

FOUNDATIONS

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1

AN INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC RELATIONS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Describe how public relations creates ongoing dialogue between organizations and individuals or groups.
- 1.2 Identify key responsibilities of public relations professionals.
- 1.3 Distinguish between public relations and associated disciplines.
- 1.4 Evaluate how the discipline of public relations is likely to change and stay the same in the years to come.

What do you think of when you hear the term *public relations*? Take a moment and jot down your first impressions. It is perfectly okay if you have certain perceptions and thoughts about the field. Some of these will likely be true, but others may not be. After reading this chapter, reflect on your notes and see what has or has not changed in your thinking about the field. Furthermore, after finishing this textbook, ask yourself the same question and see what has changed and what has stayed the same.

In the mind of the general public, the public relations field is often associated with fictional characters such as Samantha Jones in *Sex and the City*, Keeley Jones from *Ted Lasso*, Emily Cooper in *Emily in Paris*, Alexis Rose in *Schitt's Creek*, or Olivia Pope in *Scandal*. Some even refer to PR professionals derogatively as “spin doctors,” meaning that our job is to make something seem better than it is. Yes, it is true that managing crisis communications, like Olivia Pope does, is an important part of what we do. We also have to be entrepreneurs and manage our client’s brand and press opportunities, like Alexis Rose does. We have to make sure our clients get the partnerships they need for sponsorships and media coverage, like Keeley Jones does. And, like Emily Cooper, we host influencer events to generate word-of-mouth communication—while building our own personal brand in the process—in fabulous locations such as Paris. However, our field is so much more. In contrast to the “spin doctor” stereotype, we are bound by carefully constructed ethical guidelines, as will become clear in this book.

PR practitioners, or those of us who work in the field, look at public relations from various perspectives. Some focus on the duties of PR professionals, such as media pitching, creating press releases, and formulating media kits, while others focus on specializations within the field, such as event planning, crisis communications, employee and internal communication, risk and issues management, nonprofit relations, media relations and campaigns, or reputation management, and we will explore these perspectives in depth.

An example of a notable PR effort includes the campaign that brought together Grammy-award-winner Olivia Rodrigo and Sour Patch Kids. Rodrigo, the artist behind the award-winning album *Sour*, partnered with the candy company in a brand-aligned influencer campaign:

The goal of the collaboration was to generate excitement for the upcoming release of Rodrigo's album while allowing fans to participate in a contest for the chance to win Sour Patch Kids boxes signed by Rodrigo. This campaign won the 2022 Webby Awards for Best Influencer Campaign. This collaboration is not the only one that has been praised. What happens when you bring together a popular show that showcases positivity and happiness, and an ice cream brand? You get an iconic and memorable partnership between Apple TV's *Ted Lasso* show and Jeni's Ice Cream ahead of the show's third season in 2023.



Olivia Rodrigo.

PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo

Brand partnerships and influencer collaborations are not the only scenarios in which public relations is in play. In fact, public relations is everywhere in society, and professionals may handle broader scopes of focus (such as crisis communications) or more specialized areas (such as influencer or creator relations).

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

Finally, this chapter summarizes how public relations today is more than just press releases and working with the media—ours is a field that is evolving, combining the use and application of data, stories, marketing, branding, advertising, and social and digital components to foster and sustain mutually beneficial relationships across audiences and channels. Using conversation, storytelling, and the development of sustainable communities, we can connect with related disciplines using our relationship management practices. We will also discuss how public relations professionals serve as counsel or advisors to others, offer strategies to best engage with publics internally and externally, create and advocate for stories to be shared across media channels, and generate opportunities to bring communities and partners together through innovative ideas and approaches.

WHAT IS PUBLIC RELATIONS?

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

Historically, the definition of the profession has evolved over the decades. Scholars have defined **public relations** as “the planned effort to influence opinion through socially responsible and acceptable performance based on mutually satisfactory two-way communication” (Cutlip & Center, 1971, p. 4). Broom and Dozier (1983) further defined public relations as being “concerned with relations with numerous publics, that like consumers, affect organizational survival and growth” (p. 6). Coombs (2007 p. 106; see also Heath, 2000) defined public relations as “the use of communication to manage the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders.” However, a more recent version of the definition focuses on relationships that an organization and publics may have with each other. Broom and Sha (2013) have defined public relations as a “management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 5).

