting travel and tourism in the country among both Thais and foreigners. The research fills a gap in the history of tourism PR and its relation to broader social and economic structures in Siam prior to the 21st century.

Ruth Garland's *No escape from the No.10 bunker? UK government news management under siege: John Major (1990–97) and Boris Johnson (2019–2022)* considers the principles and practice of effective and ethical corporate communications at the heart of British Government (No.10 Downing Street in central London is the Prime Minister's residence). She argues that the principles of ethical communications were marginalised during the Major period and in disarray during the Johnson premiership. When considering government communication, Garland considers that it is not sufficient, historiographically, to consider one particular actor or discipline, but all. One attitude could be that governments under siege and fighting for survival, like those of Major in 1995–1997 and Johnson in 2021–2022, were doomed to failure and therefore had nothing to lose by challenging PR orthodoxy. The author argues that this approach was wrong for at least three reasons: it did not ameliorate the state of constant crisis at No.10; it was not consistent with best practice in public relations; and it did not serve the public interest.

Kerrie Milburn's article, *Bernays and Goebbels: "The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde"*, takes a challenging view of public relations and propaganda by comparing the practice of Edward Bernays with the development of the Nazi's extensive and highly-developed propaganda led by Josef Goebbels. There are lessons from history, she commented, about deceptive communication and "fake news".

Tom Isaacson and Tasos Theofilou shed light over the understudied area of sports public relations. Their research compared the history of university football with cases in the United Kingdom and the United States in *Football (Soccer) on campus, examining the historical development and promotional impact of the world's most popular sport through transatlantic university comparisons*. They found that in the UK, football is the dominant campus sport with strong ties to professional football and high growth potential for the women's game.



The lack of a fan-based model indicates the possibility for structural change, but there is stiff competition for fan interest from the historically popular and well-developed professional game. In the US, varsity football (soccer) faces intense competition from popular revenue-producing sports, such as American football and men's basketball. However, growth in college soccer, which is assisted by high-profile international influences, indicated future advancement opportunities.

Following on from Watson (2015) who found that education was one of the “springboards” that powered the world-wide growth of public relations as a service industry and an occupation, Tom Watson discusses in *Debate over public relations education, 1950s–1990s: The IPRA perspective* how attempts at standardised world-wide PR education proposed widely in the latter part of the twentieth century have failed but, in the forms such as the IPRA Gold Papers Nos. 4 and 7, offered a benchmark for local and national approaches. In addition, Watson notes that tension between practitioners and educators has been persistent and largely relates to control over curriculum rather than creativity or innovation.

Susan Kinnear and Sarah Bowman in *Recognising a signature pedagogy for Public Relations teaching and learning in the last twenty years* contend that the driver for change in public relations education has been the constant struggle to prove value. They explore the historical and contemporary context of teaching public relations within a university setting, how it has evolved and the assumptions that underpin it both nationally and internationally. Findings, following investigation of post-2000 curriculums, indicate the existence of a “signature pedagogy” for public relations. The authors suggest that this pedagogy is a fresh way to look at teaching and learning that can be developed further. In addition, results suggest the existence of an Anglo-American, skills-based approach to public relations knowledge, alongside international nuances around multi-culturalism. From a practical viewpoint, the paper makes a contribution on how public relations tertiary programmes can be designed, taught and adapted in the future.

Finally, Sarah Bowman and Heather Yaxley explore alternative methods of historical research in *Developing an original Café Delphi historical method to research women's individual and collective experiences of sex, sexuality, and sexism in PR in the 1990s*, which offers a new approach to capture individual and collective experiences. The Café Delphi approach develops a feminine analytic tool employing metamodern oscillation to connect past, present and future. The paper considers the theory and practice of the Café Delta methods and offers a case on women's experience in British public relations employment in the 1990s.

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