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HISTORICAL CONTEXTS AND TODAY'S PRACTICES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 Understand the roles of the four traditional models in the history of public relations.
- 2.2 Summarize the contributions of notable figures in public relations.
- 2.3 Understand the current state of PR practice.
- 2.4 Analyze how PR practice, research, and theory are adapting to today's media landscape.

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. Some ideas and incidents will raise a few eyebrows as we look back in time 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 we've learned to 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 into what it is today. As we look at past stories, actions, and campaigns, public relations' significant impact 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 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 you will consider how advances in technology, including social media, have affected the field's future foundations.

HOW DO THE FOUR PR MODELS FUNCTION?

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 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

Before discussing the characteristics of each model, let's look at what makes each model distinct.

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 share the following universal themes:

- *Roles.* Each model defines a specific role for the senders and receivers of messages. 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 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—for instance, to change their attitude. 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 power is given to a person's current attitudes and norms in 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 of understanding our key publics—attitudes give us a sense of 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.

As we explore the four main models, 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 press agents did not restrict themselves to telling the truth to meet their goals. Compared to today's practices, this model focuses on generating news for the sake of news, and it's not always transparent in providing all of the information everyone would want to have on hand to make a decision. Some may perceive publicists as there only to “spin” the news toward the positive for their client but not to address any negatives.

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 some within the PR field were not happy with the filmmakers' overall perspective and 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 sending 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. Today's popular tabloids and celebrity magazines target the same 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 5,000% 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 increase name recognition for Daraprim. Some may even say that Elon Musk's work over the years with Tesla and SpaceX—and even his purchase of Twitter—could be viewed as a modern-day take on the press agency and publicity model.



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.

Strobridge & Co. Lith.; archived in the Library of Congress Web Archives at <https://www.loc.gov/item/pictures/item/2012645423/>

2. The Public Information Model

The **public information model** emerged in the 1920s as journalists began to challenge press agents about the truth of their messages. This model represents a one-way communication of relevant, meaningful, truthful messages to key receiver audiences from an organization’s perspective. It shares its one-way line of communication and lack of formal research with the press agency and publicity model, but it differs in its efforts to be truthful.

PR professionals who work in the tradition of the public information model use the 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 this sense, the PR practitioner serves as an “internal journalist.” This model focuses on providing the media with information from the organization that helps journalists 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 is the most priceless possession a person, company, or PR professional can have. Reputation can be defined as “stakeholders’ evaluation of their organization in terms of their ‘affect, esteem, and knowledge” (Deephouse, 2000, p. 1093). For a PR practitioner working in the public information model, the overall goal is to present their organization as transparent by providing key audiences with accurate and timely information about any situation at hand. For reputation purposes, stories and testimonials are powerful tools that may compel people to reinforce—or motivate them to change—their overall perceptions of a brand or situation.

One major innovation of the public information model was the creation of the press release. A press release is a document, formatted the same way as a traditional news release, that is an official statement and story from the organization's perspective to be shared with media outlets. The first press release, created by Ivy Lee, appeared in the *New York Times* on October 29, 1906. 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'S FIRST PRESS RELEASE

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.

Source: Lee, I. (1906, October 30). Statement from the road; It declares the rails on the bridge must have fitted exactly. *The New York Times*, 2.



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 he did so with the interests of his client, rather than the public, in mind.

Harris & Ewing; archived in Library of Congress Web Archives at <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2016860103/>

Lee helped establish the public information model for public relations and provided the field with case studies on the power of controlling clients’ images 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 to a coal miners’ 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 Rockefeller’s image after the 1914 Ludlow Massacre. 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

in history, 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. During this crisis, Lee sent out informational bulletins to key opinion leaders to give them updates on what was happening from the organization’s side (Hallahan, 2002).

If you were to look for a more contemporary example in which an organization used the public information model to disseminate information and stories, both the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Elon Musk of SpaceX have tapped the power of Lee’s PR model in order to be the information authority related to space shuttle launches, particularly in times of crisis. The NASA *Challenger* disaster on January 28, 1986, marked a tremendous tragedy for the world when the space shuttle exploded after liftoff. NASA and its communication staff had to provide information to key audiences—the public, the media, and other stakeholders—to keep them aware of the situation and what NASA was going to be doing in response. SpaceX had its own disaster in 2016. Musk controlled the narrative with his statements and updates on social media, but he also speculated on the reasons 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, however, refers to the fact that the receivers are not equal participants in the conversation. Instead, unlike the previous two models, practitioners using this model incorporate formal research on audience attitudes—which constitutes the receiver’s voice—into their messaging. Those who use this model apply the power of persuasion to craft messages based on audience feedback. These messages are meant to influence receivers to think or act in the way the organization or client wants. PR professionals have raised concerns over this approach because it is perceived as manipulative for the benefit of a client, whose intentions might not necessarily be in the best interest of the audience members.