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the PR field’s largest professional organization, defines public relations as a “strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (Public Relations Society of America, 2020). Lewis PR, a global PR firm, describes public relations as requiring “seamless integration across multiple channels. Successful brands know there is a multiplier effect when public relations and digital marketing work hand in hand, ensuring continuity across channels and around the world” (Tannahill, 2015). What this means is, for public relations to work, professionals must take care to coordinate all channels, audiences, and content for the right place, time, and location.

There are similarities between academic and practitioner perspectives when it comes to the conceptualization of public relations. First, both academics and practitioners recognize that public relations has a core focus on relationship management (understanding the dynamics of the needs and expectations from each party involved) and that this impacts the dynamics between an organization and the key people it’s trying to reach.

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

Why do we use the term *public relations* to describe our field? The first word, *public*, refers to the key audiences with whom we want to engage in conversation for the ultimate purpose of creating a strong connection that is sustainable for the long term. *Relations* refers to the connections we forge with our audiences (or publics), based on common ground. So, in sum, the term *public relations* literally refers to engaging in an ongoing dialogue with individuals or groups in a win-win situation. For example, in the case of the collaboration between Sour Patch Kids and Olivia Rodrigo, both entities were able to gain positive media coverage and recognition of their work in the influencer and creator space. Audiences for both were excited to see this campaign come together, making it a successful win-win situation for everyone involved.

We Identify Publics

Our audiences usually have relevant age cohort, demographic, and psychographic characteristics that may be important to keep in mind when planning particular initiatives and activities. For example, the generational cohort of baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) may respond

to a PR campaign differently than millennials (born between 1981 and 1994) or Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2009) would. It is also important to note that brands are already looking at Generation Alpha (born after 2010) as well. Some brands are having a resurgence among certain cohorts, such as McDonald's and Oreos for Generation Z, while Generation Alpha is gravitating to YouTube, Minecraft, Roblox, and Disney+.

Some brands (products or items that are owned and produced by a parent company like General Motors and Chevrolet or PepsiCo with Cheetos and Gatorade) aim for engagement with members of a particular demographic, such as a socioeconomic group. For example, manufacturers of affordable or luxury cars take their audience's respective needs into account.

PR campaigns also target segments of their audience with particular psychographic characteristics—that is, certain core lifestyle, attitude, behavior, and opinion attributes, such as interests in fitness, food, or home improvement. One of the cardinal sins for PR practitioners is to state: “We want to target the general public.” This means you want to target everyone, which may be neither realistic nor achievable within the scope of a campaign. Targeting the general public—capturing the 8 billion people who are part of global society—is usually not the best way to approach things.

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

Some examples of publics that are focused in practice include:

- Employees (senior, entry level, consultants, freelancers, etc.)
- Community (business locations, nonprofits, local government, opinion leaders)
- Media (local, national, international, trade, specialized, social, creator/influencer driven)
- Government (local, national, legislators, regulatory agencies)
- Academia (researchers, staff, faculty, administration)
- Industry / Business-to-Business (team partners, competitors, employees, trade associations, etc.)
- Consumers / Customers (current, former, potential customers)

We Focus on Stakeholders

A special kind of public is known as a **stakeholder**, an individual who has a vested interest in the organization. These stakeholders could be external to an organization or internal within the organization. Stakeholder theory, which helps us understand the behavior of stakeholders, has been an important part of PR research for decades (Laplume, Sonpar, & Litz, 2008). Stakeholders come in many forms, but broadly speaking, those who are financially or emotionally invested are considered to be stakeholders. For example, college students are key stakeholders for the university since they (1) are invested in their education financially and (2) want their university to do

well in order to burnish their reputation and the prestige of their degree. Freeman (1984, p. 25) was the first scholar to operationalize what stakeholders are by defining them as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives.” Clarkson (1995, p. 106) defined stakeholders similarly by stating that they “have, or claim, ownership, rights, or interests in a corporation and its activities, past, present, or future.” Grunig and Repper (1992) defined stakeholders as publics, implying they are a broader group comprised of anyone an organization needs to be aware of for its well-being. Stakeholders want to work with organizations that practice ethical behavior and maintain a positive and proactive relationship with them for the long term (Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998).

