

AN INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC RELATIONS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define public relations.
- Identify key areas within public relations.
- Distinguish between public relations and similar disciplines.
- Understand the influences of other disciplines on public relations.

Introduction

What do you think of when you hear the term *public relations*? Take a moment and jot down your first impressions. After reading this chapter, reflect back on your notes and see what has or has not changed in your thinking about the field.

In the mind of the general public, our field is often associated with fictional characters such as Samantha Jones in *Sex and the City* or Olivia Pope in *Scandal*. Some even refer to us derogatively as “spin doctors,” meaning that our job is to make something seem better than it is. Yes, it is true that planning events in the entertainment industry and managing crisis communications are important parts of what we do. However, our field is so much more. In contrast to the “spin doctor” stereotype, we are bound by carefully constructed ethical guidelines, as will become clear in this book.

PR practitioners, or those of us who work in the field, look at public relations from various perspectives. Some focus on the duties of PR professionals, such as media pitching, creating press releases, and formulating media kits, while others focus on specializations within the field, such as event planning and crisis communications, as well as media campaigns, or reputation management, and we will explore these perspectives in depth. An example of these efforts includes the campaign that brought together McDonald’s and Burger King. Both are competitors in the marketplace with their own reputations to manage and oversee, but for the purpose of a good cause, the two brands came together in a media campaign to fight the battle against cancer.

Burger King and McDonald’s had not partnered on previous campaigns due to the fact they are competitors in the same market in the fast-food industry. However, the purpose of this campaign focused on a good cause that affects all audiences, even

the brands' own customers. They took off their competitors' hats (or, in this case, gloves) to partner together to raise awareness and drive donations to support the cause to fight cancer. This resulted in positive media coverage and acknowledgement for their efforts, which shows you can collaborate and support a good initiative even with your biggest competitor. Some things are bigger than selling burgers, and this is what Burger King and McDonald's did with this partnership.

As we will discover in this chapter, public relations is in a state of transition. We face new challenges every day, and we need to have the right tools, resources, and insights to best meet these challenges. This chapter explores what public relations is and how it functions, what PR professionals do, and how the field differs from, and collaborates with, related disciplines.

Finally, this chapter summarizes how public relations today is more than just press releases and working with the media—ours is a field that is evolving, combining the use and application of data, stories, marketing, advertising, and social and digital components to foster and sustain mutually beneficial relationships across audiences and channels. Using conversation, storytelling, and the development of sustainable communities, we can connect with related disciplines using our relationship management practices.

What is Public Relations?

Everyone has a different perception and definition of what public relations is, and it is important to know how the parties involved, from academics to practitioners, define the field.

How Academics Define Public Relations

Academic scholars have defined **public relations** as “the planned effort to influence opinion through socially responsible and acceptable performance based on mutually satisfactory two-way communication” (Cutlip & Center, 1971, p. 4). Broom and Dozier (1983) further defined public relations as being “concerned with relations with numerous publics, that like consumers, affect organizational survival and growth” (p. 6). Coombs (2001, p. 106; see also Health, 2000) defined public relations as “the use of communication to manage the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders.”

How Practitioners Define Public Relations

As practitioners, we have our own view of the field. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), our largest professional organization, defines public relations as a “strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (Public Relations Society of America, 2020). Lewis, a PR firm, describes public relations as the “seamless integration across multiple channels. Successful brands know there is a multiplier effect when public relations and digital marketing work hand in hand, ensuring continuity across channels and around the world”



Burger King and McDonald's join hands to fight cancer.
GritDaily

(Tannahill, 2015). What this means is, for public relations to work, there has to be an effort in making sure all channels, audiences, and content are coordinated together for the right place, time, and location.

There are similarities between academic and practitioner perspectives when it comes to the conceptualization of public relations. First, both academics and practitioners recognize that public relations has a core focus on relationship management (understanding the dynamics of the needs and expectations from each party involved) and that this impacts the dynamics between an organization and its key publics. Key publics are individuals who have a clear relationship with the client and will be the primary targets for the message strategies being implemented in a PR campaign. Second, academics and practitioners alike argue that for these relationships to work, they have to offer a win-win situation for both parties, not just one.

Yet, there are some differences between academic and practitioner perspectives. Academic scholars focus on how public relations is conceptualized based on theoretical perspectives (discussed in Chapter 2), whereas practitioners look at public relations as a strategic element and a process for accomplishing mutually beneficial relationships. Mutually beneficial relationships focus on creating a win-win situation for both parties involved. The strategic element is an important one to add here because the field relies on research, planning, and the creative execution of these efforts.

How Do We Build Relationships in Public Relations?

Why do we use the term *public relations* to describe our field? The first word, *public*, refers to the key audiences with whom we want to engage in conversation for the ultimate purpose of creating a strong connection that is sustainable for the long term. *Relations* refers to the connection we forge with our audiences (or publics), based on common ground. So, in sum, the term *public relations* literally refers to engaging in an ongoing dialogue with individuals or groups in a win-win situation. For example, in the case of the McDonald's and Burger King collaboration to fight against cancer, both brands gained positive media coverage for uniting to help address a global health issue, and at the same time, audiences and those impacted by these efforts benefited in knowing two global brands are doing their part in helping address this cause for them, which creates a win-win situation for everyone involved.