Edward Bernays, often considered the “father of modern-day public relations” for the 20th century, used the two-way asymmetrical approach extensively in his PR work. As noted earlier, Bernays was the nephew of famous psychologist 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.



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/Boston Globe/via Getty Images

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 an 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. Many brands have associated themselves with certain connections to reach and engage with audiences on a deeper level. Peloton disrupted the fitness market with its on-demand features and classes that allowed customers to bypass paying for expensive fitness classes. Glossier embraces a customer focus not only by pushing out engaging content about its brand culture but also by producing high-quality products. Bernays’s ideas reflect contemporary concepts such as brand association, which refers to the 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 away from 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 role of public relations in today’s society. We need a new model that accounts for how social media has changed the power dynamics of public relations, giving audiences—not organizations or other clients—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 the kind of mob mentality (a group of people coming together around a particular issue) that exists on social media (Blevins, 2016), the view that consumers and influencers are trustworthy sources of information, and the outrage sparked by some campaigns. For instance, how can a new model help us make sense of the public reactions to recent controversial commercials by Nike and Gillette, in which Nike featured the controversial former football player Colin Kaepernick (Kaepernick was the first to kneel during the national anthem during National Football League games), and Gillette addressed 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
Press Agency and Publicity	P. T. Barnum	One-way communication	Generating buzz, excitement, and hype surrounding an event, person, or idea
Public Information	Ivy Lee	One-way communication	Becoming your own media outlet and passing along information and messaging in a transparent yet persuasive manner
Two-Way Asymmetrical Communication	Edward Bernays	Two-way communication with feedback that is not balanced	Utilizing persuasive messages
Two-Way Symmetrical Communication	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

GAME CHANGER

MADISON HARDY, CEO OF BEESCENE AGENCY

How did you get your start in public relations?

Twitter. Very millennial of me, right? But one tweet looking for an intern from my now-business partner Joey Wagner is how I got started. I deferred law school for a year to work for free in a space I had never even really thought about. After that first year of working inside a PR firm with clients and helping produce events, I knew law school wasn't going to happen, and 7 years later, here we are.



Courtesy Madison Hardy

What is your favorite part of working in public relations?

Never having the same day twice. I feel extremely blessed to love what I do and care deeply about my clients, and sometimes that means crazy requests and hours, but I wouldn't change a thing. I don't think I would do well in a more traditional 9-to-5 setting.

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

Finding the WOW factor over and over again. A key component of being an entrepreneur, creating staple events, or pitching PR stories is all about the angle in which you show your main topic. Whether that is surviving COVID without firing employees, showcasing a new product, or igniting a new PR push, being constantly creative and looking at things in new ways can be extremely challenging.

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

The PR / marketing industry is so massive, there are thousands of people I would consider changing the game currently depending on the niche, but a few names I would tell everyone to follow and analyze would be Gary Vee, Alexis Ohanian, and Dany Garcia.

What are some things you wish you had known when you were starting out in public relations?

Always be adaptable and always remember to change your perspective. We are in a world of 24/7 changes and that is okay. Take a breath, refocus on your goals, and remember to learn from LITERALLY everything you do.

What would be your walkout song when you get on the stage for a presentation?

Changes daily, haha, but "This Is Me"—The Greatest Showman

If you could do a Last Lecture, what would you want to talk about, and what would be your key message for the audience?

In the past 2 years, I would argue we have seen the most drastic changes to our industry in modern history. These changes have opened our eyes to so many ways we can use technology and specifically social media outlets to our advantage but also our disadvantage. My last message would focus on the responsibility reporters, story tellers, or business owners have to portray truth for a greater good over trying to get clicks or sell more tickets.

Madison Hardy is CEO of BeeScene Agency, a brand ambassador agency, and is also part owner of "J Wagner Group," a marketing and event production firm located in Louisville, Kentucky. She specializes in brand management through public relations, social(s) account management, and event coordination while always staying on top of the local and national trending topics and news. For over 8 years, Madison has helped clients execute amazing events while elevating brands.