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

We Manage Relationships Between Publics and Brands

Besides exploring population data (demographics) and attitudes and opinions (psychographics), we will look at other attributes that define the publics of public relations. The current relationship that a public has with a brand or an organization is a key factor. **Engagement**—the actions taken in response to an organization’s content or message strategy—is a focus of PR practitioners and researchers. PR researchers need to recognize not only the power of engagement in traditional circumstances (such as dialogue and participating in conversation) but also the importance of engaging with audiences online, both digitally and socially (Dhanesh, 2017).

By connecting with audiences in the online spaces the audiences gravitate toward, we can form relationships. Some audiences will have a positive relationship with a brand or organization, while others will not. We describe a public’s relationship with a brand as positive, neutral (not engaged yet), or negative. These various relationships are evident in recent cases. For example, Adidas sparked a lot of reactions (both positive and negative) related to its viral Bare Breast Campaign. While the campaign featuring uncensored images was designed in part to promote the brand’s wide range of sports bras, it also aimed to celebrate diverse body shapes and sizes. We’ll revisit this case in more detail in Chapter 4.

Another case of building relationships with audiences virtually—and translating it into financial success—is Apple TV’s hit show *Ted Lasso*. The show’s PR and social team created fake Twitter accounts for each character and for the fictional soccer club at the heart of the series, allowing the characters to come to life, extend the storylines from the show, and give exclusives on social media. In essence, the characters and accounts were not promoting the show—because they *were* the show. Audiences did not feel like they were being promoted to; rather, they could become part of the overall experience and enjoy the process. As far as strategic content and brand voice, the *Ted Lasso* accounts’ tweets came in real time, and the characters engaged with audience members, including Diane Sawyer, Dolly Parton, and Ryan Reynolds. Specifically, the show’s strategy went viral when it jumped on a Twitter trend using a creative approach. Wendy’s, known for its feisty brand presence on social media, partakes in Roast Day, sending snarky messages

to brands and individuals with the hashtag #RoastMe. *Ted Lasso's* team of writers did not partake in Roast Day, instead asking audiences how Ted Lasso could toast them in kindness using the hashtag #ToastMe. All told, the *Ted Lasso* team created a community built on relationships across different channels and focused on positivity, goodness, and entertainment through interactive storytelling.



Ted Lasso's characters come to life on screen and online.

Album/Alamy Stock Photo

Brand personality alignment is a key factor that can help contribute to a public's overall relationship with a brand. Because of this, more brands are willing to advocate for viewpoints, perspectives, or issues that are tied to their brand and the publics associated with it. Audiences, especially those in Generation Z, want organizations and others to stand for various issues—social, environmental, racial justice, global, and so on—that are tied to their corporate values and community-based expectations. REI did this for its #OptOutside campaign, which encouraged its customers, employees, and others to go outside instead of shopping during Black Friday sales. And brands such as the New York Yankees and Tampa Bay Rays partnered in May 2022 to utilize their platforms to share information about gun control after the tragic school shooting in Uvalde, Texas. When implemented, brands' campaigns related to gun control have gone over both positively and negatively, depending on the response from the brand's key audiences and the brand's own view of its actions. As we will discuss later in this book, advocacy messaging can bring forth both praise and resistance, even to the point of boycotts and outrage from key audiences. An example of this was Ben & Jerry's recent decision to cease sales of its product in the West Bank (discussed in Chapter 2), in which the corporation, for the sake of its brand, took advantage of the growing trends in advocacy advertising. This new approach is especially relevant to longer-term audiences (such as Generation Z and future generations).

Let's look at another example of relationship management. In 2021, Nickelodeon released a video celebrating the 25th anniversary of popular children's TV show *Blue's Clues* featuring the show's former host, Steve Burns. The video provided a rationale for where Steve had been during the years since the show ended, and Burns spoke directly to millennial audiences who had grown up watching the show about understanding the challenges associated with adulthood. During

a time when the world was still working and living through COVID-19, the video with Burns went viral, and audiences around the world shared their appreciation for the touching video.



Steve Burns celebrates the 25th anniversary of *Blue's Clues*.

Erik Pendzich/Alamy Stock Photo

The cases of *Ted Lasso* and *Nickelodeon* show the power of kindness, empathy, and relationships, and they prove that not everything in public relations content needs to be advertised, promoted, or negative. Audiences want to have content, experiences, and partners that resonate with them, and public relations professionals need to recognize the importance of this. Relationships and audience segmentation will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

GAME CHANGER

STEPHEN WADDINGTON, PR PROFESSIONAL

How did you get your start in public relations?

