

# HISTORICAL CONTEXTS AND TODAY'S PRACTICES

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand the history of public relations and its major figures.
- Distinguish among the four traditional models of public relations.
- Analyze the main theoretical perspectives of public relations.
- Understand the current state of PR research, theory, and practice.

### Introduction

The historical foundation of public relations is not just a collection of dates and theories. Our field's history is full of character, drama, and perspectives that span generations. In this chapter, these elements come together to form a neat package for you to enjoy and learn from.

Understanding the roots of public relations allows us to predict where our field is going and what we need to do to move it forward. As we look back in time, some ideas and incidents will raise a few eyebrows as we view them through the lens of today's ethical codes of conduct. However, our history has much to teach us. While we cannot undo past missteps, we can apply the lessons learned and shape the future.

Public relations is a relatively "new" field that came into being centuries ago. Since then, it has evolved significantly, especially in the last several decades, thanks to communication advances, inventions, and case studies that have shaped the field to what it is today. As we look at past stories, actions, and campaigns, the significant impact of public relations on society becomes clear. For starters, as a hub discipline, public relations connects with other disciplines for inspiration and collaboration. It is also, to an extent, based on family relations. For example, take Edward Bernays and Sigmund Freud. Bernays, who is considered the "father of modern-day public relations," is the nephew of Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. Public relations has benefited from and aligned with fields including psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

In this chapter, you will also consider the influences of four traditional models of public relations. Key leaders, past and present, are discussed and highlighted based on their contributions. You will also become familiar with the emerging challenges of public relations in practice, theory development, and research, and look at the ways in which advances in technology, including social media, have affected the field's future foundations.

## How Did the Field of Public Relations Begin?

To understand how public relations is practiced today, it helps to explore its four main models as described by Grunig and Hunt (1984). These models categorize the ways in which PR functions are organized and carried out:

1. Press agency and publicity
2. Public information
3. Two-way asymmetrical communication
4. Two-way symmetrical communication

## The Four Models: The Basis of Public Relations

Before discussing the characteristics of each model, let's look at what they have in common.

1. Press agency and publicity focus on pushing the message across to get the most attention, with little opportunity for the audience to provide feedback.
2. Public information is more focused on putting audiences at the forefront, making sure they have the information they need to feel confident about a given situation.
3. Two-way asymmetrical communication focuses on providing a balanced conversation, but there is still one party that is overseeing the power within the conversation.
4. Two-way symmetrical communication is the ideal situation for collaboration, co-creation, and equal participation in the relationship-building phase for PR efforts.

## The Four Models: Universal Themes and Messaging

Each of the four models shares the following universal themes:

- *Roles.* A specific role for the senders and receivers of messages is defined. In this aspect, PR models are similar to the traditional communication models discussed in most communication textbooks and classes.
- *Lines of communication.* There is always a line of communication—whether this is one-way communication (the sender sends a message to the receiver, but there is no opportunity for the receiver to respond) or two-way communication (there is an ongoing dialogue between the sender and the receiver).
- *Message strategy.* There is an overall goal to communicate a specific message to key audiences for a specific reason. Creators of messages often aim to persuade an audience to think differently about a brand or person. They craft messages in different ways to accomplish a goal.

- *Behavioral intention.* There is an ultimate goal to motivate audiences, through specific messages, to take some sort of action or to think in a different way, such as changing their attitudes. In many ways, behavioral intention is related to the established attitude and behavioral theories from psychology that can be applied to corporate reputation management. One is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which focuses on attitudes, subjective norms, and intention. This psychology model allows professionals (even PR professionals) to determine how much influence is given to a person's current attitudes and norms on a given situation. In order for PR professionals to persuade their audiences to take an action, we first have to understand what motivates them from a psychological level. Another theory from psychology that is useful for the study of public relations is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). TPB adds perceived behavioral control—how much control the individual has in a given situation—to TRA's focus on attitudes, subjective norms, and intention. TPB can be used to predict the likelihood of a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of the TPB, an attitude “represents a summary evaluation of a psychological object captured in such attribute dimensions as good-bad, harmful-beneficial, pleasant-unpleasant, and likable-dislikable” (Ajzen, 2001, p. 28). Attitudes are a core aspect to better understand our key publics—attitudes give us a standing on how individuals feel or perceive our work, brand, company, and efforts. Attitudes are hard to change, but it can be done through strong relationship-building measures, strategies, and efforts.

## How Do the Four Models Function?

As we explore the four main models that follow, compare and contrast how each addresses roles, lines of communication, message strategies, and behavioral intentions.

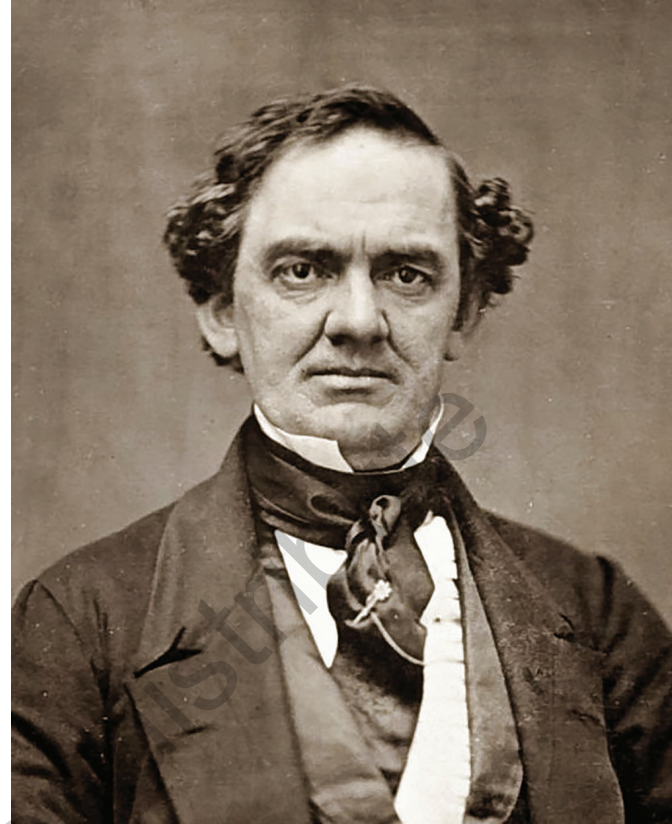
### 1. The Press Agency and Publicity Model

Named after 19th-century press agents (also known as PR professionals at the time), this model is filled with pizzazz, extreme elaboration, manipulation, attention-getting strategies, and show business. A press agent focuses on generating awareness and publicity for a client or person, whereas a publicist is solely responsible for an individual person, brand, or client to generate interest across media and channels. The **press agency and publicity model** is characterized by one-way communication from a sender to a receiver audience with the goal of getting that audience's attention, whether positive or negative. Practitioners of this model conduct no formal research to inform their message strategies. Of the four models discussed here, this one is generally considered to represent the lowest ethical standards, as the press agents did not restrict themselves to telling the truth to meet their goals. Compared to the practices today, this model focuses on generating news for the sake of news, as well as not always being transparent in providing all of the information everyone would want to have on hand to make a decision. When working as a publicist, there is a perception you are there only to “spin” the news for the positive for your client, but not to address the negatives if there are any.

The press agency and publicity model was made famous (some may even say infamous) by legendary showman P. T. Barnum. Australian actor Hugh Jackman played P. T. Barnum in the 2017 movie *The Greatest Showman*, and it was clear that some within the PR field were not happy with the filmmakers' overall perspective and the treatment

of Barnum as a hero (Wadsworth, 2018). Many of us in the field of public relations are sensitive to this model, as it contributes to negative views of PR efforts as “spin” or even propaganda. In the real Barnum’s favor was the fact that although he saw nothing wrong with deceptive messages as long as the public got its money’s worth from his shows, he went out of his way to attack “humbugs” who took advantage of the public, such as spiritual mediums who claimed to be able to contact the dead.

This model is not entirely historical, as it plays a role in our evaluation of current events. The popularity of tabloids and celebrity magazines today echoes the curiosity and skepticism of the public that was exploited by Barnum. The 2015 case of Martin Shkreli, who hiked the price of an antiparasitic drug called Daraprim by 5000 percent overnight, sparked outrage among his audiences because of the ethical issues and concerns that his actions were simply a publicity stunt (Arthur W. Page Center, n.d.-b). The action, while distasteful to the extreme, did ensure increased name recognition for Daraprim.



