The state of the field:

Competing identities, emerging alliances, and the public relations of nations

A special issue of PUBLIC RELATIONS REVIEW

The end of the first decade of the 21st century has been marked by significant shifts in the power, practice, and theory of public relations. Alongside the continuing global expansion of connectivity, ecological degradation, and social media, recent events – such as the global economic downturn and changing public attitudes to business – are creating different operating conditions.

Academically, the rise of different voices in journals, books, and research has been paralleled by the declining power of the ruling paradigm of late 20th century public relations. The old centre has not held. As an enlarged diversity of opinion continues to emerge, however, the newer voices differ on key areas in the present, past, and future. In fact, not only are there disagreements on what public relations is now, but on what public relations has been, and on what public relations might be.

And all of these debates contribute to the re-forging of a field in transition in a time of rapid change. The special issue’s overarching theme is assessing the state of the art in contemporary public relations and considering what is likely to shape the field’s future. Within that wide spectrum, the editors invite a range of contributions with a particular interest in articles that address the following three areas:

1. **Competing identities and public relations**

In examining public relations and identity construction in these more visibly competitive and uncertain times, this special issue looks at business competition and beyond. It is open to considerations of competition, not only between nations but between cities, between practitioners in different professions (e.g., advertising, marketing), and between different academic disciplines (including new social media fields and practitioners and traditional disciplines such as anthropology and psychology).

2. **Collaborative ventures**

What kind of joint ventures and, perhaps, outsourcing alliances, might increase the field’s business, environmental, intellectual and social relevance? Can the importation of advances from other disciplines and other professional or online practices, re-energize public relations thought and action?

3. **The public relations of nations**

One area of particular interest is the public relations of nations and how national public relations practices differ and compete and interact with small nation states, regional blocs, stateless nations, international bodies, and transnational issues. The special issue invites a wide range of contributions that reflect, and that reflect on, the spectrum of possibilities of these conditions; that address current issues and trends; and that speculate on future pathways. Please feel free to contact the editors directly if you wish to discuss the relevance of any proposal. We offer the following questions not as a definitive list, but as prompts for a spread of responses:
What role does, or might, PR play in city, region, and national identity construction?

How do globalization and the associated changes in transnational organizations (e.g., the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the World Trade Organization, and the Global Alliance) impact on PR.

How is the rise of activist, critical, and radical PR changing the field?

As PR strives for academic recognition, how can it become more competitive (e.g., in journal rankings, research grants, discipline assessment exercises)?

What can PR do to survive and thrive as some core business (e.g., CSR, event management, reputation) faces encroachment from marketing and other fields?

What is the existing, or desired, role of PR practitioners in different competitive arenas (e.g., organisational leadership, social media development)?

Should PR link strategically with other knowledge clusters (e.g., anthropology, pragmatics, semantics, neuroscience) rather than develop its own body of knowledge?

What is the state of play with regard to the relevance of PR in such areas as arts promotion, cultural and public diplomacy, social marketing, sport, and tourism?

How might new research in the history of PR impact on the field as it goes forward?

Submit proposed abstracts to any of the special issue editors below.

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