

HOW STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION SHAPES VALUE
AND INNOVATION IN SOCIETY

ADVANCES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

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ADVANCES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS AND
COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT VOLUME 2

HOW STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION SHAPES VALUE AND INNOVATION IN SOCIETY

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SERIES PREFACE

The field of public relations has never been more vibrant. There are more scholars, more projects, more conferences, more publications, and more outlets than ever before. Over the past decades, the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) and its members have played a key part in this development. EUPRERA works to stimulate and promote innovative knowledge and practices of public relations education and research in Europe. The association facilitates networking among its members, and runs several cross-national research projects and a PhD seminar, in addition to its annual congress. It is on the heels of the latter event that the new series *Advances in Public Relations and Communication Management* is now published in cooperation with Emerald. With the series, we offer some of the best papers presented at the annual congress. All contributions are peer reviewed (double blind) in order to bring you, the reader, the best of the new and exciting research in our area.

Each volume in *Advances in Public Relations and Communication Management* will be edited by the local organizer of the recent congress, the Head of the Scientific Committee of EUPRERA, as well as the EUPRERA President. The editorial team reviews and selects the strongest work from the many full papers submitted. Each congress has a topic chosen by the local organizer in cooperation with the EUPRERA board, something that obviously will be reflected in each volume in the series. Previous topics have included communication ethics, public values, and cultural identity, to mention a few. The topic of the 2016 congress in Groningen showcased how strategic communication shapes values and innovation in society, while in 2017 we will gather in London under the heading “Public relations and the power of creativity – Strategic opportunities, innovation and critical challenges.”

EUPRERA traces its roots back to 1959, when the association CERP Education & Research was founded. In 2000, the name EUPRERA was adopted. The location of the annual congress speaks volumes about an association that now involves the *whole* of Europe. Berlin, Milan, Warsaw, Bled, Tallinn, Leipzig, Lisbon, Carlisle, Roskilde/Lund, Bucharest, Jyväskylä, Leeds, Istanbul, Barcelona, Brussels, Oslo, Groningen/Amsterdam, and London are some of the recent host locations. As an association, we pride ourselves that we represent large parts of the academic public relations community in Europe, counting approximately 500 professors, lecturers, and researchers as members.

With the advent of the new series, we also hope to strengthen the congress experiences of our members and to attract new members. Most importantly, however, we see the series as a crucial platform for high-quality research and Pan-European cooperation.

Øyvind Ihlen
EUPRERA President (2016–2017)
Professor, University of Oslo, Norway

INTRODUCTION

With a society characterized by huge social, political, economic, and technological changes, it would be strange if the public relations discipline did not question its role in this picture. Hence, when the 2016 congress of EUPRERA was held in Groningen, the Netherlands, the theme summoning participants was *Let's talk society!* As stated by the organizers at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences: “Technological transitions, economical changes, medical advancements, environmental turbulence, political movements and other evolving circumstances influence public values that shape societies. It is important to analyze the situated meaning of these societal themes in everyday life, and the influence of public relations and strategic communication in this regard.”

Within the time span of three days, over 200 participants from 25 countries and 71 institutions gathered to discuss such topics. This volume presents some of the best contributions among the 45 presented papers and contains chapters from scholars based in the United Kingdom, Finland, Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Singapore. The nine chapters address the conference topic in a number of ways.

The first cluster is made up of three chapters that focus on *skills and competencies*. Adrian Crookes (London College of Communication, University of the Arts, London, UK) takes an inward look and explores how the university system in the United Kingdom readies the candidates for practice. In other words, Crookes addresses the social value of the worth of higher education. The chapter is titled “Educating Society’s Future PR Practitioners: An Exploration of ‘Preparedness’ as a Qualitative Indicator of Higher Education Performance.”

In the chapter “Lessons Learned: Communication Studies in Transition” Korien van Vuuren and Jan van der Stoep (both from Christelijke Hogeschool Ede, the Netherlands) review a new curriculum that has the aim of enabling the students to become relevant partners in dialogue with society.