P. T. Barnum (1810–1891), the circus founder and master of hype and deception known as “the greatest showman on Earth,” was a major practitioner of the press agency and publicity model of public relations.

Harvard Library

## 2. The Public Information Model

The **public information model** (which focused on providing information to the public from the company’s perspective) emerged in the 1920s, as journalists challenged press agents about the truthfulness of their messages. This model represents a one-way communication of messages from a sender to receiver audiences with the goal of providing truthful information to the audiences. This model shares its one-way line of communication and lack of formal research with the press agency and publicity model but differs in its efforts to be truthful.

This model focuses on communicating relevant, meaningful information to key audiences from an organization’s perspective. PR professionals use tools and tactics of journalists and other members of the media such as press releases, press conferences, and statements to the press from the organization’s standpoint. In a sense, the PR practitioner serves as an “internal journalist.” The public information model focuses on providing the media with information from the organization that would help journalists to write stories for their publications or media outlets. This approach is still commonly used today. Website content, newsletters, email marketing measures, feature stories, video news releases, and other aspects of owned media (media that the organization or individual controls) are consistent with this model.

The public information model also focuses on image and reputation. A reputation for a person, company, and PR professional is the most priceless possession to have. Reputation can be defined as “stakeholders’ evaluation of their organization in terms of their ‘affect, esteem, and knowledge’” (Deephouse, 2000, p. 1093). The overall goal is to present the organization as transparent by providing key audiences with accurate and timely information about any situation at hand. For reputation purposes, stories and testimonials make up a powerful element that compels people to either reinforce their overall perceptions of a brand or situation or be motivated to change them.

# STATEMENT FROM THE ROAD

## **It Declares the Rails on the Bridge Must Have Fitted Exactly.**

***Special to The New York Times.***

PHILADELPHIA, Oct. 29—This statement relative to the Atlantic City disaster was authorized by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company to-day:

On account of the difficulty of raising the trucks of the cars out of the water the railroad officials have not been able to discover the cause of the accident. They have ascertained, however, that there was no defect in either the drawbridge or its mechanism to cause the derailment. The bridge—both stationary and movable parts—is of the most approved modern type.

General Manager Atterbury is on the ground supervising the work of raising the trucks. Their great weight has so far defied the efforts of the wrecking apparatus, but attempts are still being made to get them to the surface. When they are examined, the railroad officials think, it will be shown that there was something about one of the trucks that caused the train to leap the track.

It is certain that the rails on the drawbridge and those on the solid section fitted exactly, for otherwise the signal could never have shown a clear track. By means of the interlocking system it is impossible for the motorman to get the “go ahead” signal until the rails are exactly in place.

The Pennsylvania Railroad Company is leaving nothing undone to get at the cause of the accident. The Coroner has already gathered a jury and is making a thorough investigation; the officials of the company are giving him every assistance in their power.

## **“MANNY BERNARD” KILLED.**

One of the victims of the railroad wreck at Atlantic City on Sunday was Emanuel Freed of this city, a vaudeville actor who was known on the stage as “Manny Bernard.” He selected that stage name because he was a nephew of Sam Bernard, the comedian. Mr. Freed was a son of David Freed, President of a paint company at 458 Pearl Street, who lives at 1,227 Madison Avenue, and is the Foreman of the October Grand Jury. Mr. Freed, seeing the name of his son in the list of killed, got excused from jury duty yesterday and went to Atlantic City, where he identified the younger Freed’s body. Judge Rosalsky appointed Henley Isaacs of 68 East Seventy-seventh Street as temporary Foreman of the Grand Jury in David Freed’s place.

Emanuel Freed had started to Atlantic City to fill an engagement at Young’s Pier.

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Source: Lee, Ivy. “Statement from the Road. It Declares the Rails on the Bridge Must Have Fitted Exactly. Special to *The New York Times*.” 1906.

One major takeaway from the public information model was the creation of a press release. A press release is a document formatted the same way as a traditional news release, but it is an official statement and story from the organization’s perspective to be shared with the media outlets. The first press release, created by Ivy Lee, appeared in the *New York Times* on October 29, 1906. It is an example of the use of the public information model of public relations. In the release, Lee gives information about a tragic train crash—but his larger objective is to control the messaging from the point of view of his client, the Pennsylvania Railroad Company.

Lee helped establish the public information model for public relations and provided the field with case studies on the power of controlling the images of clients and transforming how they are perceived by key publics. Lee was famously hired by

John D. Rockefeller, who did not necessarily have the best of reputations based on his coal and railroad business transactions in the early 20th century.

Lee was able to bring more transparency when coal miners went on strike by allowing reporters to go underground and meet with the miners to listen to their complaints. He ensured that the information given to reporters was accurate and truthful (Museum of Public Relations, 2017). However, Lee had more difficulty when attempting to rebuild the image of Rockefeller after the 1914 Ludlow Massacre happened. Colorado National Guard troops and mine security forces attacked an encampment of striking miners and their families, killing 21, including women and children. This event was considered one of the most dramatic confrontations between labor and capital, and it happened at one of Rockefeller's mines (Public Broadcasting Service, n.d.). The event represented a huge personal and business crisis for Rockefeller. Lee provided detailed information about the situation as well as guidance for restoring Rockefeller's image as a person in the minds of key audiences, such as his employees, media, and other business partners. Lee, during this crisis, would send out informational bulletins to key opinion leaders to give them updates on what was happening from their side (Hallahan, 2002). If you were to look for a current example in which an organization required using the public information model to be the main source of information and stories, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Elon Musk of SpaceX launches could tap the power of Lee's PR model in order to be the authority of information happening with this partnership, launches, and statements in a time of crisis. The NASA *Challenger* disaster on January 28, 1986, marked a tremendous tragedy for the world as the space shuttle exploded after liftoff. NASA and its communication staff had to communicate to the public and key audiences to provide the media and other stakeholders with the necessary information so they were aware of the situation and what NASA was going to be doing in response. SpaceX had its own disaster in 2016, and Musk controlled the narrative with his statements and updates on social media, but speculated on the reasons why the disaster happened (Davenport, 2018).

### 3. The Two-Way Asymmetrical Communication Model

Unlike the two previously discussed PR models, the **two-way asymmetrical communication model** focuses on two-way lines of communication, allowing both sender and receiver to participate in a conversation. The asymmetrical aspect refers to the fact that the receivers are not equal participants in the conversation, however. Instead, unlike the previous two models, practitioners using this model incorporate formal research into audience attitudes, which then constitutes the receiver's voice. Those who use this model apply the power of persuasion to craft messages that are based on audience feedback. These messages are meant to influence receivers to think or act the way the organization



Ivy (Ledbetter) Lee (1877–1934) wrote the world's first press release in 1906. In it, he informed the public about a tragic accident, but did so with the interests of his client, rather than the public, in mind.

Library of Congress



Edward Bernays (1891–1995), known as the “father of modern-day public relations,” used a two-way communications method to represent his clients and to persuade audiences to think or do something (whether ethical or not) that benefits the client. Boston Globe/Getty Images

Sigmund Freud, a detail that suggests the strong connection public relations has with psychology. Bernays sought to reach people at the unconscious level rather than at the rational level of reasoning.

Bernays brought public relations into the modern world by achieving a lot of firsts for the field. He was the first person to coin the term *public relations counsel*, which describes the role public relations plays in advising senior management in specific situations or campaigns. His approach to public relations can be seen at work in the following classic campaigns:

- **“Torches of Freedom” Campaign.** Bernays was hired by the American Tobacco Company in 1929 to help change the perception of women’s smoking. Bernays suggested to the company that it needed to gather a group of women to walk in the women’s marches in the 1920s while smoking Lucky Strike cigarettes as “Torches of Freedom.”
- **“Light’s Golden Jubilee” Event.** Bernays was hired by General Electric in 1929 to create an event to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the invention of the light bulb and the work of Thomas Edison (Museum of Public Relations, n.d.) on October 21, 1929. Bernays coordinated the event in style, showing the world the full potential of public relations as a means for producing positive experiences, great stories, and a true impact on society (Museum of Public Relations, n.d.).
- **Bacon and Eggs: The American Breakfast Campaign.** Yes, public relations can take credit for making bacon and eggs part of a true American lifestyle. Bernays was hired by the Beech-Nut Packing Company (which produced pork products) to increase pork consumption (Colleary, 2012). Bernays used research and insights from his “study of doctors” to persuade the American public that having a heavier breakfast of bacon and eggs was healthier for them than some of the breakfast items of that time (Colleary, 2012).

