

## Introduction

# Public Relations on the international stage. Academic discipline and professional reality

Marc Compte-Pujol

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya  
mcomptepuj@uoc.edu

Joan Cuenca-Fontbona

Blanquerna – Universitat Ramon Llull  
joanfc@blanquerna.url.edu



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This monograph entitled *Public relations on the international stage. Academic discipline and professional reality* introduces a selection of highly topical and scientifically interesting research on the theory and practice of public relations in various parts of the world.

Public relations is characterised by being both a highly sought-after professional activity throughout the world (Dühning, 2015; Puentes-Rivera, Hernández-Martínez and Cuenca-Fontbona, 2020) and also a highly specialised and complex academic sub-field of communication, with multiple theoretical perspectives that coexist today (Botan and Taylor, 2004; Compte-Pujol, 2016; Fawkes, 2018). Notable among them is the functionalist or managerial perspective initiated in the final decades of the 20th century with the work of Cutlip, Ferguson and Grunig, among others, according to whom the term “public relations” could be considered a synonym for “communication management” (Míguez and Baamonde, 2011).

Although in some areas public relations is still exclusively associated with publicity and media relations, the truth is that it also includes corporate and institutional communication, strategic planning and the implementation of communication, internal communication, lobbying, investor relations, marketing communication, issues management, crisis communication, event

planning, protocol and ceremony, fundraising, public diplomacy and many other sub-specialties (Caldevilla-Domínguez, Barrientos-Báez and Fombona-Cadavieco, 2020; Fawkes, 2018; Míguez, 2013; Xifra, 2014).

In the academic world, public relations is a vast toolbox of techniques, tools and knowledge for managing any type of communication need in any organisation, whether public or private. The term is still the most widely used by researchers in organisational and strategic communication throughout the world, and is used by several specialised academic journals, multiple conferences and various international associations, such as the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) in Europe or the Asociación de Investigadores en Relaciones Públicas (AIRP) in Ibero-America, among others. However, in the professional sphere, the term *public relations* seems to be in clear decline over recent years in comparison to newer concepts such as *strategic communication*, *integrated communication*, *communication management* or *corporate communication*, among others (Dühring, 2015; García, 2016; Míguez, 2013; Moreno, Navarro and Zerfass, 2012; Puentes-Rivera, Hernández-Martínez and Cuenca-Fontbona, 2020).

For this monograph, the eight articles have been divided into three sections based on Dühring's (2015) division of the three schools of thought in public relations that are considered predominant today.

In the first section, public relations is understood as a synonym for strategic communication, with a clear orientation towards management studies and business economics. Research within this domain focuses on the management of the communicative function of organisations and on communicative processes, without subscribing to the *Grunigian* paradigm that has been predominant for decades. Here, we present two papers focusing on the management of internal communication, the specialisation of organisational communication that has grown the most in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (Dircom, 2022) and which is managed either by communication departments or, in many cases, by human resources departments (Cuenca and Verazzi, 2020). The first article is entitled "The function of internal communication during the COVID-19 health crisis: Transformation or transubstantiation?" and is by professors Joan Cuenca-Fontbona from the Universitat Ramon Llull in Barcelona, Marc Compte-Pujol from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Mariana Sueldo from the ISM University of Management and Economics in Lithuania. The text analyses the evolution of internal communication before, during and after the pandemic from a fundamentally qualitative point of view, through in-depth interviews with internal communication directors or communication directors of large multi-sectoral Spanish companies. The second article, "The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The perception of communications executives in companies: The role and challenges of internal communication" by professors Cristina Aced Toledano from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Susana Miquel Segarra from Jaume I University of Castellón and María-Cruz López-de-Ayala from the Rey Juan Carlos University of Madrid, examines

internal communication during the pandemic, but in this case from a quantitative point of view.

In the second section, following Dühring's (2015) classification, the articles discuss public relations that go beyond the *Grunigian* paradigm. These texts focus on the humanities and critical theory, investigating the consequences of the practice of public relations on society in general and on minorities when seen as a discursive force capable of shaping the values and social and cultural beliefs that legitimise certain interests over others. Two articles focus on this area, one on the historical evolution of the psychology of public relations, and the other on the impact of public relations on happiness and well-being. The article entitled "Historical evolution of public relations psychology in Europe and the United States" is by Professor Rocío Torres-Mancera of the University of Málaga, while "Bibliometric analysis and network mapping of the scientific literature on the influence of public relations on well-being and happiness" is by professors Dolores Rando-Cueto, José Manuel Núñez-Sánchez, Carmen Jambrino-Maldonado, Patricia P. Iglesias-Sánchez and Carlos de las Heras-Pedrosa from the University of Málaga.

The third and final section features four articles that fall within the more traditional research and practice of public relations since the 1980s, what Dühring (2015) calls corporate communication, close to professional practice and clearly application-oriented. This is a field that correlates with traditional themes and research interests: the tactical and practical skills of communication professionals, alignment with communication departments, and communication tools. The first article in this section, "Advertising and public relations degrees: profiles and the glass ceiling in the Spanish labour market" is by Gloria Jiménez-Marín from the University of Seville, Víctor Álvarez-Rodríguez from the University of Cádiz and Isabel Palomo-Domínguez from the Mykolas Romeris University. The text combines the traditional university-business binomial, focusing on the gender perspective as part of what is popularly known as DEI (diversity, equality and inclusion) concepts, which are increasingly important in the professional practice of communication management (Meng et al., 2021; Zerfass et al., 2022).

The second article, "The scope of crowdfunding in responsible university relations", by Ana Ibáñez-Hernández, Carmen Carretón-Ballester, Javier Esclapés and Maria José Rodríguez-Jaume from the University of Alicante, focuses on one of the fundraising techniques that has experienced the greatest growth in recent years – crowdfunding – and applies it to the particularly complex organisational context of the university. Given that the ultimate purpose of public relations is to lay the foundations for building mutual trust between audiences and organisations, the discipline makes more sense and is more active than ever in practices such as crowdfunding, which is based on building trust between multiple funders. In relation to the paramount importance of trust in general, it is worth noting that most public relations practitioners in Europe and Asia-Pacific consider that building and maintaining trust remains the top strategic issue to address in their work (Mcnamara et

al., 2021; Zerfass et al., 2022). All this in an environment of a permanent crisis in global trust towards virtually all types of organisations that is growing year after year (Edelman, 2022).

The third article, “The current role of influencers in public relations: Comparing Spain and the USA” by Carmen Máiz-Bar and Javier Abuín-Penas of the University of Vigo, compares the two countries in relation to one of the main objectives of the discipline: influence. The purpose of persuasion continues to be a reality of the discipline, although nowadays it is more common to see public relations as a practice that facilitates mutual influence between organisations and their publics, understood as active subjects who seek to achieve their goals in accordance with their own interests (Oliveira and Capriotti, 2019).

The fourth and final article, “We have an Ondas Award and a lot of anxiety: Engagement strategies and parasociality of the *Estirando el chicle* podcast” by Lucía Caro Castaño and Lourdes Gallardo Hurtado from the University of Cádiz, is framed within the progressive digitalisation of communication processes and their tools, a fundamental trend that concerns both communication departments and consultancies and agencies (Álvarez-Nobell, Molleda and Zerfass, 2021; Cuenca-Fontbona, Matilla and Compte-Pujol, 2020; Cuenca-Fontbona, Compte-Pujol and Zeler 2022; Dircom, 2022; Mcnamara et al., 2021), to the point that ComTech is increasingly key (Zerfass et al., 2022).

We hope you enjoy reading them.

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