Madison has had her work and clients' work published in many major outlets, including Southern Living, PEOPLE, and ESPN. She has produced events and worked with organizations such as Jackson Family Wines, BEAM Suntory, Tito's Vodka, the Kentucky Derby, the Breeders' Cup, and most notably the full production of the Muhammad Ali funeral. Madison played Division I volleyball while attending Miami University while earning degrees in political science and American studies. She hopes to continue to work with brands on events all over the world to elevate her home city, Louisville.

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 with 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) is 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 told the audience about the actions it 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 had known 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% by what the enterprise does and 10% 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 issues surrounding equal pay became prominent in the news, companies like Adidas and Adobe responded with a promise that they would make ensure equal pay among women and men in their organizations.
- *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 in anticipation of concerns that may arise, brands such as Netflix make sure they communicate with their audiences about any changes related to pricing or their product offerings (e.g., taking the popular TV show *The Office* off the streaming service).
- *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, in October 2019, the airline provided food and drinks to a group of military service members 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, experiences, 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 recruited 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 companies, including Adobe, Intel, Dell, Humana, Samsung, and General Motors, have programs that enable employees to share their stories with the company's 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 DeGeneres and how she handled the situation. DeGeneres also had to do crisis control when accusations emerged that she had mistreated staff on her show. She announced that the show would end in 2021 by stating, “When you're a creative person, you constantly need to be challenged—and as great as this show is, and as fun as it is, it's just not a challenge anymore. My name is on the show and everything we do and I take responsibility for that” (Yandoli, 2021).

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. 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 (PRSSA)


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 as being the first person ever to win PRSA's top three awards and the first woman 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 PRSSA. 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 she encouraged efforts to bring educators into PR workplaces so they could bring new insights into the classroom. Plank actually has her own national day, created and launched by the Plank Center for Leadership, 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).

**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/uas-plank-center-to-celebrate-2nd-annual-betsy-day/)

 **THE PLANK CENTER**
FOR LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

@PlankCenterPR

University of Alabama Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations promotions for Betsy Plank Day

Source: The Plank Center. (n.d.) UA's Plank Center to celebrate 2nd annual 'Betsy Day'. <https://plankcenter.ua.edu/uas-plank-center-to-celebrate-2nd-annual-betsy-day/>

Inez Kaiser and Her Public Relations Firm

Inez Kaiser (1918–2016) was a pioneer in the public relations field for being the first Black woman to establish her own firm and take on national clients (Inez Kaiser, n.d.). She was able to work with brands such as Burger King, Sears, and 7UP when she created Inez Kaiser & Associates (Inez Kaiser, n.d.). Along with working with prominent clients, she was an active member of the NAACP, and her communication skills helped in crafting effective and successful messages during the civil rights movement (Inez Kaiser, n.d.). When practicing public relations, Kaiser always emphasized the importance of relationships by stating, “Always be thoughtful and thorough with your clients. And try your best to develop a personal relationship with them,” (PR News Online, n.d.).

Contemporary Figures of Public Relations

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

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 set a new standard for PR practices through his advocacy for the integrated marketing perspective, which emphasizes that different disciplines need to work together (Burson Cohn & Wolfe, n.d.). Public relations today is viewed not as a silo field but as a bridge that enables 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 role in building the Edelman Trust Barometer, a longitudinal study looking at trust issues and trends in public relations, and for his work 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.

Barri Rafferty

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

Maha Abouelenein

Maha Abouelenein is an Egyptian-American communications consultant with extensive industry experience, including senior leadership roles such as the head of communications for Google Africa. In addition, Abouelenein is an entrepreneur and keynote speaker representing her company Digital & Savvy while working with high-profile brands and celebrities such as Gary Vaynerchuk.

Charlene Wheeless

Charlene Wheeless is the senior advisor for equity and justice at APCO Worldwide and Principal at Charlene Wheeless LLC. Wheeless was the recipient of the 2022 Betsy Plank Award given by the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations.

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 also embrace them personally.