Bernays’s influence on public relations continues today. Presently, there are many brands that have associated themselves with certain connections to reach and

engage with audiences on a deeper level. Peloton disrupted the fitness market for its on-demand features and classes for customers to bypass paying for expensive fitness classes. Glossier embraces being a product that has a customer-focus initiative through engaging content about its culture as a brand along with producing high-quality products. Bernays's ideas reflect contemporary concepts such as brand association, which refers to the same less conscious, deep-seated connections people make with a brand. He was unabashedly engaged in what he called "the engineering of consent." In his early work, *Propaganda*, Bernays (1928) stated, "Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, and our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. . . . It is they who pull the wires that control the public mind" (p. 37). The ethics of "unseen" manipulation of public attitudes is as big an issue today as it was in Bernays's time, and perhaps even more so.

#### 4. The Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Model

The **two-way symmetrical communication model** is very similar to the previous model given its use of the two-way channel between sender and receiver. However, the two-way symmetrical communication model is more of a level playing field, making it the "ideal situation" for public relations. Instead of the manipulation inherent in the asymmetrical model, this model constitutes more of a negotiation with the audience with the goal of reaching a cooperative, win-win outcome. To achieve this goal, users of this model conduct essential formal research into audience attitudes. This information is then used to guide open, transparent conversations. In his later work, Bernays had advocated for this practice in public relations (the ideal way to communicate and function in public relations), which is a slight shift in what he had done in his earlier work.

While each of the four models for public relations is useful, we need a new approach to explain the nature of the role public relations plays in today's society. We need a new model that integrates the dynamics of how social media has changed the power of public relations, giving audiences—not organizations or other clients—the control in the situation. Such a model could perhaps explain how situations, crises, and circumstances are influenced when the audience is indeed "louder" than the brand (or organization or client) in question. The model could also help explain the rise of a kind of mob mentality (a group of people coming together for a particular issue) that exists on social media (Blevins, 2016), the outrage sparked by some campaigns (such as recent controversial Nike and Gillette commercials), and the view that consumers and influencers are trustworthy sources of information. Nike featured the controversial former football player Colin Kaepernick in its commercials (Kaepernick started the kneeling during the national anthem movement during National Football League games), and Gillette featured a commercial that created conversation on both sides of the aisle (pro/con) about addressing the issue of male toxicity in society.

Table 2.1 outlines the four models, the historical figures with whom they are associated, and the overall significance they have for the PR field.



▼ TABLE 2.1

### Historical Models and Figures of Public Relations

| Model                                     | Key Figure and Campaign | Approach  | Significance to PR  |
|---|-------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Press Agency and Publicity</b>         | P. T. Barnum            | One-way communication   | Generating the buzz, excitement, and hype surrounding an event, person, or idea                                   |
| <b>Public Information</b>                 | Ivy Lee                 | One-way communication   | Becoming your own media outlet and passing along information and messaging in a transparent yet persuasive manner |
| <b>Two-Way Asymmetrical Communication</b> | Edward Bernays          | Two-way communication with feedback that is not balanced              | Utilizing persuasive messages   |
| <b>Two-Way Symmetrical Communication</b>  | Edward Bernays          | Two-way communication with feedback that is balanced for both parties | Communicating with mutual understanding to create a win-win situation for both parties                            |

### Who Are the Notable Figures of Public Relations?

While PR history is filled with significant founders, it is also important to see where our field is being practiced today, who is leading the charge of new ideas, and who will be the future leaders and visionaries for our profession.

#### Historic Figures of Public Relations

In addition to Ivy Lee’s and Edward Bernays’s associations with the four models, others have made major contributions to where public relations is today.

##### Arthur W. Page and the Page Principles

In many ways, Arthur W. Page (1883–1960) earns the title of the father of “the modern-day practice of corporate public relations” (Arthur W. Page Center, n.d.-a). Page, who was the vice president of AT&T, was known for creating a sense of ethical and responsible corporate behavior, now known as the Page Principles (Arthur W. Page Center, n.d.-a). The Page Principles (Arthur W. Page Society, n.d.) include the following guidance for PR practitioners:

- **Tell the truth.** Let the public know what’s happening with honest and good intention; provide an ethically accurate picture of the organization’s character, values, ideals, and actions. For example, Taco Bell was transparent with its beef recall in 2019 and let the audience know the actions that the company was taking to address the circumstances. On the other hand, Boeing took additional time in disclosing its efforts in the 737 jet plane crisis that occurred in 2018. It was later reported that the company knew about the issues with this particular model of plane for two years at least.
- **Prove your claims with action.** Public perception of an enterprise is determined 90 percent by what it does and 10 percent by what it says. It is one

thing for a brand to release a proper and ethical statement, but it is another to take action in response. When the issue of equal pay came into play in the news, companies like Adidas and Adobe responded with a promise they would make sure their female employees receive pay equal to their male counterparts.

- **Listen to stakeholders.** To serve the enterprise well, understand what your publics want and need and advocate for engagement with all stakeholders. Keep top decision makers and other employees informed about stakeholder reaction to the enterprise's products, policies, and practices. To listen effectively, engage a diverse range of stakeholders through inclusive dialogue. Adobe does this extremely well with its employees as well as its influencer group, Adobe Insiders, who are professionals in the marketing space and able to get the latest news and updates to share within their networks on- and offline.
- **Manage for tomorrow.** Anticipate public reaction and eliminate practices that create difficulties. In preparation for updates and potential concerns that may arise, brands such as Netflix make sure they are able to communicate with their audiences about any changes related to price increases or changes in their product offerings (e.g., taking the popular TV show *The Office* off Netflix).
- **Generate goodwill.** Conduct public relations as if the whole enterprise depends on it. Southwest Airlines, a brand that has been known for its communication and customer relations efforts, makes sure to do this with specific actions, particularly surprise and delight strategies. For example, the airline did this in October 2019 where it was able to provide food and drinks to a group of military servicemen and women as they were traveling to their base. Even though these professionals were not Southwest Airlines customers, the company felt it was the right thing to do.
- **Do not implement a strategy without first considering its impact on stakeholders.** As a management and policymaking function, public relations should encourage the enterprise's decision making, policies, and actions to consider its stakeholders' diverse range of views, values, experience, expectations, and aspirations. In 2019, Facebook Blueprint coordinated efforts to develop a new certification and program focused on engaging educators and students in social media. Before the official launch, Facebook coordinated a group of educators to be part of a pilot program to provide feedback, suggestions, and ideas for how to make the program better.
- **Treat employees well: They express the true character of the enterprise.** The strongest opinions—good or bad—about an enterprise are shaped by the words and deeds of an increasingly diverse workforce. As a result, every employee—active or retired—is involved with public relations. It is the responsibility of corporate communications to advocate for respect, diversity, and inclusion in the workforce and to support each employee's capability and desire to be an honest, knowledgeable ambassador to customers, friends, shareowners, and public officials. Many programs like Adobe, Intel, Dell, Humana, and General Motors have programs that highlight employees of the company to be able to share and articulate their stories to their networks.

- **Remain calm, patient, and good-humored.** Lay the groundwork for PR successes with consistent and reasoned attention to information and stakeholders. When a crisis arises, remember, cool heads communicate best. Ellen DeGeneres, the popular talk show host and comedian, had to address her audiences when a photo was released of her sitting with former president George W. Bush at a Dallas Cowboys football game. Ellen shared on her show that “Here’s the thing, . . . I’m friends with George Bush. In fact, I’m friends with a lot of people who don’t share the same beliefs that I have. We’re all different and I think that we’ve forgotten that that’s OK” (quoted in Henderson, 2019). This response received reactions from both sides of the political aisle, but most of the responses were positive toward Ellen and how she handled the situation.

### Rex Harlow and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)

Rex Harlow (1892–1993) created the American Council on Public Relations in 1947, which later became the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the largest professional organization for the PR field. Members of the many different Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and PRSA chapters can look to Harlow as spearheading the establishment of the first PR professional organizations. As a result of his leadership, students, educators, and professionals can come together and explore current trends in public relations, discuss growing concerns and challenges facing the field, and gain valuable education and training to bring back to their profession and client work. Harlow was able to help make the PR field an established area where everyone can come together to discuss current issues and topics impacting the field. To this day, PRSA is the largest PR professional organization and hosts its annual international conference every year.