We Identify Publics

Our audiences usually have relevant age cohort (otherwise known as age generational cohorts, similar to baby boomers, Generation Z, millennials, etc.), demographic, and psychographic (core lifestyle, attitude, behavior, and opinion attributes) characteristics that may be important to keep in mind when planning particular initiatives and activities. For example, the age cohort of boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) may respond to a PR campaign differently than millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) do. Some brands (products or items that are created and produced by a parent company like General Motors and Chevrolet trucks) aim for engagement with members of a particular demographic, such as a socioeconomic group. For example, manufacturers of affordable or luxury cars take their audience's respective needs into account. PR campaigns also target particular psychographic segments of their audience, such as people interested in fitness, food, or home improvement. One of the cardinal sins for PR practitioners is

to state “we want to target the general public.” This means you want to target everyone, which may be neither realistic nor achievable within the scope of a campaign. Targeting the general public—essentially capturing the 8 billion people who are part of the global society—is usually not the best way to approach things.

Publics is a common term in public relations, one that helps us identify audiences who will be the focus of a campaign. These are individuals whose shared characteristics mean it makes sense to group them together. For example, if Starbucks were going to explore its publics, it might separate publics who are avid coffee drinkers from publics who are tea drinkers (or, heaven forbid, decaf drinkers!). The key for PR professionals is to make sure publics are categorized by specific attributes. By doing this, PR professionals are able to group and focus on certain audiences during a campaign, which is far more practical than trying to reach every person on the planet.

We Focus on Stakeholders

A special kind of public is known as a **stakeholder**, an individual who has a vested interest in the organization. Stakeholder theory, which helps us understand the behavior of stakeholders, has been an important part of PR research for decades (Laplume, Sonpar, & Litz, 2008). Stakeholders come in many different ways, but those who have an invested interest financially or emotionally are those who are considered to be stakeholders. For example, college students are key stakeholders for the university since they (1) are invested in their education financially and (2) want their university to do well for their reputation and the prestige of their degree. Freeman (1984, p. 25) was the first scholar to operationalize what stakeholders are by defining them as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives.” Clarkson (1995, p. 106) defined stakeholders similarly by stating that they “have, or claim, ownership, rights, or interests in a corporation and its activities, past, present, or future.” Grunig and Repper (1992) defined stakeholders as publics, implying they are a broader group comprised of anyone an organization needs to be aware of for its well-being. Stakeholders want to work with organizations that practice ethical behavior and maintain a positive and proactive relationship with them for the long term (Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998).

More contemporary scholars view the management of stakeholders as more “network-based, relational, and process-oriented” (Andriof & Waddock, 2002, p. 19), meaning that stakeholders are not working or operating in silos, but are connected to each other based on mutual contacts, experiences, and even online communities. We are all “six degrees of Kevin Bacon” related! Organizations that are effective in managing relationships with stakeholders can enhance their overall strategies and reputation among their stakeholders for the long term while separating themselves from their competitors (Hillman & Keim, 2001). One of the main reasons that corporations and other large entities focus on their communication and business practices in relation to stakeholders is that such a focus increases the positive perception of a corporation (Argenti, 1996).

We Manage Relationships Between Publics and Brands

Besides exploring population data (demographics) and attitudes and opinions (psychographics), we will look at other attributes that define the publics of public relations. The current relationship that a public has with a brand or an organization is a key factor. **Engagement**—the actions



Nike
@Nike

Follow

You can take the superhero out of her costume, but you can never take away her superpowers. #justdoit



12:34 AM - 25 Aug 2018

124,474 Retweets 295,587 Likes



Serena Williams

2.5K 124K 296K

Nike and Serena Williams
Nike, via Twitter

Nike responded, supporting Williams, sparked positive feelings among key publics because Nike's actions aligned with the public's expectations of the brand. This alignment is a key factor that can help contribute to the overall relationship that a public has with a brand. Because of this, more brands are willing to stand for a viewpoint, perspective, and issue that is tied to their brand and those that are associated with it. This practice is bringing forth a new advocacy wave for brands to take on. Audiences, especially those in Generation Z, want organizations and others to stand for various issues—social, environmental, race, global, and so on—that are tied to their corporate values and community-based expectations. REI did this for its #OptOutside campaign to encourage its customers, employees, and others to go outside instead of shopping during Black Friday sales. And, brands such as Dick's Sporting Goods and Walmart have taken the initiative to not sell guns and other firearm products in their stores to address the gun control issue. When implemented, the reactions from brands on these various issues have been both positive and negative, depending on the response from the brand's key audiences and the brand's own view of its actions. As will be discussed later in this book, advocacy messaging, such as that accomplished by Nike, can bring forth both praise and resistance, even to the point of boycotts and outrage from key audiences. An example of this was the recent Gillette commercial (discussed in Chapter 2) in which the corporation, for the sake of its brand, took advantage of the growing trends in advocacy advertising. This new approach is especially relevant to longer-term audiences (such as Generation Z and future generations).

taken in response to a content or message strategy of an organization—is a focus of PR practitioners and researchers. PR researchers need to recognize not only the power of engagement in traditional circumstances, but also the importance of engaging with audiences online, both digitally and socially (Dhanesh, 2017).

By connecting at the online spaces our audiences gravitate to, we can form relationships. Some audiences will have a positive relationship with a brand or organization, while others will not. We describe a public's relationships with brands as positive, neutral (not engaged yet), or negative. These various relationships are evident in recent cases. For example, Nike received positive feedback from its customers when it released an ad supporting tennis player Serena Williams after the French Open president said she couldn't wear her catsuit during competition because it was "too revealing." The way that

Let's look at another example of relationship management. In 2017, United Airlines faced a brand crisis when a live video of a passenger went viral on social media; the content of the video did not do any favors for the brand's reputation. In this case, a passenger was dragged from a United flight, which resulted in a damaging onslaught of media coverage of the airline. Customers who saw the video responded negatively toward the brand; it had damaged their relationships with United. Subsequently, the airline noted the response and adjusted its messaging strategies to try and restore its relationships with customers. While the brand will always have to bear the incident and its fallout as part of the company's history, United strategists are making efforts to restore customer trust and improve relationships with the airline's key audiences.