Working as a tech journalist in the '90s, I reported on the explosion in electronics and the build-out of the internet. There was a shortage of people with skills to convey technical concepts in a way that the public could understand. I made the switch into public relations and doubled my salary. It seemed like a pragmatic move. I've since retrofitted a formal education.



Courtesy Stephen Waddington

What is your favorite part of working in public relations?

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

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

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

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

The fragmentation of traditional media and the explosion of new forms of media. A series of massive technology platforms, namely Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google, have firmly established themselves as the new media ecosystem. Checks and balances remain a work in progress.

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

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

Stephen Waddington is a business advisor and troubleshooter who helps organizations with planning, strategic decision making, and execution. He is the founder and managing partner of Wadds Inc. Stephen has held the role of Visiting Professor in Practice at Newcastle University since 2015, supporting the university and students through teaching and mentoring. He is a PhD research student at Leeds Business School, where he is investigating the contribution of public relations to management.

WHAT DO WE DO AS PR PROFESSIONALS?

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

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

The profession of public relations is practiced worldwide. Public relations has a significant global presence, and practices differ from country to country (Verčič, van Ruler, Bütschi, & Flodin, 2001). Many brands maintain a global presence, requiring consistent messages

that we create and share. At the same time, brands need to tailor messages to unique local circumstances.

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

- serve as the trusted counsel of an organization (which means being proactive in making sure the team knows all of the different perspectives, options, and challenges they could face and how messaging strategies could help address this)
- participate in active creative and strategic brainstorming sessions to address problems, opportunities, and risks facing a client or company in question
- forecast and educate on new trends, areas, issues, and specializations that have a direct impact on the work our clients, audiences, and brands are doing
- conduct research to explore concepts and identify audiences to gain insights to be used in strategies and campaigns
- integrate and educate aspects of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging into public relations practices
- skilled in conducting, evaluating and applying insights from multiple research methods, such as traditional (ex. focus groups, interviews, observations, surveys, content analysis, etc.), social (ex. customer service, social listening and monitoring, network analysis, big data), and emerging (ex. AI)
- engage with internal audiences (building team advocates internally among employees and staff members could help address any challenges that come from external audiences)
- serve as the contact point for the media (being the face of the organization in the media allows the messaging to be consistent across channels and situations)
- implement community and audience initiatives (which means leading the way to advocate for community efforts to support those who are impacted by our work)
- Proactive in identifying emerging challenges or issues that may arise
- manage expectations and perceptions before, during, and after a crisis (which means making sure to address all concerns, questions, and preparations for when a crisis hits)
- advocate for audiences internally and externally (public relations serves as an advocate for our client for all audiences, inside and out, and it is important to communicate consistently across all audiences)

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

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

We Write

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

- press releases;
- news releases, or formatted stories that follow the journalism structure of a news article in the style of the Associated Press, which allows journalists and media professionals to review the stories to determine if they want to cover them in their own publication or media outlet;
- fact sheets;
- prompt engineering and content creation with artificial intelligence tools;
- backgrounders, which give journalists and media professionals an overview of the brand, key parties, and the campaign to help them write a thorough and complete story for their media outlet;
- memos and pitches, which are persuasive statements and points directed to media professionals to persuade them to cover the story about your client and can come via phone, email, or social media channels;
- speeches and statements;
- crisis plans, messages, procedures, and statements;
- pitches, reports, contracts, and deliverables for creators and influencers (individuals who have a strong following and perceived area of expertise in a given area online);
- question-and-answer sessions;
- scripts for public service announcements (PSAs);
- feature stories;
- strategic briefs and plans, from creating a brief overview of an idea you have for a campaign to launching a full comprehensive PR plan to execute; and
- social and digital media content to be distributed across a vast array of channels.

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

- update social media;
- create storyboards for advertisements and social media content pieces (visual layouts of each scene that will be created);
- listen to and monitor reports from traditional, digital, and social media;
- perform creator and influencer audits (evaluating which influencer to work with based on certain criteria);
- create podcast episode scripts;

- create white papers and ebooks;
- develop brand writing and content guides;
- conduct walk-throughs for VR experiences;
- organize walk-throughs for the metaverse;
- create briefs to launch new VR/AR/metaverse features to provide information and generate awareness on issues and knowledge;
- compose ads;
- create content calendars (outlined dates and schedules for when content will be pushed and executed across different channels);
- write analytics reports from social and digital media campaigns; and
- create visual storyboards for stories on specific platforms.