### Betsy Plank and the Public Relations Student Society of America

As the first woman in public relations in a leadership position, Betsy Plank (1924–2010) opened the door for women interested in the field. Plank achieved many firsts, such being the first person ever to win PRSA’s top three awards and to lead organizations including Illinois Bell and PRSA (Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations, n.d.-a). In addition, Plank was a leading voice in the establishment of the student version of PRSA, the Public Relations Student Society of America. Because she was an alumna of the University of Alabama, the university created the Plank Center for Leadership in 2005 in her name to promote scholarship, research, and discussions surrounding leadership issues in public relations (Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations, n.d.-a). Plank was a big supporter of bridging the gap between education and practice, and supported efforts to bring educators into PR workplaces so they could bring new insights back into the classroom. Plank actually has her own national day, created and launched by the Plank Center for Leadership at the University of Alabama, called #PlankDay, during which students and PRSSA chapters come together to celebrate the life of Betsy Plank and to share these insights with the community online (Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations, n.d.-b).

## Contemporary Figures of Public Relations

While we have reviewed some early pioneers of public relations, who are the individuals who currently shape the field? By exploring them, we can anticipate where our field is heading. Who knows—future leaders might be reading this textbook right now! Maybe you will be a significant figure in the practice of public relations.

### Harold Burson

Among today's leaders is Harold Burson (1921–2020), who co-founded Burson-Marsteller, one of the largest PR agencies in the world. (After a February 2018 merger with Cohn & Wolfe, the agency is now known as Burson Cohn & Wolfe.) He has been described as one of the century's most influential figures in public relations (Burson Cohn & Wolfe, n.d.). Burson, who was a strong advocate for the integrated marketing perspective for public relations, which emphasizes that different disciplines need to work together, set a new standard for PR practices (Burson Cohn & Wolfe, n.d.). Public relations is viewed not as a silo field, but as a connecting arm to marketing, advertising, promotions, sales, and other related disciplines to work together.

### Richard Edelman

Richard Edelman (1954–) is another key figure in today's PR landscape. Edelman, who is the president and CEO of Edelman, has been recognized for his work in building the Edelman Trust Barometer, a longitudinal study looking at trust issues and trends in public relations, and working with some of the top brands in the industry to make Edelman one of the leading PR firms in the world according to prominent PR media outlets (Edelman, n.d.). Edelman has been a leader in identifying current trends and issues that have impacted the PR field globally and around the world.

### Barri Rafferty

Barri Rafferty (1964–), the new CEO of Ketchum, became the first female PR professional to lead a top five PR firm (Ketchum, 2017).

### Qualities of Today's Leaders

These are just a few of the prominent PR figures currently shaping the industry. You may be asking yourself: What unifying characteristics are consistent among all of these PR figures?

- **PR leaders are adaptive and responsive to change.** All are agile in responding to shifts in the industry. Public relations is a fast-paced field that thrives on change, and it is important for leaders and practitioners to be both responsive and adaptive. Today's leaders not only encourage their teams to maintain these characteristics, but embrace them personally as well.

**Celebrate  
#BetsyDay!**

Betsy Plank was the **First Lady** of public relations, a trailblazer for leadership in PR and the **“Godmother of PRSSA.”**

Help us celebrate her renowned career in public relations!  
Find out how you can participate at [PlankCenter.ua.edu/BetsyDay](https://PlankCenter.ua.edu/BetsyDay)

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- **PR leaders are open to varied perspectives in the field and in other disciplines.** These leaders look both inward and outside of the field to related fields including psychology and journalism for inspiration, ideas, and research to help them with their practices.
- **PR leaders are unafraid and exploratory.** Sometimes it is lonely to present new ideas, perspectives, and approaches that go against the norm. In order to make an impact, you may have to go against the common perspective or paradigm to make a difference. All PR leaders approach their work in new ways, differentiating themselves from others and solidifying themselves forever in PR history.
- **PR leaders know what is real and what is “shiny.”** All of these professionals approach each of their efforts strategically with a long-term focus. It is very tempting to do something for the moment or for the short term, but real benefits and wins happen when you are able to look at the bigger picture. These professionals are not going to jump on a trending topic or platform just for the sake of it—they will be using their experience and insights to gather information whether or not it is on brand, on strategy, or even sustainable.
- **PR leaders contribute to new models and practices.** While knowing the foundation of PR history is crucial, doing something the way it has always been done will not make a memorable impression on the field. However, being able to add something that is new, exciting, and unique will do the trick.

## The Four Models Today: What Can Recent Campaigns Teach Us?

Public relations has had its own evolution over the years, but is currently defined as “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (Public Relations Society of America, 2020). The themes, models, and leaders you have just read about do not live just in the past. They are strong and present in our practices today.

The one thing that we can almost guarantee about public relations is that we will always have case studies to turn to as lessons from the past and guidance for the future. Recent campaigns that have illustrated the creative aspects of public relations include Airbnb and its partnership with Mattel in making a Barbie-themed house for people to stay in, and the campaign through which Cheez-It® snack items merge with Pizza Hut® to tap into two existing fan bases. IHOP® has jumped on the train with reality show partnerships including A&E’s *Tiny House Nation*. All of these campaigns are creative, collaborative, and innovative in that they tap into new strategies, audiences, and mediums.

These campaigns showcase the fact that traditional PR models are still relevant for current cases. So, let’s take a moment to apply some of the principles discussed previously in this chapter to some contemporary cases.

### 1. The Press Agency and Publicity Model: Today

While press agency and publicity was the prominent model used by practitioners in the 20th century, this model continues to be practiced and integrated into current campaigns to this day. While some of these campaigns work or have worked to generate buzz and

excitement regarding an event or other campaign (see the Red Bull® campaign, discussed a bit later in this section), others (see the Fyre Festival event, discussed next) have generated more negative publicity in response to their efforts. Regardless, we can gather and apply through case studies valuable knowledge on what to do, and what not to do, in PR efforts.

### **The Fyre Festival: An Audience Is Misled**

This is a classic example that will also be discussed in Chapter 3 on ethics and the law, but it also shows the risks associated with using propaganda and illusion to mislead audiences. It is a big mistake to fool audiences into believing they will be gaining a positive experience when the experience will not and does not live up to the hype. This case of the Fyre Festival shows the risks associated with misleading audiences and withholding important information.

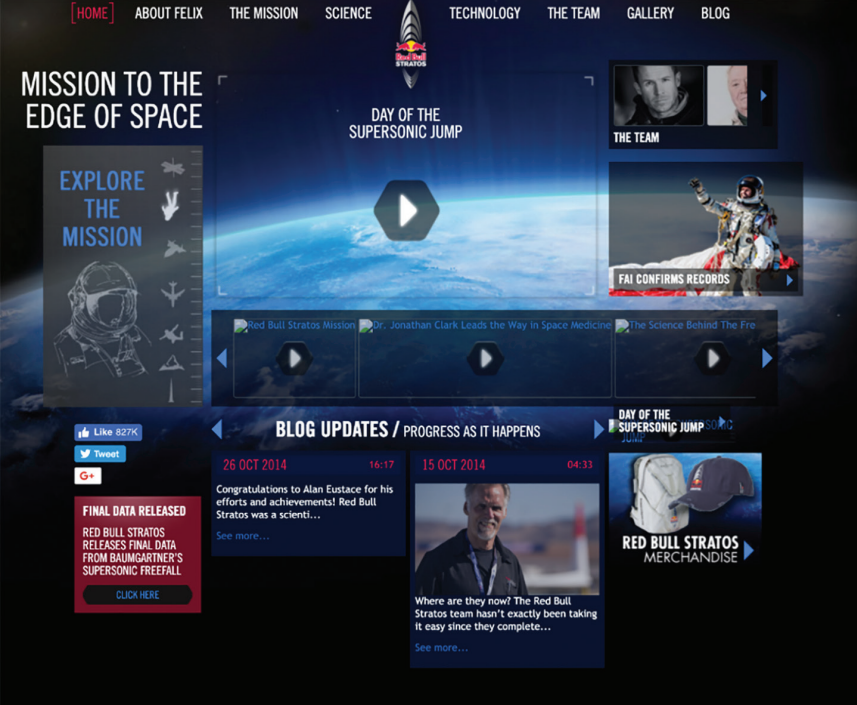
The Fyre Festival of 2018 was the culmination of influencer marketing (using individuals with large online communities to promote specific brands, products, or clients for compensation) going wrong. The festival was supposed to be the “Coachella of the Caribbean,” but it turned out to be a festival that promoted fraud, misleading attendees with the notion they would be attending a luxury event. On the contrary, it was far from luxurious. Tents, cheese sandwiches, and turmoil were just a few things that characterized the Fyre Festival experience of attendees. This was not what they had been expecting. We can explore the Fyre Festival case through the lens of the press agency and publicity model because of the organizers’ one-way channel of communication with their receiver audience. However, because attendees took to social media, they were able to provide negative feedback and share their responses for the world to see, something that resulted in two documentaries highlighting the catastrophe-in-the-making by Netflix and Hulu. The marketing for the event was very effective, but the lack of preparation, issues pertaining to training and resources for those on the ground for the festival, and the ethical concerns for the investment to the event were all areas of concern that were highlighted in the documentaries.