- *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 a difference, you may have to go against the common perspective or paradigm. All PR leaders approach their work in new ways, differentiating themselves from others and solidifying themselves forever in PR history.
- *PR leaders are willing to mentor and give back to future leaders.* In order for the field to move forward and evolve, the next generation must have guidance on the steps they need to take to be successful like their predecessors. Mentorship is an essential component among industry leaders today.
- *PR leaders are willing to stand forward and make sure we are all represented.* As noted in Chapter 4 on “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging,” public relations as a field needs to champion equal representation, and today’s leaders are taking this to heart in their efforts as leaders of their own firms and as leaders in the industry more broadly.
- *PR leaders know what is real and what is “shiny.”* All of these professionals approach 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 it 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 only in the past. They are strong and present in our practices today (see Figure 2.1).

The one thing 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’s partnership with Mattel on a Barbie-themed house people can stay in. We can also examine 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 media.

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Historical Contexts and Future of PR

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 include: press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical. All four of these models have strong characteristics that have 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. Looking to the past can help us envision where the field needs to go.

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 the chance to have a conversation, though one party 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.



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 we discussed 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 about an event or other campaign (see the Red Bull® campaign, discussed a bit later in this section), others (see the Fyre Festival, discussed next) have generated more negative publicity. 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 classic example shows the risks associated with misleading audiences through propaganda, illusion, and withholding information. It is a big mistake to fool audiences into believing they will have a positive experience when the experience will not and does not live up to the hype.

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 promoted as a luxury event—the “Coachella of the Caribbean”—but, on the contrary, it was far from luxurious. It turned out to be a festival that promoted fraud. Tents, cheese sandwiches, and turmoil were just a few things that characterized attendees' Fyre Festival experience, and 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, which resulted in two documentaries by Netflix and Hulu highlighting the catastrophe-in-the-making. 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 ethical issues related to investments in the event were all areas of concern.

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. While being transparent and up front with audiences from a brand's perspective is often very effective, it can sometimes transform into a much bigger crisis.

Serena Williams's Retirement from Tennis

Athletes, celebrities, and senior executives in all walks of life have announced their retirement from their professions. Sometimes this choice is theirs, and other times it is not. However, taking it upon yourself to be your own media outlet and spokesperson on this important occasion—in one of the largest publications and media outlets in the world, while you are on the cover—is next level. This is what Serena Williams, the iconic tennis player, did in August 2022 on the cover of *Vogue*. In the exclusive piece, Williams stated she did not want to “evolve away” and was transparent that her reason for retiring was due to her desire to spend time with family and move on in her next chapter of life (Haskell, 2022). What was powerful in Williams’s statement was how she felt she could not “have it all,” meaning staying in tennis and having the chance to continue building her family (Conner, 2022). This move put Williams in the powerful position of allowing her own story, words, and views to be shared with the media, since she is not only a successful athlete but also a media company with her own brand. Having control over her message during an important career milestone was impressive to see.



Serena Williams's *Vogue* Cover
Patti McConville/Alamy Stock Photo

Unilever and Ben & Jerry's

There are some cases in which companies become their own media outlet during a time of disagreement or crisis. But what happens when you have two opposing views in a business relationship in which one corporate brand owns another? The public information model can be viewed in different ways in light of the issues that Unilever and Ben & Jerry's have had. As they say on social media, “It’s complicated,” especially considering that Ben & Jerry's is suing Unilever (CNN, 2022).

What happened between the two companies? First, Ben & Jerry's, known for its progressive political and social views, made the decision in 2021 to no longer sell its products in the West Bank due to “being inconsistent with their views” (CNN, 2022). However, Unilever, as

the parent company that owns Ben & Jerry's, made a statement saying that it was the one that decided where the brand would be sold. However, this all came to the stage again when Ben & Jerry's sued Unilever, not only for this action but also for allegedly freezing the salaries of Ben & Jerry's top executives (Michalitsianos, 2022). Unilever addressed the suit with a statement to the media by pointing out what they expect Ben & Jerry's to do for their business overall: "The long-term future of Ben & Jerry's is squarely as part of Unilever. There is plenty for Ben & Jerry's to get their teeth into in their social justice mission without straying into geopolitics" (Naidu & Kerber, 2022).

This situation is different from the approach Serena Williams took by owning her message, and it shows the confusion that results from communicating two different messages that are then re-presented by the media. There is not only a struggle happening within the business organizational chart for Unilever and Ben & Jerry's, but there is a battle going on in the public sphere and media landscape. As their corporate motto goes, Ben & Jerry's is not doing the world a "flavor" (according to Unilever).