We Conduct Research

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

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

Many PR firms and university programs are well known for the research they share with the community. For example, over the past 15 years, the communications firm Edelman has established itself through research that explores trends in consumer trust. Further, every two years, the University of Southern California produces the Communication and Public Relations Generally Accepted Practices (GAP) Study, a comprehensive study focused on identifying new trends related to the industry, profiling emerging skills among practitioners, and describing the current industry landscape.

We Think Creatively

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

We Understand Business Practices

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

We Meet Emerging Expectations

To cope with a rapidly changing industry landscape, we must be adaptive, agile, and able to bring new capabilities to the table. Already, academic disciplines such as marketing, advertising, and English are becoming more adaptive, and we PR students and professionals must work to stay ahead of these trends.

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

- *Forecasters.* Forecasters anticipate concerns about issues such as the environment. An example of an award-winning environmental campaign is LADbible’s “Trash Isles” campaign, which advocated action to address plastic pollution in our oceans.
- *Reputation managers.* Reputation managers understand how to manage, build, and rejuvenate a brand image when it is in crisis and to protect it in case something further goes wrong. Examples of recent reputation management cases are Disney’s handling of the “Don’t Say Gay” bill passed in Florida, Will Smith’s “Oscar slap” case, and the leaked email crisis in which an Applebee’s executive advocated lowering wages for workers amid inflation and COVID-19-related challenges. In these cases, owning the narrative and being mindful of the long-term effects could be factors to discuss and strategize from a PR standpoint.
- *Crisis communicators.* Crisis communicators manage major problems that cannot necessarily be anticipated. Crises can emerge at any time, as seen with brands such as Southwest Airlines (flight disruptions), Meta Platforms (layoffs), and Reddit (blackout protest against platform’s new company policies). There are other cases in which brands find themselves in a crisis because of a storyline in a show or movie. As we’ll discuss in Chapter 11, Peloton had to contend with two characters on separate shows dying due to working out on a Peloton bike, which forced the global fitness brand to respond to concerns from their stakeholders and audience.
- *Creators.* Creators, such as TikTok beauty creator Mikayla Nogueira, understand how to create new stories from perspectives not showcased in previous efforts in public relations. For example, Nogueira has partnered with many brands such as Makeup by Mario, Fenty Beauty by Rihanna, and Glow Recipe to provide exclusive content (beauty tutorials), influencer exclusives (interviews), and product reviews to her audiences. Creators are a new wave of influencers who can work with PR professionals and agencies to create a win-win situation for all.

However, it is important to note that creators may also create negative press, and audiences’ skepticism of their motives for promoting and supporting the brands they advocate has sparked a new countermovement called “de-influencing.” Nogueira faced backlash with early 2023’s viral “Mascara Gate” incident, in which audiences

questioned the validity of her recommendation for a L’Oreal mascara product as part of a sponsored partnership.

- *Digital and social media experts.* Such experts know how to engage the public through their brand and how to stand out with brand messaging on social media. From large events such as the Super Bowl and the Kentucky Derby to smaller-scale creative activations and partnerships, PR professionals have to be innovators and leaders in this space.
- *Storytelling and storydoing.* Storytellers help audiences engage with and relate to a brand or organization on an emotional level. Examples of expert stories include the “Here to Create” campaign with Billie Jean King and Adidas at the U.S. Open, and the tribute Nike and Gatorade created for Serena Williams’ retirement.
- *AI integration.* As artificial intelligence and other tools emerge, public relations professionals need to be skilled in knowing how and why we use these tools for work but also be on the forefront of changes and additions. Understanding the components for prompt engineering (instructions, context, input data, and output interpreter) are needed for AI integration in public relations work. We will discuss these items more in detail in Chapter 7.

Brands not only tell stories but also encourage audiences to take action as part of these stories (that is, they build a participative brand culture via “storydoing”). For instance, the outdoor company REI’s brand benefited from its #OptOutside campaign, which encouraged the company’s employees (and everyone!) to take the day after Thanksgiving off to celebrate with loved ones and go outside. Stories come in all shapes and sizes, and each has a unique tone. Some spark happiness, some sadness, but overall, the goal is to create an emotional connection that resonates with audiences.