### **The Red Bull Space Jump: An Extreme Event Pays Off**

A space jump hosted by Red Bull in 2012 generated a huge amount of buzz, excitement, and brand awareness for the organization. The campaign was all about the hype of a jump—from 39,000 meters or 24 miles above Earth’s atmosphere. It was something that had never been attempted, let alone livestreamed for the world to see. The campaign and planned event were a huge risk with a potentially big payoff for both the jumper and the sponsoring brand. A partnership with Red Bull allowed Austrian skydiver Felix Baumgartner to space dive from the stratosphere in record time, beating the previous skydiving record. The event was presented live on YouTube and resulted in 8 million views and more than 2.6 million mentions on the day of the launch alone (Boies, 2012). While this campaign was focused on creating hype and excitement around a risky event, the sponsor and skydiver pulled it off. Further, audiences were provided with the opportunity to engage, share, and comment about the event on a designated social media platform.

## **2. The Public Information Model: Today**

The public information model is also still present and accounted for here in the 21st century. Being transparent and upfront with audiences from a brand’s perspective can be very effective, or it can transform into a much bigger crisis for the brand.



Red Bull Stratos campaign website  
Red Bull

### Pepsi and Kendall Jenner: A Tone-Deaf Ad Sparks Outrage

This is a case in which a campaign’s attempted goals turned into a crisis with a negative impact on a brand. Kendall Jenner, one of the Kardashian sisters and a model, was featured in 2018 in a Pepsi commercial designed to address current issues that had sparked protests. In it, Jenner appears as part of a generic protest while promoting Pepsi. What the campaign creators had hoped would be an in-touch commercial did not go over well with viewers. Pepsi felt it needed to respond, but instead of addressing the concerns of its key publics—

that the commercial was cynical and hypocritical—Pepsi instead apologized to Jenner, something that sparked even more outrage toward the brand and campaign. In essence, how a brand or person publicly responds in a crisis is as important as how it handles the situation.

### The Southwest Airlines Crisis: A Direct Response Works

On April 17, 2018, Southwest Airlines experienced a crisis when a passenger died following an accident that occurred in flight. Southwest Airlines Flight 1380, en route to Dallas, had to land in Philadelphia to address this tragedy (Arenstein, 2018).

The company could have approached this situation in several different ways, but the fact that all 144 passengers documented the event on social media as it happened makes a straightforward response ideal. Southwest Airlines wanted to be transparent, timely, and compassionate in regard to the death of a passenger and how that affected others on the plane. Southwest released several statements, including the one provided on the next page. CEO Gary Kelly recorded a video response to the situation (“Southwest Airlines Flight 1380 Statement #2;” 2018). This showed the world what the organization would do to make sure this type of accident would not happen in the future, while giving the media, key stakeholders, and others the information they needed regarding this incident.

In a second press release from Southwest Airlines, dated April 17, 2018, the company confirmed the crash of Flight 1380, expressed sympathy to the loved ones of the deceased, and provided contact information for answering the questions of the media and public.

## 3. The Two-Way Asymmetrical Model: Today

These next few campaigns show that sometimes when we set the overall goal of engaging with key audiences, we tilt the balance of the conversation toward our source (that is, our organization or other client), rather than toward the audience. The purpose of messaging is to influence audiences to do something specific—whether it is to make a purchase (see “Gary Vee”, later in this section) or to follow a specific Instagram account (see “The World Record Egg,” at the end of this section). In the following examples, the communication between the parties and sources is not necessarily equal in footing, yet both sources seek to persuade audiences to take some sort of action based on the relationship they have created.

# SOUTHWEST AIRLINES FLIGHT 1380 STATEMENT #2—ISSUED 3:00 P.M. CT

## **SOUTHWEST AIRLINES CONFIRMS ACCIDENT; OUR HEARTS ARE WITH THOSE AFFECTED**

Apr 17, 2018

**Southwest Airlines Co.** (NYSE: LUV) confirms an accident involving Southwest Airlines Flight 1380. The flight made an emergency diversion to Philadelphia Airport (PHL) earlier today after the Crew reported issues with the number one engine which resulted in damage to the fuselage.

We are deeply saddened to confirm that there was one fatality resulting from this accident. The entire Southwest Airlines Family is devastated and extends its deepest, heartfelt sympathy to the Customers, employees, family members and loved ones affected by this tragic event. We have activated our emergency response team and are deploying every resource to support those affected by this tragedy. For a message from Gary Kelly, Southwest Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, please click [here](#).

The aircraft involved today was a Boeing 737-700 (N772SW) and was enroute from New York LaGuardia (LGA) to Dallas Love Field (DAL). In total, the flight had 144 Customers and five Southwest Crewmembers onboard. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the Southwest Pilots and Flight Attendants who acted professionally and swiftly to take care of our Customers during the emergency diversion and landing.

Finally, Southwest Airlines officials are in direct contact with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to support an immediate, coordinated response to this accident. Southwest is in the process of gathering additional information regarding flight 1380 and will fully cooperate in an investigative process.

Please join the Southwest Family in keeping all of those affected by today's tragedy in your thoughts.

Source: Southwest Media. April 17, 2019. "Southwest Airlines Flight 1380 Statement #2 - Issued 3:00 p.m. CT: Southwest Airlines Confirms Accident; Our Hearts Are With Those Affected."

## **LeBron James and the NBA: An Unfortunate Blunder**

In October 2019, Daryl Morey of the Houston Rockets sent out a tweet that read: "Fight for Freedom. Stand with Hong Kong." Morey was supporting the efforts of protesters in Hong Kong who were calling for democracy and basic human rights in China while facing authoritarian rule and police violence. Morey's tweet went viral, and as a result, the Chinese government withdrew a lot of support for the organization's games and teams. LeBron James, one of the biggest stars in basketball, was asked by the media (perhaps unfairly) to comment on the situation. He and the team were in China. Unfortunately, his response was confusing and, like the immediate reaction of many in the National Basketball Association (NBA), seemed pretty self-serving: Losing audiences in China was going to be a big problem. Without China's support and consumer base, NBA-related brands, organizations, and professionals stood to lose a lot of money. Unfortunately, instead of giving a neutral response, such as "I'm a basketball player focused on my game. I don't know the context yet, so I really can't answer," or a pro-democracy response, such as "I support human rights, democracy, and free speech," James responded as follows:

"Yes, we all do have freedom of speech, but at times there are ramifications for the negative that can happen when you're not thinking about others, and you're only thinking about yourself. . . . I believe he [Morey] wasn't educated on the situation at hand and he spoke. And so many people could have been harmed, not only financially but physically, emotionally, spiritually." (quoted in Kennedy, 2019)



As a result, James's comments became the subject of controversy, something that he had to address as they quickly went viral. NBA teams and key leaders such as Commissioner Adam Silver also had to make statements about their attitudes toward China and how they will address that relationship going forward.

### The Gary Vee and K-Swiss Campaign: A Successful Partnership

In 2017, Gary Vaynerchuk (aka Gary Vee), a global businessperson, wanted to change how people perceived entrepreneurs by raising them to the level of celebrities, such as athletes who benefit from endorsements. By partnering with the shoe brand K-Swiss, Vaynerchuk created a movement for other entrepreneurs to be able to sign exclusive deals for the shoe company, breaking the mold for what it means to “get a shoe deal.” This showed you did not need to be a celebrity or athlete to get one. Vaynerchuk communicated these messages himself, by engaging with audiences with tons of content on his social media channel, but used the community and audience members he engaged with to amplify the messages as well. Gary shared updates on his accounts and with his team, but also made sure to communicate with people online and in person during meet-ups.