3. The Two-Way Asymmetrical Model: Today

These next few campaigns show that sometimes, when PR professionals 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. In the following example involving Dan Price, 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.

The Rise and Fall of Dan Price

If you have heard of the CEO who became famous for making sure all of his employees earned a salary over \$70,000 per year, you've heard about Dan Price. Price was the CEO of Gravity Payments and became a leading voice among CEOs around the world for taking a pay cut from his own salary so he could pay his employees more. His social media fame skyrocketed and the benefits were clear, until a New York Times article was published investigating Price for sexual assault and other alleged inappropriate behavior toward women (Passy, 2022). With his celebrity status, Price was acknowledged for his leadership advice both on his own platforms and in many



Dan Price

Idaho Statesman/Tribune News Service/via Getty Images

interviews. However, issues arose when real life did not match up to his public persona, according to the New York Times investigation (Dan Price, the CEO Who Boosted Employee Pay, Resigns after Investigation - MarketWatch, n.d.). This case shows that a person or organization can indeed be transparent and open to feedback and conversation, but it depends on the situation they are faced with. Price had no issue receiving feedback and creating conversation when it came to the \$70,000 minimum salary, but this was not the case when it came to addressing the allegations against him.

4. The Two-Way Symmetrical Model: Today

Kim Kardashian and Beats

There are many corporate co-branding partnerships going on, and while many may think they've seen everything that needs to be seen involving the Kardashian family, there's no disputing that the Kardashians know how to engage and use the media and PR profession to their benefit.

Kim Kardashian has established herself as a powerful force for brands she oversees, such as SKMS and others. She is also open to new partnerships with other collaborators, such as Beats. Kardashian partnered with Beats by Apple to provide customers with versions of the Beats Fit Pro earbuds in a trio of different skin colors to either “blend in or stand out” (Smith, 2022). This partnership campaign not only brings together two forces but also allows audiences to interact, engage, and share their thoughts on this new collaboration on and offline.

Jax and Victoria's Secret

One way to get the public's attention and have a conversation about an ongoing issue in society is to write a viral song about it. Perhaps this will start a conversation with the leader of the corporation. This is what happened to former *American Idol* contestant Jax, who wrote a viral song titled “Victoria's Secret” about the body image concerns she had growing up and Victoria's Secret's harmful messaging on this subject. When the song went viral, Amy Hauk, the CEO of Victoria's Secret, responded:

Jax's latest single “Victoria's Secret” has resonated with many of her fans, including me. I want to thank Jax for addressing important issues in her lyrics. We make no excuses for the past. And we're committed to regaining your trust. I believe that to create trust, you need to get comfortable being vulnerable. Admitting you were wrong, shaking your struggles, it's first step to true meaningful connection. Our transformation is a journey and every day we are working hard to advocate for all women—including the 25,000 who work for us. As CEO of Victoria's Secret and PINK, I can wholeheartedly say that we are all committed to building a community where everyone feels seen and respected. And if we mess up or can do better, we want to know. We truly value your voice and are working to find new ways to listen and bring you into the conversation, (Just Jared, 2022).

This case shows the openness that can come with having a conversation based on a topic and listening to what others are saying in the process. Bringing Jax and the Victoria's Secret team together to see what can be done to improve body image issues could be a good next step in the conversation. Many conversations praised Jax for this song, and others mentioned what Victoria's Secret was doing and how the company's response would play out in the future. While Victoria's Secret has had many challenges over the years as a brand, there is a chance for it to work

toward a more effective and contemporary body-image approach that represents current thinking on this topic among the global community.

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 not only 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 freestanding PR firms are now agencies that label themselves experts in “integrated marketing communication,” “communication marketing,” or “strategic communication.” For example, Edelman, one of the largest PR agencies in the world, now lists itself as a marketing agency. In addition, the public may struggle with its perception of what public relations 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 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 perspectives in the field that do not emerge from the “right” sources. The field cannot afford to hold 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 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 in 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 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. A subset of agenda setting that is used in public relations has been agenda building, which uses media assets a public relations professional has created to get the information to the key publics (e.g., press releases, media advisories, etc.).	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/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 they impact 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, identities, 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?