Where Do We Find Public Relations in Action?

The work we do takes place across a wide spectrum of industries and sectors. Avidar (2017) notes that public relations functions in public and government sectors, private business sectors, and social nonprofit sectors. In addition to these three traditional areas, new contexts for PR specialty areas (social media, technology, etc.) and roles (consultants, entrepreneurship, and freelancing) are emerging. The lines between related disciplines are blurring. For example, today's PR professional is expected to be competent in advertising and paid media, responsibilities that used to exist outside the domain of the PR professional.

The work we do is not always recognized as "public relations." Jobs for PR professionals are listed in various and different terms. For example, for some organizations, PR functions are listed as part of "corporate communications." This model is used by General Motors, Brown-Forman, Yum! Brands, and many other large organizations. In these cases, our responsibilities and work are focused internally, within the corporate setting. Many corporations and their brands list corporate communications in job titles, yet the individuals in these positions supervise other departments of specialization such as employee advocacy, public affairs, investor relations, social media strategy, and community outreach and relations. In organizations such as the military or nonprofit groups, a public affairs or public information officer may be described with terms that we associate with PR professionals.

The profession of public relations is practiced worldwide. Public relations has a significant global presence, and practices differ from country to country (Verčič, van Ruler, Bütschi, & Flodin, 2001). Many brands maintain a global presence, requiring consistent messages that we create and share. At the same time, brands need to tailor messages to unique local circumstances.

What Do We Do as PR Professionals?

As PR professionals, we are often assigned to the following functions. We

- serve as the trusted counsel of an organization (which means being proactive in making sure the team knows all of the different perspectives, options, and challenges they could face and how messaging strategies could help address this);
- engage with internal audiences (building team advocates internally with employees and staff members could help address any challenges that come from external audiences);

- serve as the contact point for the media (being the face of the organization in the media allows the messaging to be consistent across channels and situations);
- implement community initiatives (which means leading the way to advocate for community efforts to support those who are impacted by our efforts);
- manage expectations and perceptions before, during, and after a crisis (which means making sure to address all concerns, questions, and preparations for when a crisis hits); and
- advocate for audiences internally and externally (public relations serves as an advocate for our client for all audiences, inside and out, and it is important to make sure to communicate consistently across all audiences).

In addition to this list of our traditional responsibilities, our field is growing and developing new areas of specialization. For example, we might be expected to manage social media, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) message strategies. Social media messages come from all platforms and channels, which means we must be able to create, curate, and analyze content, making sure it reflects our brand's voice, community, and values. AR and VR are still relatively new media for us, but through experience—immersing ourselves into virtual worlds (through VR) and adding in additional layers of information (through AR)—we can make stronger connections between our audiences and brands.

On the job, we must be able to write, research, think creatively, and function in a business setting.

We Write

Writing in many different formats and in different media is one of our biggest responsibilities (see Chapter 7 for coverage of writing). Among the items we produce are

- press releases;
- news releases, or formatted stories that follow the journalism structure of a news article in the style of The Associated Press, which allows journalists and media professionals a way to review this story to determine if they want to cover it in their own publication or media outlet;
- fact sheets;
- backgrounders, which focus on providing an overview of the brand, key parties, and the campaign for the media in order for them to write a thorough and complete story for their media outlet;
- memos and pitches, which are persuasive statements and points directed to media professionals to persuade them to cover the story about your client and can come via phone, email, or social media channels;
- speeches;
- question-and-answer sessions;
- scripts for public service announcements (PSAs);

- feature stories;
- strategic briefs and plans, from creating a brief overview of an idea you have for a campaign to launching a full comprehensive PR plan to execute; and
- social media content to be distributed across vast array of channels.

Because of changes happening in the industry, we are performing new tasks and creating new kinds of writing. Some of the shifts in the industry are the result of new platforms and tools (e.g., social media), the blurring of the lines between industries (e.g., ads for advertising campaigns), and new content for new channels (e.g., AR, VR). These new tasks and types of writing require that we

- update social media;
- create storyboards for advertisements and social media content pieces (visual layouts of each scene that will be created);
- listen to and monitor reports from traditional, digital, and social media;
- perform influencer audits (evaluating which influencer to work with based on certain criteria);
- create white papers and ebooks;
- conduct walk-throughs for VR experiences;
- create briefs to launch new AR features to provide information and generate awareness on issues and knowledge;
- compose ads;
- create content calendars (outlined dates and schedules for when content will be pushed and executed across different channels);
- write analytics reports from social and digital media campaigns; and
- create visual storyboards for stories on specific platforms.

We Conduct Research

Conducting research, setting forth objective predictions, systematically collecting information, and working with numbers are key skills that we must have. Yes, we *do math*: The days of simply sharing data with marketing research firms and asking them to calculate the numbers are over. Identifying trends, current expectations, and early warning signs of possible issues that could translate into a bigger crisis for the brand help us understand what is happening in the field.

Research skills not only allow us to uncover data and interpret results; they help us to apply what we learn. To apply our insights, we outline and discuss our findings through a strategic lens and evaluate them in terms of their relevance using the plan we have in place. We develop strategic plans, analytical reports, and SWOT analyses (understanding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for an organization or client in question), and we listen to and report further insights gained.