### The World Record Egg Instagram Campaign: A Simple Idea Raises Awareness

In 2019, Kylie Jenner lost the title of having the most liked photo on Instagram to an egg. Yes, an egg. This account, called @world\_record\_egg, generated 52 million likes (Bromwich & Maheshwari, 2019). However, ahead of the 2019 Super Bowl, the account displayed a change in the egg, showcasing it as a football and asking its audience members to stay tuned for the event and watch for Hulu. This approach generated a huge global reaction and discussion, building the hype and excitement for where the account was going. When audiences pushed the button to post, an account that generated millions of likes became as valuable (some say more so) as a Super Bowl ad. Some have estimated the account is worth about \$10 million based on analytics and reach calculations. When it was uncovered that the person behind the popular, iconic account worked in advertising, he partnered with Hulu to create more awareness about mental health after the 2019 Super Bowl (Bromwich & Maheshwari, 2019).

## 4. The Two-Way Symmetrical Model: Today

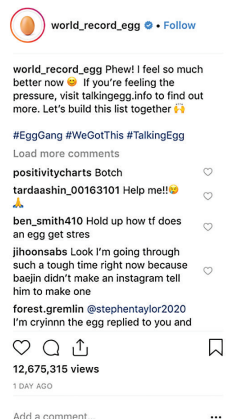
### The 2008 and 2016 Presidential Elections: A Win for Social Media

Both of the campaigns in the 2008 and 2016 U.S. presidential elections were based on the two-way asymmetrical model. In both cases, two presidential candidates (Barack Obama and Donald Trump) persuaded voters they were “outsiders” relative to Washington, DC, politics. Both candidates in their respective elections also communicated using social media as a way to persuade audiences to join their cause and campaign. Both presidential candidates in their respective elections engaged in conversation, but ultimately, it was the different groups having conversations with other groups that coordinated these particular campaigns together according to the two-way symmetrical model for public relations.

World record egg and mental health campaign with Hulu

Source: @world\_record\_egg via Instagram

FOR MORE INFO VISIT:  
**TALKINGEGG.INFO**  
 #TALKINGEGG  
 EGG GANG



For many great minds in public relations, politics has been at the forefront of their thinking when it comes to the use of social media for campaign messaging. However, it is important to note that social media played a role in two separate elections that resulted in two different results. The first, 2008, has been listed as the first “social” election, where Obama was one of the first presidential candidates to tap the power of social media for his campaign. Fast-forward a few years later, and we see that Trump not only used social media for his campaign but focused specifically on Twitter to get his messages and statements to the public. Whether you are on one side of the aisle or another, many different social media lessons and takeaways from both of these elections will impact future PR efforts in the political arena. More focus on this specialization will occur in Chapter 14.

## Why Study PR Practices, Research, and Theories?

Because public relations is an established area of research, a field founded in theory, and a dominant profession, it’s important to study it. We need to look at what has been done before, but also at where our field is going so that we can identify and get ahead of future issues and challenges and make the most of opportunities that will impact what we do. Looking at the concrete practices of public relations also helps us define our work and our roles as practitioners—and allows us to make public relations as effective and relevant as possible.

### Our Practices

There is a common phrase in the industry: “Stay in your lane.” This is all fine and good if you want to get on the fast track to insignificance. As more disciplines, including English and journalism, embrace content and training similar to that taught in PR courses, public relations will need to adapt to continue thriving.

Our positions as PR professionals within organizations are shifting rapidly. That doesn’t mean that PR functions are not happening; rather, organizational structures have sometimes blended what used to be the PR department with other departments, such as marketing. Outside of such organizations, what were once free-standing PR firms are now agencies that label themselves as expert in “integrated marketing communication,” “communication marketing,” or “strategic communication.” For example, Edelman, one of the largest global PR agencies in the world, now lists itself as a marketing agency. In addition, the public may struggle with its perception of public relations, of what it does, especially in relation to marketing. Even among those who are familiar with PR functions, there are misconceptions. Some assume we just do press releases, publicity, and other earned traditional media work (e.g., networking and media relations work with media professionals). However, this is not the case. Public relations has a strong stake in the areas of new emerging technologies and tools. For example, social media, a core set of platforms based on relationships, is a perfect area of specialization and focus for PR practitioners. To continue our success, we need to embrace and take ownership of these new areas wholeheartedly. We must—and should—advocate for what we can do, what we have to offer, and why our positions are crucial to the success of an organization or other client.

How does public relations do this exactly? Embracing new perspectives and ideas is key. Self-appointed gatekeepers on the practice side might also hinder new ideas and

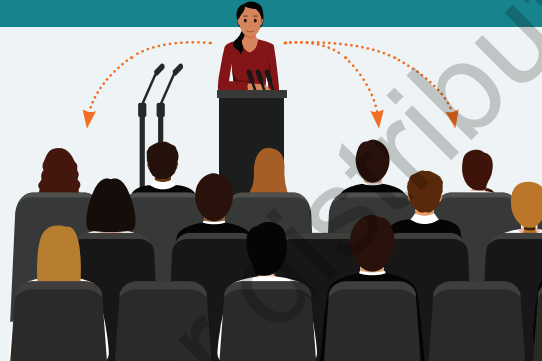
# HISTORICAL CONTEXTS AND FUTURE OF PR

There are several perspectives and historical models public relations professionals can look to as a guide for how the field has been practiced and embraced over the years. The four that are listed here are press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical. All four of these models have strong characteristics that have both made the field of public relations into what it is today and provide key lessons and case studies to note for the future. Like all other aspects of society, it is important to know our field's history so we do not make the same mistakes that were made in the past, and know where the field needs to go.

▼ INFOGRAPHIC 2  
How We Can Expand Our Approaches

## PRESS AGENCY

The press agency and publicity model focuses on the party, individual, or organization in question communicating in a one-way fashion where the information is focused on the intended receiver.



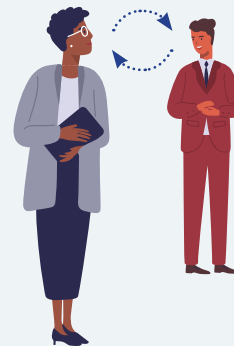
## PUBLIC INFORMATION

This model is focused on getting relevant and meaningful information to key audiences from the organization's perspective by utilizing key tactics used by members of the media and journalists.



## TWO-WAY ASYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION

The two-way asymmetrical communication model is focused on two-way communication, allowing both parties to have a chance to have a conversation, though one has more power than the other.



## TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

This model is very similar to the previous model, except that the symmetrical model focuses on equal power between the parties in conversation.



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perspectives in the field that do not emerge from the “right” sources. The field cannot afford holding ideas or people back just because they did not come from a particular program, school, or PR professional organization. Everyone needs to be on board and work together to move the field forward, rather than circling around the same spot like a plane trying to land at Chicago O’Hare airport.

## Our Research

The importance of understanding the impact of new areas of specialization, such as influencer marketing, advocacy, and even social media, on the field of public relations is crucial (Museum of Public Relations, n.d.). Researchers are working together to explore emerging challenges and opportunities.

One of the significant challenges facing researchers today is the need to question “traditional models.” Certain dominant perspectives—such as the four models covered earlier in this chapter—have shaped the PR field to date, yet the only way for the field to grow and evolve is if these perspectives are continuously challenged, examined, and tested against new approaches such as big data analysis, network analysis, and others.

PR research has not pushed its boundaries very far due to fear of change and, in some cases, an inability to get past gatekeepers and cliques within the PR research field. In some ways, academic and even professional agency dynasties can be like the houses in television’s *Game of Thrones*. For example, “academic families” representing certain theoretical perspectives and schools are not always welcoming toward competing individuals and ideas. What? A new approach from an outsider? Dracarys! Where is Drogon when you need him?

In all seriousness and dragons aside, for a field’s research to thrive, we need to encourage fresh ideas, perspectives, and theories regardless of the pedigree of the sources. Without new ideas and perspectives, PR research will not keep pace with the times and will risk becoming stale and irrelevant.

Along with having new fresh ideas and perspectives, PR researchers need to diversify the different tools used to measure and evaluate questions and concepts. New method and measurement approaches (or rather their lack) are another growing concern about PR research. PR researchers should expand their horizons by experimenting with new ways to evaluate behaviors, attitudes, and other relevant constructs. Being aware of advances in related fields, such as psychology and marketing, as well as engaging with transdisciplinary research teams, can stimulate breakthroughs in research. What is cliché in one field is often just the perfect thing that is needed to advance another.

