

Editor's essay

Historical research within public relations is a relatively new field of scholarship. It may sound contradictory; however, the nature of the discipline and its dynamic expansion academically and professionally has, until recently, limited opportunity to research the phenomenon historically.

Attempting to explore the past of the discipline signals, in part, a desire to understand the present and to an extent foresee future directions. This historical quest for knowledge though does not come without challenges. When focusing on historical research and historiography, public relations researchers must become *historians* using the same techniques and appropriate methodological approaches as professional historians in order to explore and analyse the past. Perhaps there may still be scepticism on the ability to do so (J. Xifra, personal communication, July 7, 2016) or acknowledge the existence of professional prejudices (D. Wright, personal communication, July 6, 2016); however, recent scholarship provides a solid argument for the opposite viewpoint. One may also argue that existing tools and models used to capture historical developments are not appropriate (L'Etang, 2014); hence, there is a necessity to provide the space where public relations historians can be critical, reconceptualise paradigms, and become bolder in their analysis of the field. The scholarship of this niche area was offered a substantial platform for development in 2010 with the founding of the International History of Public Relations Conference (IHPRC) by Professor Tom Watson. Since then, expansion of research outputs published yearly in special issues, books, book chapters and the proceedings of the IHPRC is evident.

Over the past seven years, the IHPRC has provided the opportunity for more than 280 papers to be presented and discussed from Asian, Eastern European, Middle Eastern, African, South American, Western European and North American regions. The papers could be classified under the Watson (2013) typology in those describing and analysing narratives of the past, investigating historical cases, and offering an alternative approach. The latter typology offers a thematic breakdown involving themes on national public relations histories, influential personalities, cases/campaigns that were affected (even unintentionally) by public relations, and finally those that offer future historiographic directions.

This special issue hosts research outputs presented during the seventh IHPRC, held at Bournemouth University in July 2016, as well as the work of other public relations historians who responded to the call for manuscripts.

The four papers, in alphabetical order, are the following:

William Anderson, using the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) as a case study in his paper *Social Movements and Public Relations in the Early Twentieth Century: How One Group Used PR to Curtail Venereal Disease Rates*, introduces some antecedents of contemporary public relations. Public relations is examined in relation to social movements and how ASHA members used persuasive communication via audience segmentation, events, visual media and the creation of house organs to get their messages across. Public relations and public relations-like activities are highlighted in ASHA's campaign to make sexual health an issue for the public in the early 20th century.

Natalia Rodríguez-Salcedo and Beatriz Gómez-Baceiredo in *A herstory of Public Relations: Teresa Dorn, from Scott Cutlip to Burson-Marsteller Europe (1974-1995)* explore the developments of a world-renowned consultancy under the influential leadership of Teresa Dorn in the newly established democracy of Spain. Through oral and archival history, the authors offer insight on the difficulties and prejudices that a female practitioner of the time had to face while guiding Burson-Masteller to become one of Spain's top consultancies.

Cylor Spaulding and Melanie Formentin explore the advancement of Scientology as a church denomination in order to evaluate the role of public relations in this religious movement. The authors' article, *Building a religious brand: Exploring the foundations of the Church of Scientology through public relations*, provides evidence that allows the evaluation of founder L. Ron Hubbard's use of public relations to establish the Church of Scientology.

Finally, Gareth Thompson's *Parallels in Propaganda? A Comparative Historical Analysis of Islamic State and the Nazi Party* draws a comparative historical analysis between the so-called Islamic State (IS) and the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party) by applying historical institutionalism and interdiscursive analysis based on communication artefacts from both organizations. While comparing the propaganda operations between the two organizations, the author confirms parallels in ten categorizations and places into perspective the effectiveness of digital recruitment for IS. Thompson's findings place IS propaganda in historical context and provide insight on countermeasure communication strategies when considering the youth as a target audience of organizations such as IS.

All four articles enrich the literature on public relations history, proving that knowledge creation produced from historical research is valuable for practitioners, researchers, tutors or students of the discipline. Public relations doesn't exist in a silo and has a rich history that needs to be told accurately and interpretatively.

On a personal note, we would like to thank the authors, the contributors, IHPRC friends, *JPPR* and, most importantly, the reviewers of all manuscripts submitted for this special issue. All papers went through a double-blind peer-review process and, had it not been for the reviewers' endless volunteer work under considerable time pressure, nothing would have been possible.

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