The skills and competencies that are needed in the practice is also the topic of the chapter written by Markus Mykkänen and Marita Vos (both from University of Jyväskylä, Finland). That is, these authors research what practitioners say they need when they want to contribute to organizational decision-making. Business understanding and target group oriented reading top the list of the competencies that the practitioners feel are necessary. The title of the chapter is “Clarifying Skills and Competencies in Organisational Decision Making – Perceptions of Finnish Communication Professionals.” These findings obviously point back to the educational system.

Research on *social media* and public relations abounds, and two contributions to the 2016 conference centered on the dialogic potential and the use of social media by governments. This is the second cluster of chapters in this book. The first of these chapters discusses the touted dialogic potential of social media. Wim J.L. Elving (Hanze University of Applied Science/University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands) and Rosa May Postma (Berenschot Communication Consultancy, Utrecht, The Netherlands) confirm what is found in much of the research literature: The potential of social media is largely untapped. In the chapter with the title “Social Media: The Dialogue Myth? How Organizations Use Social Media for Stakeholder Dialogue” the authors warn about missed opportunities for engagement and trust building.

Public organizations typically face some of the same challenges as identified by Elving and Postma. Public organizations are the theme of the third cluster of chapters in this book. As indicated by the title, the chapter called “Towards a Societal Discourse with the Government? A Comparative Content Analysis on the Development of Social Media Communication by the British, French and German National Governments 2011–2015” traces this development in the three largest European countries. A three-person team consisting of Holger Sievert, Carolin Lessmann, and Jonas Henneboehl (all from the Macromedia University in Cologne, Germany) confirms that social media has become more important, but as the other social media chapter concludes, in terms of dialogue it is still a way to go.

The debate regarding the communication practice in the public sector is not only centered on social media use and dialogue with citizens. In addition, the transfer of private sector practices to the public sector is discussed. Much attention has been paid to the practice of so-called new public management. In their chapter, Aher Kaidi and Vilma Luoma-Aho (both from University of Jyväskylä, Finland) point to differences between the public and private sector in terms of change, and then link this topic to communication. The authors warn about implementing a top-down approach to change, and call for communication practices that emphasize engagement. The title of the chapter is “Contextualising Change in Public Sector Organisations.”

A mainstay in public relations research in general is *crisis communication*, and this volume has two contributions in this area. The first of these addresses the plight of the government, more specifically what happens when a nation’s leader experiences widespread critique. In the chapter titled “When a Nation’s Leader Is under Siege: Managing Personal Reputation and Engaging in Public Diplomacy,” Augustine Pang, Ratna Damayanti, and Eugene Yong-Sheng Woon (all from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) explore image repair strategies. An addition to the well-established typology of William Benoit is the strategy of diversion.

The second crisis-communication chapter takes a step back to review a string of related key concepts across disciplines. The chapter titled “Reputation: A Cross-Disciplinary Study of Key Concepts in Public Relations,

Business Administration, and Public Administration” is written by Finn Frandsen, Winni Johansen, and Heidi Houlberg Salomonsen (all from Aarhus University, Denmark). In the text, it is particularly the concept of reputation that is under scrutiny and the authors conclude that public relations has not really engaged with this concept, while public administration has had a vibrant debate about the practice as indicated above (cf. new public management).

Lobbying or *public affairs* is yet another contested communication domain. In a chapter titled “Secrets of Public Affairs,” Mona K. Solvoll and Tor Bang (both from the Norwegian Business School, Norway) discuss the lack of transparency in this business. The authors construct a model for analyzing public affairs activities based on principles of transparency and secrecy. A conclusion is that the studied public relations agencies take care not to give away too much about their competencies or privileged insights.

Taken together the chapters demonstrate how the discipline of public relations influences society through, for instance, education, by emphasizing certain aspects over others. As pointed out implicitly or explicitly by several of the chapters: Public relations may or may not enhance societal dialogue, while the latter is obviously what the academic discipline aims for. Thus, it can be concluded, we need to continue talking.

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