Many PR firms and university programs are well known based on the research they share with the community. For example, over the past 12 years, the communications firm Edelman has established itself through research that explores trends in consumer trust. Further, every two years, the University of Southern California produces the Communication and Public Relations Generally Accepted Practices (GAP) Study, a comprehensive study focused on identifying new trends related to the industry, emerging skills among practitioners, and the current industry landscape.

We Think Creatively

Creativity and creative thinking are essential skills for the PR professional. Other disciplines such as marketing and advertising may lay claim to the creative hat, but no one discipline “owns” creativity. As PR professionals, we are in an optimal position to bridge the science and art of persuasive messaging. We help amplify our clients’ stories to invite audience connection. With the help of integrated research practices, strong audience insight analysis, and an understanding of the nature of sustainable relationship- and community-building practices, public relations can become the hub that connects various disciplines together in the integrated marketing communication spectrum. We are creative in how we approach and build bridges between the insights gathered from research and how they can be executed and applied through messaging, content creation, and storytelling. Public relations is as much of an art as it is a science.

We Understand Business Practices

As PR professionals, we must have and be able to exercise an understanding of business. We must be ready to go into a boardroom with a solid background in finance, accounting, marketing research, and business communication practices. Most PR departments report to a chief marketing officer (CMO) or marketing department. Like public relations, business has its own language, terms, and practices. To be effective, we must be able to work hand in hand with professionals from various departments in our organizations.

We Meet Emerging Expectations

As mentioned earlier, being skilled in writing, research, creativity, and business are key elements for us to have in our tool kits. To cope with a rapidly changing industry landscape, we must be adaptive and agile and able to bring new capabilities to the table. Already, academic disciplines such as marketing, advertising, and English are becoming more adaptive, and we PR students and professionals must work to stay ahead of these trends.

Among the newer roles and expectations for PR practitioners are the following:

- **Forecasters.** Forecasters anticipate concerns about issues such as the environment. An example of an award-winning environmental campaign is the Cannes Lions “Trash Isles” campaign. This was a campaign that advocated action to make sure we are not polluting our oceans any more as a planet.
- **Reputation managers.** Reputation managers understand how to manage, build, and rejuvenate a brand image when it is in crisis, and to protect it in case something further goes wrong. Examples of recent reputation management are the handling of the Papa John’s case, Aflac’s reputation deficit, and Prince Harry and Meghan Markle’s move to no longer be part of the Royal Family. In addition,

Carnival is battling to overcome reputation and crisis challenges (as discussed in the next point) in how it is handling sick passengers on its cruise ships in light of the coronavirus epidemic that is spreading worldwide. In these cases, owning the narrative and being mindful of the long-term effects could be factors to discuss and strategize from a PR standpoint.

- **Crisis communicators.** Crisis communicators manage major problems that cannot necessarily be anticipated. For example, the “Crock-Pot® Killed Jack” campaign that refers to the popular character from the show *This Is Us* sparked a lot of discussion on how to manage a PR crisis. When the character Jack Pearson died because of a fire that was caused by a Crock-Pot during one of the episodes on the show, Crock-Pot as a brand had to respond to the outrage emerging from the fans of the show online and in the press.
- **Creators.** Creators, such as Nike and Serena Williams, understand how to create new stories from perspectives not showcased in previous efforts in public relations. For example, the brand Nike took a stand, in collaboration with Williams, to empower athletes to have their own voices, not only in its product but through its branding. This happened after the French Open, where Williams was not allowed to wear a catsuit or a tutu while competing.
- **Digital and social media experts.** Such experts know how to engage the public through their brand and how to stand out with brand messaging on social media. One example is the Mr. Peanut campaign created for the 2019 Super Bowl. The experts who created the campaign connected with Super Bowl audiences through real-time interactions and contests.
- **Storytellers and storymakers.** Storytellers provide an opportunity for audiences to engage and relate more to a brand or organization on an emotional level. Examples of expert stories include the “Here to Create” campaign with Billie Jean King and Adidas at the U.S. Open, DiGiorno, and the tribute Nike provided to the late basketball star Kobe Bryant and his family. Stories come in all shapes and sizes, and each has a unique tone. Some spark happiness, some sadness, but overall, the goal is to spark an emotional connection with audiences that resonates with them.
- **Advocates.** Advocates spark change and raise awareness. One example is the animal crackers campaign by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).
- **Cause evangelists.** So-called cause evangelists advocate for action to be taken to make an impact on society to think or act differently to address an ongoing issue. An excellent example of this is the Dove “Real Beauty” initiative, which focused on addressing the need that beauty is everywhere, and we are all beautiful inside, to address the pressure of certain standards of beauty that were presented only in the mass media.
- **Strategists.** Strategists provide connections to creative ideas and strategic executions. An example of an excellent strategy is the campaign “Nothing Beats a Londoner” by Nike. This campaign took a new innovative idea and, with the help of research and being able to determine what has been done in the industry already, creatively executed this experience for London residents to be a part of and share with others.

How Do We Work With Professionals in Related Fields?

What differentiates public relations from related fields, such as journalism, advertising, and marketing?

Those who may underestimate or misinterpret public relations as a profession may not understand our responsibilities. Our field is sometimes viewed inaccurately as a subfield of marketing or tied to limited specializations such as event planning and publicity. Public relations may not be taken seriously by some because it “only” focuses on managing relationships. This is in spite of the fact that social psychologists view managing relationships as one of the most challenging functions of the human mind (Caccioppo & Freberg, 2019). Our field may not be considered to be truly scientific because, as practitioners, we deal with intangible assets, such as attitudes and opinions.