## Our Theories

Theories are sets of facts—and relationships between facts—that help us explain and predict phenomena of interest. They help us understand how or why something works the way it does. Why are some Instagram accounts more influential than others? How do brands identify best practices for their social media activities? Some people confuse evidence-based, scientific theories with the alternate uses of the word *theory* to describe a guess or a hunch, such as “I have a theory that the New England Patriots might win the Super Bowl.” Unlike guesses or hunches, evidence-based, scientific theories not only focus on the why and how aspects of a phenomenon, but they are also built up through extensive and systematic observation and experimentation.

PR theory building has resulted in a rich repertoire of systems that help explain and predict many of the phenomena described in this textbook. Some of these theories originated in public relations itself, while others have been adapted from fields including psychology. For example, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) helped psychologists predict how people's existing attitudes and social influences might lead to particular behaviors, such as quitting smoking (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Because shaping attitudes is an integral part of public relations, these types of theoretical models have been invaluable.

Table 2.2 provides a brief introduction to many of the theories used in public relations that you will meet throughout your course and in later parts of this textbook. Note the rich variety of disciplines that contribute to our understanding.

▼ TABLE 2.2

### Outline of Key Theories in Public Relations

| Theory                                  | Summary   | Origin of Theory |
|---|---|------------------|
| Two-Step Flow                           | Focuses on how information from the media proceeds in two different steps: first to opinion leaders, and then to the other audiences for a message. Traditionally has focused on mass media implementation but has since been applied to new media channels.  | Communication    |
| Framing                                 | Focuses on the essence of certain issues and topics rather than a particular topic at hand. Very closely aligned with agenda-setting theory.  | Communication    |
| Agenda Setting                          | Powerful influence of the media to designate issues and topics the audience needs to know.  | Communication    |
| Situational Theory of Publics           | Audiences are identified and classified into groups based on how aware (or unaware) they are about a situation, issue, or problem in question.  | Public Relations |
| Diffusion of Innovation                 | Explains how innovation for a product, topic, or issue diffuses over time based on level and timing of adoption.  | Communication    |
| Uses and Gratifications                 | Audience-centered approach looking at what audience members do with media (their use and the reasons behind it).  | Communication    |
| Attribution                             | Understanding how audiences assign certain characteristics, feelings, and intentions to people to better understand them.   | Psychology       |
| Reasoned Action/<br>Planned Behavior    | Links behavior with one's beliefs, attitudes, and perceived behavioral control. TRA is the earlier model, and TPB addresses the concept of behavioral control.  | Psychology       |
| Rhetoric                                | The original persuasion method of communication.  | Philosophy       |
| Critical                                | A fundamental approach in the social sciences. This approach looks at social phenomena happening in society and in our environment and critiques how it impacts our human interactions and practices. With social media, it is used to discuss how having access to the tools of communication has been beneficial (or not) to our relationships, identity, and how we practice in our field. | Philosophy       |
| Convergence                             | Focuses on the intersection between traditional and social media.   | Communication    |
| Excellence                              | How public relations makes organizations more effective and organized based on how they are managed and organized.  | Public Relations |
| Dialogic                                | The main focus is that dialogue is about the exchange of ideas and perspectives, and there needs to be channels in which these conversations can be used for organizations with their publics.  | Rhetoric         |
| Organization–Public Relationships (OPR) | One of the fundamental perspectives in the PR field. The primary focus is on the management of mutually beneficial relationships between the key publics and the organization in question.  | Public Relations |

## Social Media: What Is Its Impact on Public Relations?

Many factors have influenced the field of public relations over the years, but few have the potential impact that social media has. Social media can be defined as

the ultimate personalized online networked hub of information, dialogue, and relationship management. Essentially, social media combines the use of innovative strategies with digital communication technology platforms, enabling the user to share knowledge, engage in digital storytelling through conversations and visual components, collaborate with others, engage in crowdsourcing tasks and contribute ideas to solve problems, conduct strategic monitoring and analytic analysis online, and build relationships within a community sharing common interests, investments, and needs. (Freberg, 2016)

Social media has transformed PR efforts in practice, research, and theory development. With each advance that occurs in the social media industry, PR research adapts and explores the changes and discusses the implications for the field and for society. Compared to other fields claiming to “own” social media, public relations has a strong argument for being the field that should be most closely linked to social media. Why is this the case? Our claims are based on the how and why of our use of these tools to communicate and spark conversations to formulate relationships. As Taylor and Kent (2010) noted, public relations focuses on building relationships and understanding between organizations and their key publics.

How has social media changed the PR field? Social media has been at the forefront of bringing both pain and delight for brands, organizations, and PR professionals over the past several decades. It has been the means of some of the more recognizable campaigns as well as crises in the PR profession. Several iconic PR campaigns can look to social media as a driving impact factor for their campaigns, like the @world\_record\_egg account campaign described earlier. This campaign sparked an interest and active presence on the platform for one common reason: to support an account’s mission to get the most likes on the platform. However, this was just the beginning, and the account partnered with Hulu to bring awareness to mental health. This was a global, real-time, and unexpected partnership people all over the world were able to witness and see for themselves. Yet it changed the way in which brands and accounts interact with each other, and helped bring forth this relationship in a new way.

### SUMMARY

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Public relations, as a profession, has an established history filled with specific models, key figures, and significant contributions that have brought the field to where it is today. Ours is a field and profession that is still relatively young in nature but mature enough to stand on its own two feet. With that being said, we need to consider long and hard where we want to be in the future. Moving forward, PR professionals have

to drive the direction of the field. There are two paths public relations can take: one to continue the way in which the field has always operated and practiced, and another that shows room for growth by adding in new perspectives and elements. To evolve, public relations has to embrace both its past and its present but look toward the impact it wants to continue to make in the future.

# GAME CHANGER

*Matt Kelly, PR Professional*

## **How did you get your start in public relations?**

I started in public relations in the same way almost anyone does: a crippling realization that I was monetizing a journalism career. Kidding (but, seriously). I majored in journalism in undergrad at Eastern Illinois University, which in my opinion is one of the best programs in the country. Coupled with my creative writing minor, I was certain I had chosen a lucrative education mix that would guarantee endless career prospects and wealth. The bottom dropped out of the newspaper industry, and I decided to use writing and communication skills in another way. That way was public relations.

After undergrad, I attended Ball State University to pursue my master's in public relations with a concentration in business. Between my first and second years, I interned at State Farm's corporate headquarters in Bloomington, Illinois. While I was there, brands were just starting to get into using social media to support business objectives. I decided to stay at State Farm while writing my thesis in the evenings. It was one of the busiest times of my life. With the support of some great colleagues at the company, I started the company's first social media team within public affairs with two brilliant colleagues, Griffin Hammond and Matt Edwards. Mike Fernandez, the former vice president of communications at State Farm and a global PR leader, gave us all the resources we needed to make that happen. Agency life isn't easy, but it's the most interesting and dynamic sort of work you can experience in the field. I firmly believe that.

From there, I've become sort of a journeyman in the agency world. Normally, you would go from the agency to the client side. I did the opposite. I've now worked at Weber Shandwick, Ogilvy, and Golin. I'm now at Burson Cohn & Wolfe, working with some of the brightest minds in communications to grow our digital offering in North America.

## **What is your favorite part of working in public relations?**

This is an interesting question because it's changed with my age. When I was younger in the agency world, I'm not sure I would've had a favorite part. I worked so much that my favorite part of public

relations may have been the sleep I was able to squeeze in before the daily 4 a.m. social listening reports I had to send. Even on the weekends.

Now that I'm more senior in the field, I do have favorite parts. I love thinking about the best way to reach audiences/publics who matter to brands in interesting ways. Public relations, marketing, advertising, and other fields have blended so much over the past five years as a result of digital integration. Now, we all have to think like integrated marketers, and it's more fun. For example: I used to think about the best way to pitch media to get consumers to think about a product. Now, I think about things like the best way to geo-fence retail locations and use programmatic messages to drive consumers down the funnel. See? Much more interesting and more impactful for the business.

I also love the variety. One day, you'll work on corporate reputation. Another, you'll be in a brainstorm trying to figure out how to sell more dog food. Today, I'm writing this from a social media conference in San Francisco. I arrived late last night after giving a workshop about executive social media in New York. Tonight, I take the red eye flight back to Chicago. I have two presentations I need to create on the plane. So it goes. It's not for everyone, but I love it.