Social media has become a primary and powerful communication channel and specialization within the public relations field. 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 how and why we use 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, and some brands have owed their success to social media, such as Duolingo, e.l.f. Cosmetics, Chipotle, and others. More brands, creators, and agencies will continue to push the envelope on changing the game for public relations in social media. Some of these will be good changes, and others will become iconic examples of what not to do.

One of the things to recognize in the past, present, and future of public relations is the fact that the models of public relations are rooted in human behavior, which will evolve yet stay consistent in some respects over time. The channels and ways in which we communicate, engage in relationships, and share messages will evolve and change of course, and public relations needs to be aware of these changes in order to be prepared and proactive. In order to do this effectively, we have to analyze where we have been to learn from others and not make some of the same mistakes. We must also be open to new potential ideas, new perspectives, and unique possibilities outside the silos of the public relations field.

CASE STUDY

EXPERIENTIAL PR AND THE *BRIDGERTON* EXPERIENCE

There are many different ways to generate excitement about a new show, event, and campaign, but the rise of experiential public relations (known as creative activations and executions in other related fields) is becoming the standard to reach younger audiences to generate word-of-mouth campaigns.

One of the more successful ventures that has done this well has been “The Queen’s Ball: A *Bridgerton* Experience.” *Bridgerton*, the period show from Shonda Rhimes on

Netflix, wanted to give audiences a way to really feel like part of the party as depicted in the show, so they created a traveling experience for audiences to participate in around the United States.



Sipa USA/Alamy Stock Photo

Why did this campaign generate buzz?

- This generated a lot of excitement for *Bridgerton*'s second season. Audience members, creators, and influencers were invited to be part of the red carpet event, promoted as a "once in a lifetime evening of music and dance" (The Queen's Ball, n.d.).
- The Queen's Ball was held in various cities around the United States, and customers got the full treatment they would expect if they were part of *Bridgerton*. Guests were given a variety of items as they arrived, such as a copy of Lady Whistledown's *Society Papers*, had the opportunity to interact with performers, learned a dance from the time period, and were able to present themselves to the queen performer as well (Cooper, 2022).
- The unique storytelling features not only presented key points from the show but allowed audiences to participate in the setting and feel part of the story instead of just showing audiences what the upcoming season was going to be about. Audience members were able to dress the part in regal dresses and suits to fit the time period.

What were some of the ethical and legal issues?

- It was important for the organizers of the experience to make sure that everyone who wanted to participate had the equal chance and opportunity to do so. In addition, the organizers proactively addressed any concerns that audiences may or may not have had both in person and online.
- With Netflix raising their rates and having company layoffs, these expensive activations for shows like *Bridgerton* may not be looked upon positively by some audiences. Understanding different views on experiential PR activations and experiences is key to proactively address from a campaign standpoint.

How did social media play a part in this campaign?

- Social media was at the forefront of documenting, sharing, and creating excitement online about this experiential event.
- The *Bridgerton* Experience wanted to encourage audiences to participate and be part of the experience—as well as documenting their interactions and thoughts about the event.
- Aspects like ticket sales, exclusive products, and unique content-creation opportunities were part of the messaging to persuade audiences to attend and be part of the community (Carter, 2022).

What are some major takeaways from this case?

- In order to have a strong connection with audiences, experience is going to be more impactful than a press release or statement.
- Giving audiences an opportunity to tell a story through unique experiences while feeling like part of a community will motivate audiences to share, document, and advocate for more events and interactions like this in the future.
- Capturing attention is the most important currency in most activations and experiential PR opportunities, so strategy and creative execution with unique value points that resonate with audiences will make it a successful campaign.

SUMMARY

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. 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.

APR EXAM

- Four models of public relations
- Communication theories
- Public relations theories
- Current landscape and modern thought leaders

KEY TERMS

Press agency and publicity model
Public information model

Two-way asymmetrical communication model
Two-way symmetrical communication model

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?
2. Imagine if P. T. Barnum, Ivy Lee, and Edward Bernays were present in today's PR world. How would they view the field? Who would be their BFFs in the field? Which brands, agencies, or companies would they work for? Discuss your rationale and provide a current campaign or case study that utilizes their perspectives today.
3. We have discussed the individuals who have helped shape the public relations field as it is practiced today. Based on your reading, who would be a person or professional today who will be included in these same conversations in the future? Provide an explanation along with evidence to support this perspective.
4. Review the case studies (Fyre Festival, Kim Kardashian, Jax and Victoria's Secret, Dan Price) 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?
5. 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.

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