

Editor's Preface

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It is especially pleasing for a special issue editor when the volume of submissions rises to almost twice previous levels. That brings two types of tension, though. The first that double the number of reviewers is needed to vet the articles – and consider them in scholarly yet timely manner. The second is the fear that quality may not rise with volume.

Public Relations Review's international panel of reviewers were almost universally helpful in undertaking their reviewing tasks with deep consideration and returning their critiques in a timely manner. The quality of feedback was very high and, even when a paper did not progress to publication, the author(s) received valuable guidance for future development. So I propose a metaphoric “round of applause” for the journal's reviewers. It is a voluntary task that is an important element of academic citizenship, and I thank them wholeheartedly.

As to whether the journal had received ‘pile ‘em high” submissions, the reviewers and this editor took the opposite view. The quality of papers exceeded expectations and a record of 13 papers are published in this special issue. I hope this is a ‘Great Leap Forward’ for the scholarship of public relations history (but without the disastrous results of Mao Zedong's industrialization and collectivization schemes of the late 1950s).

It is notable in this special edition that the largest cluster of papers can be considered under the heading of ‘historiography’, which has been an increasing theme at the annual International History of Public Relations Conference. Papers from Jacquie L’Etang, Jordi Xifra and Maria Collell, David McKie and Jordi Xifra, Cayce Myers and Nneka Logan all seek to extend the range of historiographic approaches. L’Etang addresses “thinking about thinking about PR history” and makes a case for greater engagement with historical sociology and historical theory. Her paper discusses evolutionary, functionalist and typological approaches, and historical periodization. Xifra and Collell introduce the work of French medieval historian Jacques Le Goff and the Nouvelle Histoire (New History) historiographic movement. They propose a nonlinear approach to the history of public relations “which will help to extend its time scale back to the beginnings of civilization” and overcome the division between pre-history (proto-PR) and the history of public relations as a practice and professional activity.

McKie and Xifra argue for three clusters of contemporary themes to feature in future public relations history scholarship: (1) “the environmental context of globalization”; (2) “the scale, methods and ecological inclusiveness to engage with these changes”;

and (3) “nation-centric mindsets, archival assumptions, and the impact of changing media”. Myers explores the influence of Arthur Chandler Jr's theory of corporate development upon public relations historiography. He argues that “rooting PR in a corporate context does not give legitimacy to PR practice and skews PR history to favor a corporate narrative.” Logan also considers corporate influence on public relations in her paper, “Corporate voice and ideology: An alternative approach to understanding public relations history”. She posits that public relations advisers in corporations created messages that reproduced ideological messages about corporations. These guided public thinking and reinforced the image of the corporation as a benevolent organization. Ideological theory, thus, is a valuable analytical tool for public relations history.

The edition also offers historical research from several countries. Kate Fitch considers the development of accreditation of public relations programs at Australian universities in the early 1990s which illustrates the continuing tension between academic education and professional bodies' interpretation of PR industry needs. Jean Valin, Anne Gregory and Fraser Likely chronicle the evolution of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management which was established in the late 1990s. This was a period when public relations practice was being swept along by globalization and profound changes were taking place to create supra-national approaches.

Three papers from U.S. researchers span from the early 19th century until the late 1970s. Tyler Page and Ed Adams tell the story of the controversial American Colonization Society's campaigns and tactics in the 19th century as it sought to repatriate black slaves to West Africa. It fell foul of both abolitionists and slave-owners. ACS's campaigns applied a wide range of public relations strategies and tactics well before these practices have been commonly recognized in literature. Lynn Zoch, Dustin Supa and Debra VanTuyll analyzed New York Times' coverage of public relations practitioners' work in the era of Ivy L. Lee to identify journalists' perceptions of public relations in the early decades of the 20th century. They found that although reporters understood the tasks and media used in public relations practice at the time, “the very “doing” of public relations” was under question.” Burton St. John III has investigated the use of corporate advertorials by Mobil in the 1970s “to build an influential persona by offering a corporate personality” which sought to be perceived as “believable and aspirational.”

Whether a scholar or practitioner, the reader has a rich variety of topics, historiographic approaches and debating points to contemplate in this special issue. We look forward to your contribution to public relations scholarship.

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