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

Work-life balance.

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

To me, all of the best thinking around influencing audiences happened in the past. There aren't enough practitioners within agencies and corporations who understand the history of public relations, so we tend to reinvent the wheel when it comes to engaging people. For example: When Edward Bernays was approached by a group of publishers to help sell more books, he said, "Where there are bookshelves, there will be books." He worked with interior designers and architects to build bookshelves into the homes of what we'd call opinion elites now. He knew their homes would be photographed for magazines, and people would clamor to have bookshelves built into their own homes. It worked.

When PR practitioners are approached by clients today, we often don't respond with an ounce of the creativity Bernays employed. In that situation, most PR people would enlist an expert to talk about the value of books. They'd hire bookish Instagram influencers to share about their favorite books. They might even hold an event in Times Square to get people to read more. But they probably wouldn't sell more books.

The biggest game changers in the PR industry know the difference between making a real business impact and making things shiny. And the best of those understand the history of public relations/marketing/advertising, have a foot in the academic side, and aren't afraid to lead with ideas instead of messaging.

### What are some things you wish you knew when you were starting out in public relations?

When you have a degree in public relations, it's not a guarantee that you know anything about how to do your job. This seems counterintuitive, sure, but it's true in my experience. When I graduated, I had worked on real accounts within a student-run agency. I knew the ins and outs of all the PR theories. I was a well-oiled machine, ready to conquer the world of public relations. Turns out, frantically busy executives at agencies don't always want to hear a 20-something pontificate about framing theory. If you have a background in the academic side of public relations and want to make an impact at an agency, figure out a way to package your knowledge into an approach that capitalizes on a trend. Then, go make the firm money with it.

### Five other things you wish you'd known in the beginning:

- Nobody cares about your background; you need to prove your value every day.

- If you don't know whose job it is, it's yours.
- Wherever you are, be there. Being present is extremely challenging, but critical.
- Don't ask questions—make statements. You'll eliminate email, and leaders will thank you.
- Crying is completely natural, but unbillable—so, stop it (kidding).

*Matt Kelly has worked with top brands like State Farm (client side), McDonald's, Discover Card, BP, Dow Chemical, SC Johnson, Conagra Brands, and others to improve their reputation and advance business objectives through smart strategy and creativity. A trusted digital crisis expert, he worked on the PR response after Hurricane Katrina while at State Farm and took those learnings to Ogilvy to lead the social engagement team for BP after the 2010 incident.*

*He loves to "yes, and" and use a high reference level to come up with the next, not-so-obvious idea—like creating a 24-hour marathon for McDonald's where the brand complimented more than 1,300 strangers. He's also a research nerd, coming up with new ways to assess influencers. He also rode a motorcycle through the Himalayas.*

*He wrote his thesis, "Fortune 500 Foray: How the Nation's Largest Insurer Leverages Social Media," while starting State Farm's first social media team in public affairs (published in PR Journal). He has since been a presenter at the International Public Relations Research Conference and at events from the International Association of Business Communicators, Word of Mouth Marketing Association, and Public Relations Society of America. He has also served as faculty for the Arthur W. Page Society. Most importantly, he's cat dad to Biggie, Marshall, and Eve.*

## APR EXAM

- PR models
- PR theories

- Current landscape and modern thought leaders

## KEY TERMS

Press agency and publicity model 24

Public information model 25

Two-way asymmetrical communication model 27

Two-way symmetrical communication model 29



# CASE STUDY

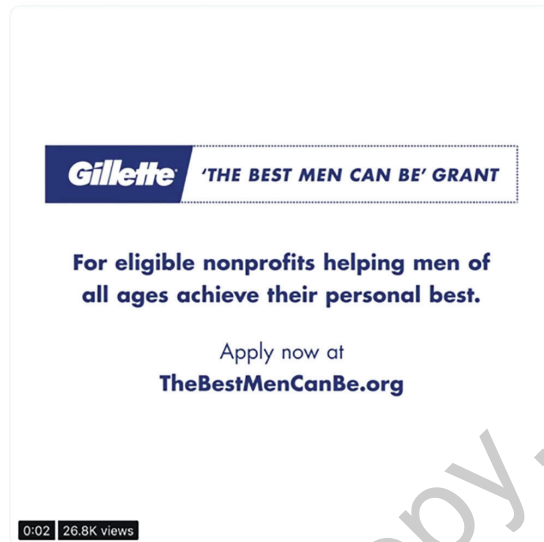
## *Toxic Masculinity and the Gillette Commercial for #TheBestMenCanBe*



Gillette  
@Gillette

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Gillette is donating \$1M each year, for the next 3 years, to nonprofit orgs helping boys & men achieve their best. We welcome grant applications from nonprofits standing up to bullying, championing inclusion, building confidence & more. Apply at [TheBestMenCanBe.org](https://TheBestMenCanBe.org).



5:00 PM - 30 Jan 2019

Source: @Gillette via Twitter

Gillette, the popular razor company, released a 2019 commercial titled “The Best Men Can Be,” which sparked both outrage and praise from communities on- and offline. The ad was first shared on Gillette’s social media accounts (YouTube and Twitter), asking audiences to watch the 48-second spot that addresses societal issues like bullying, sexual harassment, and the #MeToo movement (McCluskey, 2019). This commercial, which addressed the issue of toxic masculinity, sparked outrage, leading many to the brand’s social media accounts to voice their concerns publicly (Cain, 2019). On the other hand, others praised the commercial for bringing a powerful message to younger generations of consumers and for generating a high level of attention: “Everybody’s talking about it” (Kerpen, 2019).

### Why did this campaign generate buzz?

- This campaign generated strong feelings on both sides of the issue. Some people saw the ad as a very powerful message needed to highlight an important social issue, while others were outraged due to a perceived negativity toward males in general.
- Views of this campaign ranged from an empowering message against toxic behavior to an insulting message that grouped all males together as toxic. Both perspectives are opposite ends of the continuum for the brand, leaving no middle ground for the view of the brand and commercial on this account.

### What were some of the ethical and legal issues?

- Both Gillette and the audiences voicing their views about the commercial are able to communicate and share these perspectives.
- From an ethical standpoint, Gillette should consider integrating social issues that are part of its brand into the mix. This could produce a short-term gain or have longer-term effects on brand standing within the industry.
- This is another case that highlights the trend for brands to integrate causes, social issues, and topics that may be controversial for some audiences. Considering whether this is legal or ethical is a topic of conversation that merits further discussion.

### How did social media play a part in this campaign?

- Social media played a huge part in this case because the commercials were initially shown not through traditional media channels, but rather through specific platforms like YouTube and Twitter.
- This case also shows the power of the brand owning the narrative. This was not an agency or an individual sharing this content for the world to see—it was coming from the source itself.

- The response has been mixed on this case, with both positive and negative sentiment toward the brand. Time will tell how this will impact the brand in the long term.

### **What are some major takeaways from this case?**

- PR models can be viewed and applied in this particular campaign to this day.
- It was not discussed in the advertisement or commercial if the company had done any research to see how this would affect audiences using its products.
- Gillette was transparent in providing its message to audiences and owned the narrative of what it was talking about. The company was

selectively engaging with audiences on social media, mostly with those who were praising its efforts. The brand was not talking to all sides on this issue.

- Taking on issues and addressing them head-on for a brand may bring forth both praise and controversy—and it is important to know all of the pieces of the puzzle.
- The rise of new models and perspectives for public relations may be adopted and discussed from this case study. For example, several marketers and professionals in the field have called this campaign the rise of “woke advertising,” which focuses on addressing issues and generating awareness of important facts about social issues and tying this into their communication and marketing strategies (Hearn, 2019).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Identify the four models of public relations. What are the main characteristics that are unique to each of the theories? What features do they share in common?
2. Imagine if P. T. Barnum, Ivy Lee, and Edward Bernays were present in today’s PR world. How would they view the field? Discuss your rationale and provide a current campaign or case study that utilizes their perspectives today.
3. Review the case studies (Gillette, Fyre Festival, the 2008 and 2016 U.S. presidential campaigns, @world\_record\_egg, and Red Bull) through the lens of the PR models. What are some of the consistent characteristics for each of these cases? What do they bring to the table that is new for PR professionals to note?
4. Of the PR theories and perspectives being used today in research and practice, which one do you think is the dominant perspective? Provide your reasoning.