In fact, to achieve optimal outcomes for our organizations and publics, our activities must be integrated with those carried out by professionals in marketing, advertising, journalism, and other related fields: Public relations can be the bridge that connects these disciplines together. To this end, it is important that we advocate for our discipline and correct any misinterpretations or misunderstandings of what we do and how we do it.

For decades, professors of advertising and marketing and professors of public relations distinguished between the fields based on “paid” versus “earned” mentions in the media. Advertising agencies, responsible for placing paid content in media sources, were separate entities from PR agencies that pursued strong relationships with journalists and used persuasive strategies. The emergence of digital media blurred the lines between paid and earned. In response, Gini Dietrich (2020) developed the PESO model, which distinguishes between paid, earned, shared, and owned media.

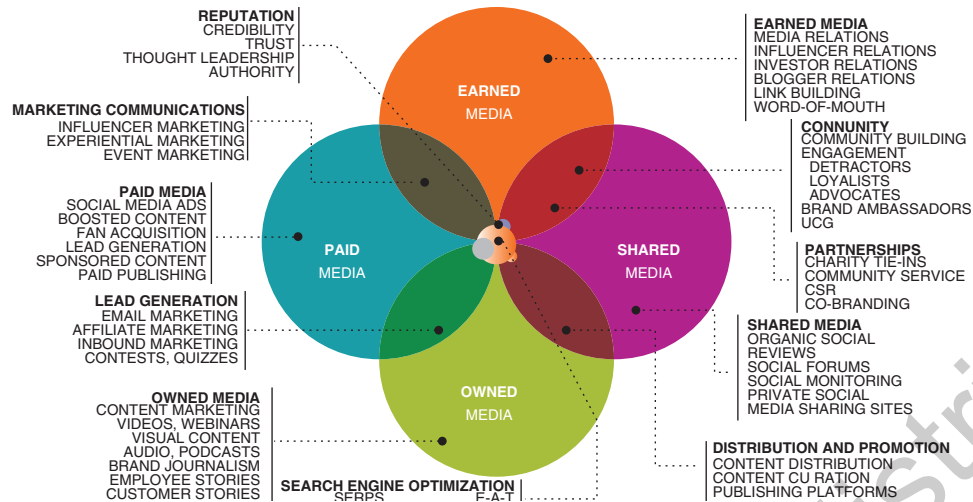
As PR professionals, we are on the same team as those in journalism, advertising, and marketing. We no longer work in discipline-related silos within our organizations but must take an integrated interdisciplinary approach to succeed. To be effective, we need to be aware of what our colleagues in public relations and related disciplines are doing and how to best work together.

We Work With Journalism Professionals

There are many professions that are aligned and work well together, and then there are those that do not get along so well. Welcome to the relationship between public relations and journalism.

Most PR programs in colleges and universities around the world are found within journalism programs, and the relationship is somewhat “complicated.” Public relations is sometimes viewed as the “stepchild” of journalism, and journalists claim they are the “real storytellers” for the profession. Now, we are capable of working together—and we need to do so. Journalism programs, along with PR programs, are adapting and changing together.

However, the market speaks differently to the disciplines. While media outlets lay off reporters and journalists, the number of PR jobs continues to grow. According to *PR Daily*, in 2018 PR professionals outnumbered journalists by 6 to 1 (Schneider, 2018). Many times, journalists come to the “dark side” of public relations after their careers in journalism stall. That’s okay—we have coffee and cookies. In all seriousness, journalists have a job: to find facts, to report news, and to capture and create stories that are relevant for their publication or outlet. Of course, PR professionals need to get exposure for their stories as well. This is not just a conversation taking place in the United States; it’s happening on a global scale (Tkalac Verčič, Lalić, & Vujičić, 2017). The relationship



between journalism and public relations is the subject of a global discussion in which both parties have different views and expectations for the other.

Here are some ways in which journalists and PR professionals interact with each other today:

- *We embrace experiential media to tell stories.* Journalists are all about using new ways to tell stories, whether to explore through VR what it is like to be in Syria during the country's civil war or to see The Weather Channel integrate AR to show the potential damage caused by Hurricane Florence, a storm that hit the Carolinas in 2018. PR professionals can work with journalists on these types of stories to help audiences experience what it is like to be in particular circumstances—whether it is for a movie promotion (such as *Tomb Raider* and VR) or for providing new services (such as Lowe's and its VR showroom). Any integration for experiences through these new emerging media can help journalism and PR professionals come together. Every experience is a story, and that's what journalists are always after.
- *We build a content marketing initiative through owned media (media that is controlled and owned by you).* PR professionals are embracing more brand journalism and storytelling by creating their own content. In a sense, they become their own media outlet. Branded websites, microsites, blogs, and trade and industry shows are just a few ways brands have done this. In one case, Gary Vaynerchuk, a *New York Times* best-selling author and entrepreneur who has built a media empire in VaynerMedia, has created his own brand and company with blog posts, videos, shows, and constant social media engagement. At the same time, Social Media Examiner, a company that hosts the annual social media conference, Social Media Marketing World, has its own show called *The Journey*. While both of these companies interact with the media industry and with professionals in this space, they do not rely on it as much as they have in the past.

We Work With Advertising Professionals

It is important to understand the differences between advertising and public relations. Public relations focuses on building relationships with segments of the public through

dialogue with media outlets to convey a story. **Advertising**, on the other hand, focuses on relationships that are built by paying for content to be placed at specific times in specific channels. Advertising and PR professionals have different views of what the other is doing, but acknowledge they need to be more integrated with each other (Supa, 2016). Advertisers have traditionally focused on measuring the impact of their messaging by using concrete metrics, whereas PR professionals have traditionally had a difficult time measuring their impact on their audiences. The differences are related to the measurement front, which is discussed in Chapter 12. However, as the lines between the two disciplines have blurred where the duties and responsibilities once separate or unique to one field are being added to the other, both have to acknowledge this and figure out how to work together to address this for their campaigns.