- *Advocates.* Advocates spark change and raise awareness. Dove, the beauty company, has advocated for real beauty standards for its audiences. In an age when everyone is using filters on social media to make themselves look better, online standards and expectations do impact real beauty standards. In a move true to its brand mission and values, Dove decided to advocate for real beauty and turn its back on TikTok’s new “Bold Glamour” filter.
- *Cause evangelists.* So-called cause evangelists advocate for action to be taken or seek to encourage society to think or act differently to address an ongoing issue. An excellent example of this is Dove again, but with another area of focus. Dove’s “Make Social Media More Body+” initiative, which advocates for more body positivity online, promotes the idea that we are all beautiful inside and addresses the pressure to conform to standards of beauty that are showcased on social media.
- *Strategists.* Strategists provide connections to creative ideas and strategic executions. An example of an excellent strategy in the world of cryptocurrency and NFTs is Gary Vaynerchuk’s VeeCon conference. Vaynerchuk, known for being an innovator in the cryptocurrency and NFT space, coordinated the very first NFT-ticketed event in Minnesota in 2022, resulting in global press, impressions, and commentary from the industry. While cryptocurrency and other digital currency trends are being examined under a microscope in light of recent legal and ethical challenges across the board, Vaynerchuk’s conference is an example of the strategic use of embracing new technologies with a specific purpose. Public relations professionals should strive to lead the way in exploring new territory, as the profession will continue to learn, grow, and adapt to these evolving changes.

HOW DO WE WORK WITH PROFESSIONALS IN RELATED FIELDS?

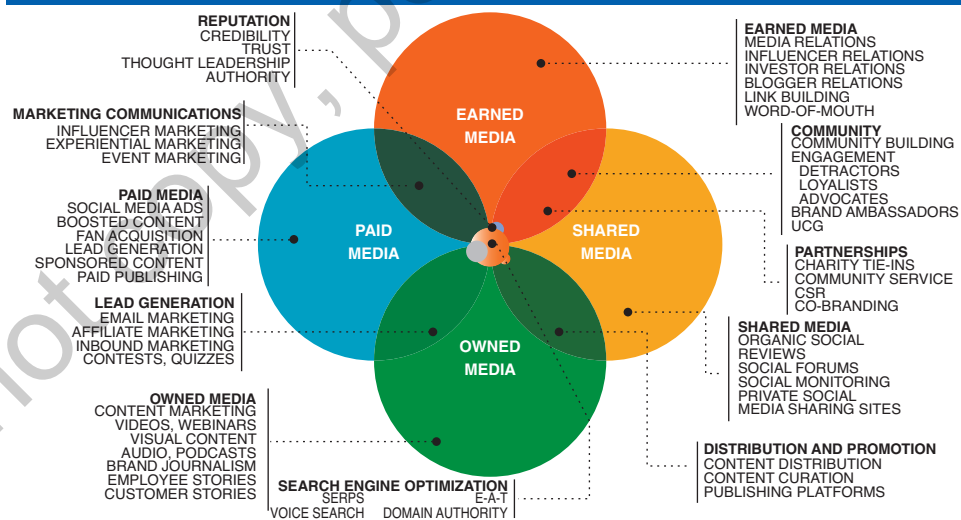
What differentiates public relations from related fields, such as journalism, advertising, and marketing?

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

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

For decades, professors of advertising and marketing and professors of public relations distinguished between the fields based on “paid” versus “earned” mentions in the media. Advertising agencies, responsible for placing paid content in media sources, were separate entities from PR agencies, which pursued strong relationships with journalists and used persuasive strategies. The emergence of digital media blurred the lines between paid and earned. In response, Gini Dietrich (2020) developed the PESO model, which distinguishes between paid, earned, shared, and owned media (see Figure 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1 ■ PESO model 2.0 by Gini Dietrich



Credit: Dietrich, G. [n.d.]. The PESO model. <https://spinsucks.com/the-peso-model>

As PR professionals, we are on the same team as those in journalism, advertising, and marketing. We no longer work in discipline-related silos within our organizations but must take an integrated interdisciplinary approach to succeed. To be effective, we need to be aware of what our colleagues in public relations and related disciplines are doing and how to best work together (see Figure 1.2).

