

[ACCEPTED VERSION]

Editor's introduction: Bournemouth University's 2011 history conference

In this special section, drawn from presentations to the second International History of Public Relations Conference (IHPRC), held at Bournemouth University in England on July 6-7, 2011, there are eight papers which cover a wide range of topics and national sources.

They will be reviewed later in this editorial and offer evidence of the flowering of the field of public relations research and scholarship. Since it was launched in 2009, the International History of Public Relations Conference has become the international hub of research and scholarship in the field of public relations history. In that period, two conferences have been attended by more than 130 delegates, well over 100 abstracts received and more than 60 papers published in online proceedings at <http://historyofpr.com>. The third conference is being organised for July 2012, which attracted a record submission of abstracts from authors in 28 countries.

The conference has attracted papers from leading public relations scholars and historians such as Günter Bentele, W. Timothy Coombs, Anne Gregory, Vincent Hazleton, Robert Heath, Meg Lamme, Karen Russell, Jacquie L'Etang and Donald K. Wright. Delegates have come from more than 20 countries. The international panel of reviewers for conference abstracts numbers around 30 of whom 15 are full professors.

The eight papers, in alphabetical order of authors, are:

In 'Trains, chains, blame, and elephant appeal: A case study of the public relations significance of Mary the Elephant', John Brummette (Radford University) tells the tragic story of Mary the Elephant whose fate to be hung from a railway crane in Erwin, Tennessee in 1916 was decided by a press agent seeking publicity for a travelling circus. Using contemporary media coverage, the article discusses the implications of the press agency model of public relations, the impact of corporate decisions on the reputation of its surrounding community, and how the values related to societal issues such as animal cruelty change over time.

W. Timothy Coombs & Sherry J. Holladay (University of Central Florida) argue in their paper, 'Privileging an Activist vs. a Corporate View of Public Relations History in the U.S.' that the history of U.S. public relations has been distorted by emphasis on corporate functions of public relations. This myopic, corporate-centric view, they contend, has perpetuated a negative view of public relations as a mere tool of "big business." In the past as well as the present, they posit that corporations have been learning from and co-opting activists' innovative public relations techniques. By alternatively grounding U.S. public relations history in the works of activists, there are possibilities for re-imagining the field and legitimising activists' works as a positive, central component in public relations theory and research.

Alina Dolea (The National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania) uses exploratory research to categorise the recent historical characteristics of government public relations in her homeland. She uncovers the main stages in the institutionalisation of government public relations since 1989 and correlates them with the general evolution of public relations in Romania between 1989 and 2011 in a paper entitled 'Stages of institutionalization and professionalization of government public relations in Romania 1989 – 2010'. The paper adds historic context to the debate about the models of evolution of public relations in Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The recent history of the UK's Government Information and Communication Service (GICS) in the period from the mid-1990s until the end of 2011 is reviewed and analysed by Anne Gregory (Leeds Metropolitan University) in 'UK Government communications: Full circle in the 21st century'. Gregory tracks changes to GICS that start with its development and politicisation under the Blair Labour government from 1997 onwards through period of professionalization to its reduction and diminution of status in the current Cameron Conservative Government. A highlight for GICS was that its leadership from 2004 to 2010 was at Permanent Secretary level, equivalent to the major departments of state. However after government change in 2010, this post was ended and leadership is at a lower level. Using document analysis and interviews with key players in the circular period of change, the paper adds to knowledge of the politics and management of governmental public relations.

A new historical perspective on the development of crisis communication and crisis management theory over the past 50 years is given in 'Tracking the defining moments of crisis process and practice' written by Amisha Mehta and Robina Xavier (Queensland University of Technology, Australia). Their research traces the development of crisis process and practice by identifying shifts in crisis research and models and mapping these against key management theories and practices.

Simon Moore (Bentley University) explores medieval state communication in the writings and actions of two of the era's most influential writers in the paper, 'Ideals and realities: Renaissance state communication in Machiavelli's *The Prince* and More's *Utopia*'. He argues that communication plays very different parts in *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) and *Utopia* by Sir Thomas More (1478-1535). The contrasts between More's carefully controlled and Machiavelli's unconstrained political communication shed light on the communication issues and practices of their times, some of which still figure in relations between State and Citizen.

In 'The evolution of public relations measurement and evaluation', Tom Watson (Bournemouth University) identifies the main trends and influences on the development of public relations measurement methods and practices over the 110 years since the beginning

of the 20th century. As the measurement of public relations effectiveness has long been a major practice issue, the paper contributes to understanding and theorisation of these practices.

Is public relations a career or not? Heather Yaxley (Bournemouth University) addresses the question by exploring the origins of careers in public relations through content analysis of biographies and other published narratives from public relations' formative years in Britain and the US. Despite evidence of the possibility of professional and bureaucratic career paths, public relations pioneers tended to reflect entrepreneurial, opportunistic and primarily commenda (agency) forms of career. Most entered the field by chance, thus revealing a lack of deliberate focus on seeking employment in the occupation. Overall, the tapestry of early careers in public relations reflects a common thread of communications and openness to take advantage of the changing times.

The diversity of topics in these eight paper which ranges from press agency through interpretative models, national characteristics of public relations, government communications, medieval theorists, public relations practices and notions of careers. All are all examined through historical methods which demonstrates the richness of public relations historical research and scholarship. It can be asserted with full evidence that it has fully emerged from being a subset of business, journalism and media history into its own field. Long may it prosper.

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