While integration is great, there are still some key differences between the two fields. Advertisers provide information directly to specific audiences through mass media. PR professionals, on the other hand, focus on key stakeholders, such as influencers, and match the right channel to their key target in a campaign. For example, Adobe wanted to reach marketing professionals who are using Adobe products in their work, so the company created an influencer group of Adobe Insiders who would be advocates and share their experiences with Adobe products in their work and at various industry-related conferences.

We can also see evidence of the differences in the budgets of advertising departments versus PR departments. The advertising budget is more focused on paid media, whereas the PR budget is more focused on staff. PR departments and firms have to invest in people to place content in media outlets because, unlike advertising departments and firms, they do not pay for this privilege. However, with the blending of the fields, we are seeing more paid media being added on to PR budgets as well.

Advertising is characterized by the use of “push,” or one-way, message strategies to get messages across to audiences, while public relations uses a “push-pull,” or two-way, dialogue designed to build mutually beneficial relationships. All advertising, like the campaign Spotify has done, is pushing a brand’s messages out to the public with little feedback directly to the brand unless it is through sharing content and commenting on this work on social media.

One of the other challenges that PR professionals face, as mentioned previously, is getting a budget. Because advertising departments have more established measurement and evaluation tools than PR departments do—tools that allow them to know whether

or not people have seen their content—they are more likely to get resources from management for media placements (where the content will appear in particular media channels). This is changing, however: PR professionals are adding more advertising and ad services to their repertoire while advertising professionals and agencies are adding public relations as a subcategory of the services that they offer to their clients.

Spotify ads
AdWeek



Public relations can support advertising by helping advertisers

- *understand the “why” behind advertising messages and taglines.* PR professionals know how to promote and engage audiences through media with different platforms that focus on dialogue rather than broadcasting messages. Engaging audiences, rather than just broadcasting messages, can be helpful in establishing relationships. Case in point: Facebook used this strategy for the ads it sent out after the Cambridge Analytica crisis, in which Facebook was allowing data to be used by this research company during the 2016 presidential election to target various political ads to audiences and violating user privacy measures. PR efforts helped to clarify why Facebook went directly to advertising measures to try to restore trust with audiences.
- *strategize when audiences may be outraged by a brand’s actions in a particular campaign.* PR professionals offer crisis and image response strategies. This was apparent in the Nike and Colin Kaepernick ad celebrating the 30th anniversary of the “Just Do It” campaign. This campaign was launched to address the connection and support of Kaepernick, who kneeled during the national anthem while playing for the 49ers professional football team.

We Work With Marketing Professionals

Marketing and PR professionals have worked together for many decades. In most cases, the PR department is part of the marketing department for major organizations, and it is a key part of the integrated marketing communication program. Yet, public relations and marketing remain very different disciplines. **Marketing**, compared to public relations, focuses on the larger picture of how to persuade audiences through a range of different techniques to encourage the audience to make a purchase. Public relations, however, focuses on the relationship and communication factors needed to build a bridge between the public and the organization.

Public relations offers a range of services that assist marketing departments and benefit organizations. We can support marketing by helping those professionals

- *understand influencers and nontraditional “media” platforms.* PR professionals can help marketing go beyond the transactional approach to understand the types of relationships needed by individual influencers (individuals who have a strong following and perceived area of expertise in a given area online). For example, influencers such as Ninja and The Rock want to partner with brands (as Samsung has done with Ninja and Under Armour has done with The Rock) that align with their own values and brands. Exploring these audience and relationship trends from a PR perspective can help marketing gain a better understanding of the relationship dynamic.
- *promote and understand the role the media plays in a campaign.* A marketing plan involves working with the media, and this is where public relations can help. With such a large range of media outlets, channels, and authors, it is critical to target the outlets that best align with the audiences at the focus of a campaign. PR professionals can help brainstorm ideas for how the media can best tell the compelling story of the campaign.

How Do We Use Storytelling?

Our field serves society, businesses, and individuals by advocating for stories to be heard, by managing relationships among audiences, by bringing forth new ideas, and by being the bridge that connects related disciplines. One element that makes public relations so effective is the power of stories. As PR professionals, we are natural storytellers and advocates for our clients' brands, campaigns, and initiatives.

That said, we know that consumers are the ones in power. Today, neither corporations nor the media are ultimately in charge of how messages are received, used, or interpreted. We have to take a step back and look at this from a communication perspective. That is, communication today is a receiver phenomenon thanks to the influence of social media on society and business. The receivers, or consumers, hold the power over the message and have become influential senders of messages as well.

In the past, newspapers and other media organizations were able to set their own agendas and publish the stories they felt were most relevant to their communities. Now, individual consumers go online to get the latest stories and information that is salient to them, all while bypassing traditional media outlets. Social media has revolutionized communication by creating platforms in which individual consumers control the stories and information they want *and* give feedback and voice to the organization or individual disseminating that message or story. This newfound influence allows receivers to establish meaningful and dynamic relationships with others while they transform themselves into individuals who also create and disseminate their own messages. The receiver has the power to discover connections with others who share similar interests and ideas regarding a given situation. In summary, social media has not created these conversations overnight (they were always there), but it has forced us in public relations to be proactive and responsive in a changing environment: We've never had control over the message. We must recognize that the power of communication belongs to the receivers of our stories: consumers.