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Introduction to Public Relations

INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC RELATIONS

What differentiates public relations from other related fields, such as advertising, journalism, marketing, and communication? Public relations functions should have an integrated role in these fields. Public relations can serve as the bridge that makes it a more collaborative and integrative team process for all of these disciplines to work and create together.

Here's how PR works with other related disciplines:

ADVERTISING

Understanding the why behind the advertising messages and taglines. Public relations professionals know how to promote and engage audiences through media with different platforms that focus on dialogue rather than broadcasting messages.

JOURNALISM

Embracing experiential media to tell stories. Journalists are all about using new ways to tell stories. Building a content marketing initiative through owned media.

MARKETING

Understanding influencers and nontraditional "media" platforms and understanding the role the media plays in a campaign.

COMMUNICATION

Helping communications professionals embrace the applied aspects of the field through message strategies and creative executions.



We Work With Journalism Professionals

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

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

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

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

- *We embrace experiential media to tell stories.* Journalists are all about using new ways to tell stories, whether it’s a war correspondent creating an experience that allows audiences to explore through VR what it is like to be in Syria during the country’s civil war or the Weather Channel integrating AR to show the potential damage caused by Hurricane Florence, a storm that hit the Carolinas in 2018. PR professionals can work with journalists on these types of stories to help audiences experience what it is like to be in particular circumstances—whether this means inviting journalists to attend an exclusive movie promotion (such as Apple TV and *Spirited*) or a new type of experience (such as the launch of Universal Studios’ Nintendo World). Any integration of experiences through these emerging media can help journalism and PR professionals come together. Every experience is a story, and that’s what journalists are always after.
- *We build content marketing initiatives through owned media (media that is controlled and owned by you).* PR professionals are embracing more brand journalism and storytelling by creating their own content. In a sense, we become our own media outlets. Branded websites, brand communities, content calendars, email newsletters, microsites, blogs, and trade and industry shows are just a few ways brands have done this.

We Work With Advertising Professionals

It is important to understand the differences between advertising and public relations. Public relations focuses on building relationships with segments of the public through dialogue with media outlets to convey a story. **Advertising**, on the other hand, focuses on relationships that are built by paying for content to be placed at specific times in specific channels. Advertising and PR professionals have different views of what the other is doing but acknowledge that they need to be more integrated with each other (Supa, 2016). Advertisers have traditionally focused on measuring the impact of their messaging by using concrete metrics, whereas PR professionals have

traditionally had a difficult time measuring their impact on their audiences. The differences are related to the measurement front, which is discussed in Chapter 13. However, as the lines between the two disciplines have blurred—where the duties and responsibilities once separate or unique to one field are being added to the other—both have to acknowledge this and figure out how to work together to address this for their campaigns.

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

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

Advertising is characterized by the use of “push,” or one-way, message strategies to get messages across to audiences, while public relations uses a “push-pull,” or two-way, dialogue designed to build mutually beneficial relationships. The main effect of the advertising collaboration between Louis Vuitton and Yayoi Kusama, for example, was to push the clothing brand’s messages out to the public through a creative art outdoor campaign. Little feedback returns from audiences directly to the brand unless it is through sharing content and commenting on this work on social media.



A Yayoi Kusama art installation decorates Louis Vuitton’s Paris flagship store.

frederic REGLAIN/Alamy Stock Photo

One of the other challenges that PR professionals face is getting a budget at all. Because advertising departments have more established measurement and evaluation tools than PR departments do—tools that allow them to know whether or not people have seen their content—they are more likely to get resources from management for media placements (where the content will appear in particular media channels). This is changing, however: PR professionals are adding more advertising and ad services to their repertoire, while advertising professionals and agencies are adding public relations as a subcategory of the services that they offer to their clients.

Public relations can support advertising by helping advertisers

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

We Work With Marketing Professionals

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

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

- *understand influencers, creators and nontraditional “media” platforms.* PR professionals can help marketing go beyond the transactional approach to understand the types of relationships needed by individual influencers (individuals who have a strong following and perceived area of expertise in a given area online). For example, influencers such as Ninja and The Rock want to partner with brands (as Samsung has done with Ninja and Under Armour has done with The Rock) that align with their own values and brands. Some creators and influencers have even become their own brand owners and created their own brand partnerships with others, such as YouTuber Logan Paul and his PRIME sports drink. Exploring these audience and relationship trends from

a PR perspective can help marketing gain a better understanding of the relationship dynamics involved.