Where Are We Headed?

Our field has been around for many years, as we will explore in future chapters in this textbook. We have embraced many different influences from fields including social psychology, journalism, marketing, and advertising. Today, we are at a crossroads for a variety of different reasons, including the following:

- Public relations will continue to have a strong presence in social media thought leadership but must do more to participate in major decision making. As discussed in a blog post by *PRsay* (Wright, 2018), PR professionals need to embrace social media practices to be able to create opportunities for dialogue with key stakeholders and publics. In addition, we need to have a seat at the decision-making table. In addition to implementing social media activities and strategies, PR professionals need to fully embrace and advocate for a more strategic management role in the industry. Some may think public relations should not venture too much into social media because it might not be “good” for the profession (Valentini, 2015). However, while social media presents challenges for PR professionals to address, it also offers great opportunities.

A PUBLIC RELATIONS WRITING PROCESS

Writing effectively is one of the most important (and challenging) things we do as public relations practitioners. For evolving professionals, it's a fundamental skill to develop—and the one most requested by employers. Not to worry! Using a process for creating effective content will help do your best work. I recommend the following:

1 RESEARCH CLIENT & TOPIC

- Determine client's style for writing /presenting content. Review previous work for attributes, messaging, "brand voice," the unique personality conveyed in that content.
- Discuss existing content/campaigns. Request samples of most successful pieces.
- Ask about assignment topic, sources for learning about it.

2 EXPLORE CLIENT'S AUDIENCES, PURPOSES, & TONE

- Discover target audiences; identify platforms used to share content.
- Ask client purpose of your writing (e.g. to persuade? inform?). What tone to convey (e.g. authority, humor)?

3 DETERMINE CAMPAIGN SCOPE & TYPES OF CONTENT TO CREATE

- Ask will you write one piece? Several?
- Ask what you will write, such as press releases, feature stories, social media updates. Locate research materials such as videos, websites, facts, content models.

4 CREATE CONTENT, REVISE (A LOT), & FORMULATE PUBLISHING STRATEGIES

- Draw on research to begin drafting. Refer to model (if you're writing text for video explaining a process, find an excellent example). Keep track of sources used; document as required.
- Share drafts with trusted professionals (who are not your client); explain feedback type desired (check for bias, etc.); draw on that to revise, finalize.
- Brainstorm how to promote, evaluate impact with metrics on engagement, sentiment.

5 CHECK CONTENT FOR ERRORS, ACCURACY, & EVIDENCE

- Edit and fine-tune. Check for format, accuracy, professionalism.
- Provide credits, citations, references of evidence as required.
- Evaluate (again); ask trusted professionals to read final piece for errors. First impressions matter!

6 SUBMIT/PUBLISH CONTENT & ANALYZE METRICS

- Send content to client or hit "publish" button on digital platforms.
- Evaluate impact of content using tools such as Cision, Meltwater, Talkwalker.
- Evaluate lessons learned for future assignments, samples for clients.

- *Public relations will continue to experience new ethical and legal challenges.* As technology and the social landscape change, so too do the issues that PR professionals face. New ways of lobbying (promoting certain efforts on behalf of others) are a key area for public relations to note (Myers, 2018), and cyberattacks and other crises, such as ethical conduct problems with brands (Wells Fargo, Uber, Michigan State University, USA Gymnastics, etc.), are additional factors for which we need to be prepared (as is discussed in detail in Chapter 3).
- *PR skills and insights will continue to be absorbed by other disciplines.* PR principles are being taught not only in PR courses, but in the courses of other disciplines, such as journalism. For example, brand storytelling (telling the story from the brand's perspective) is a PR staple that is now covered in journalism courses. English faculty, stating that they are the original storytellers, incorporate digital storytelling into their classes. Many types of academics and professionals are grabbing at new innovative channels, ideas, and perspectives that would normally be in the PR domain. Public relations needs to stake its claim and demonstrate its competence in these areas or risk becoming irrelevant.
- *PR educators and practitioners need to work together.* In the past, PR practitioners were not always aware of what PR instructors were teaching in PR courses at colleges and universities. Today, collaborative projects such as those addressed by the Commission on Public Relations Education (2018) help bridge the gap between the academic and professional worlds, but more work still needs to be done. One way to further build the bridge between theory and practice is to encourage PR educators and practitioners to attain Accreditation in Public Relations, or APR (Sha, 2011). The APR is the test to become accredited in public relations or licensed to practice in the field. It is not required to practice public relations, but it is a professional distinction that is respected in the field.
- *Public relations needs to embrace all related areas of specialization.* Innovation and creativity in messaging are not exclusively found in the field of public relations. For example, journalism creates innovative messages and embraces new media channels and tools including AR and VR.
- *Public relations needs to think outside of the field.* Public relations has taken ideas, theories, and perspectives from other fields to grow into a vibrant profession. Yet, public relations for the most part stays within the boundaries of the discipline without venturing out too far. To evolve and take the field to the next level, public relations needs to expand and explore new perspectives, collaborations, insights, and trends that can be brought back to the field to help it evolve to the next level.
- *PR research needs to embrace more diversity in topics and perspectives.* Along with bringing in new viewpoints and ideas, public relations must incorporate diversity, including diversity of race, age, sexuality, and thought, into our practices and implementation of messages (Wright, 2018). (For more on this topic, see Chapter 4.)
- *Public relations needs to be aware of the implications of the sharing economy, or the environment in which everyone is sharing rather than “owning” products*

(Gregory & Halff, 2017). The sharing economy has disrupted the norm for many industries, such as transportation (Uber), hotels (Airbnb), shopping (Amazon), and photography (Instagram). Why is the sharing economy important in public relations? The sharing economy

- shows the power of key stakeholders and publics to change the behavior of others and go in new directions to satisfy needs and expectations;
- presents opportunities for new partnerships that PR professionals can leverage; and
- emphasizes the importance of being agile, responsive, and innovative in approaching new industries, challenges, opportunities, and relationships.

SUMMARY

Public relations is a field and discipline that is faced with a challenging decision to make. We can continue down the path that allows us to use the same perspectives, ideas, principles, and models to guide our practices. This is the safe route in many ways, and many gatekeepers who like the way things have always been will want to continue on this path.

An alternative path that public relations can take is one that requires our innovation, creativity, and understanding of the balance needed to bring the science and art of our field together. This path is unknown and unexplored, which allows public

relations to lead, through voice and vision, the other disciplines we work with. Public relations, like marketing and every other discipline, should have the opportunity to lead, grow, and foster a new way of approaching our professional activities. This is crucial to the progress of our field and profession.

As you will see, each chapter in this text will bridge traditional public relations and its core principles and models—but also expand these areas with new ideas, cases, stories, and takeaways to help the field move to the next level. Let's start exploring the future of public relations together.

APR EXAM

- Definition of public relations as a management function
- An understanding of the overall purpose of public relations
- Functions of public relations

KEY TERMS

Advertising 14

Marketing 15

Publics 5

Engagement 5

Public relations 3

Stakeholders 5

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your overall impression of the field of public relations?
2. Discuss the skills that a PR professional needs to have. Which two skill areas surprise you the most?
3. Public relations is about relationships. What are some of the benefits and challenges of this perspective?

GAME CHANGER

Stephen Waddington, PR Professional



How did you get your start in public relations?

Working as a tech journalist in the '90s, I reported on the explosion in electronics and the build-out of the internet. There was

a shortage of people with skills to convey technical concepts in a way that the public could understand. I made the switch into public relations and doubled my salary. It seemed like a pragmatic move. I've since retrofitted a formal education.

What is your favorite part of working in public relations?

It is always changing, and it never stops. I thrive in that environment. I'm firmly a product of the modern media environment. I use my blog and Twitter as a personal form of media, networking, and learning and development.

What is the most challenging part of working in public relations?

The always-on dynamic is also a downside of working in public relations. It takes a deliberate and conscious effort to switch off. The conversation about mental health and well-being in public relations has begun to get louder in recent years. That's a good thing.

Who do you think are the biggest game changers for the PR industry?

The fragmentation of traditional media, and the explosion of new forms of media. A series of massive

technology platforms, namely Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google, have firmly established themselves as the new media ecosystem. Checks and balances remain a work in progress.

What are some things you wish you knew when you were starting out in PR?

How little the profession does to improve its own reputation; I firmly believe that we should have equal standing with other management professions, but only a fraction of practitioners adhere to the characteristics of a profession such as credentialing, qualifications, continuous learning, and a community between theory and practice. That's got to change.

Stephen Waddington is partner and chief engagement officer at Ketchum, helping clients and colleagues to do the best job possible engaging with the public. He is responsible for driving the integration of digital and social capabilities in client engagements across the agency's international network.

He is Visiting Professor in Practice at the Newcastle University supporting the university and students through teaching and mentoring.

Stephen understands how the media landscape works online and offline and champions best practice as a writer, conference speaker, and award-winning blogger. He is co-author of #BrandVandals (Bloomsbury, November 2013) and Brand Anarchy (Bloomsbury, February 2012); editor of and contributor to Share This (Wiley, July 2012) and Share This Too (Wiley, September 2013); and editor of Chartered Public Relations: Lessons From Expert Practitioners (Kogan Page, February 2015).

In 2017, Stephen received the PRSA's award for outstanding contribution to digital public relations and was named a top 10 U.K. PR blogger by Vuelio. Stephen is a Chartered Public Relations Practitioner, an honorary Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, and a Fellow of the PRSA.

CASE STUDY

Mayo, Florida, Renames Itself Miracle Whip, Florida



Miracle Whip tweet
@MiracleWhip via Twitter

One way to generate buzz about a company and brand is to work with a town to change its name. That's what Mayo, Florida, did for a day. The city of Mayo changed its name to Miracle Whip as a grassroots effort to spark surprise and reactions from the residents of the city of Mayo (Associated Press, 2018). In addition to changing its name, the city changed its signs and also created content by showing residents throwing mayonnaise products that were not Miracle Whip out of their homes.

Why did this campaign generate buzz?

- This campaign showed a unique take on changing a town name. Past campaigns have done it to be part of a larger marketing or PR campaign, but this campaign focused on digital first in all of the content, stories, and reactions that were shared.

What were some of the ethical and legal issues?

- There were concerns about the parent company of the Miracle Whip brand, Kraft Heinz, meeting with the city council of Mayo, Florida, in secret to make sure no one in the city of 1,500 residents knew about this campaign.
- This could have resulted in a potential violation of Florida's open meeting laws, which would cause the city and brand some legal problems.

What are some major takeaways to learn from this case?

- Understanding the role of entertaining and allowing people to experience your brand, and having a proactive approach in bringing forth audience members who could engage and interact with a brand to formulate relationships, is still key.
- Innovative ideas are great to have, but there needs to be sound execution of these ideas. It is important to follow the ethical and legal guidelines set forth before implementing an idea so there are no additional challenges and rising concerns about the campaign. In this case, the closed meeting circumstances could have been avoided.