- *promote and understand the role the media plays in a campaign.* A marketing plan involves working with the media, and this is where public relations can help. With such a large range of media outlets, channels, and authors, it is critical to target the outlets that best align with the audiences at the focus of a campaign. PR professionals can help brainstorm ideas for how the media can best tell the compelling story of the campaign.

HOW IS TODAY'S PR FIELD LOOKING TO THE FUTURE?

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

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

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

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

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

not be “good” for the profession (Valentini, 2015). However, while social media presents challenges for PR professionals to address, it also offers great opportunities.

- *Public relations will continue to experience new ethical and legal challenges.* As technology and the social landscape change, so too do the issues that PR professionals face. New ways of lobbying (promoting certain efforts on behalf of others) are a key area for public relations to note (Myers, 2018), and cyberattacks and other crises, such as ethical conduct problems with brands (Wells Fargo, Uber, Michigan State University, USA Gymnastics, etc.), are additional factors for which we need to be prepared (as is discussed in detail in Chapter 3).
- *Other disciplines will continue to absorb PR skills and insights.* PR principles are being taught not only in PR courses but also in the courses of other disciplines, such as journalism. For example, brand storytelling (telling the story from the brand’s perspective) is a PR staple that is now covered in journalism courses. English faculty, stating that they are the original storytellers, incorporate digital storytelling into their classes. Many types of academics and professionals are grabbing at new innovative channels, ideas, and perspectives that would normally be in the PR domain. Public relations needs to stake its claim and demonstrate its competence in these areas or risk becoming irrelevant.
- *PR educators and practitioners need to work together.* In the past, PR practitioners were not always aware of what PR instructors were teaching in PR courses at colleges and universities. Today, collaborative projects such as those addressed by the Commission on Public Relations Education (2018) help bridge the gap between the academic and professional worlds, but more work still needs to be done. One way to further bridge theory and practice is to encourage PR educators and practitioners to attain Accreditation in Public Relations, or APR (Sha, 2011). The APR is the test to become accredited in public relations or licensed to practice in the field. It is not required to practice public relations, but it is a respected professional distinction.
- *Public relations needs to embrace all related areas of specialization.* Innovation and creativity in messaging are not exclusively found in the field of public relations. For example, journalism creates innovative messages and embraces new media channels and tools including AI, AR, VR, and the metaverse.
- *Public relations needs to think outside of the field.* Public relations has taken ideas, theories, and perspectives from other fields to grow into a vibrant profession. Yet public relations, for the most, part stays within the boundaries of the discipline without venturing out too far. To evolve and take the field to the next level, public relations needs to expand and explore new perspectives, collaborations, insights, and trends that can be brought back to the field to help it evolve to the next level.
- *PR research needs to embrace more diversity in topics and perspectives.* Along with bringing in new viewpoints and ideas, public relations must incorporate diversity, including diversity of race, age, sexuality, and thought, into our practices and implementation of messages (Wright, 2018). (For more on this topic, see Chapter 4.)
- *Public relations needs to be aware of the implications of the sharing economy,* or the environment in which everyone is sharing rather than “owning” products (Gregory & Halff, 2017). The sharing economy has disrupted the norm for many industries, such as transportation (Uber), hotels (Airbnb), shopping (Amazon), and photography

(Instagram). Why is the sharing economy important in public relations? The sharing economy

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

CASE STUDY

NETFLIX'S *STRANGER THINGS* SEASON 4 PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN

One way to generate buzz about a company and brand is not only to have a strong word-of-mouth campaign but also to create online and offline buzz about an upcoming event, campaign, or brand. This was the case for the fourth season of Netflix's popular show *Stranger Things*. The streaming service partnered with Giant Spoon, an agency known for its creative and innovative approaches to campaigns and creative executions, to generate both online and offline traction for the upcoming show release, including an interactive display of the show's characters on the Empire State Building.



Giant Spoon's *Stranger Things* promotion lights up the Empire State Building.

Erik Pendzich/Alamy Stock Photo

Why did this campaign generate buzz?

- This campaign showed a unique take on a promotional campaign for a TV show. Not only did the agency take on this initiative with the Empire State building, but it got social media traction via an exclusive partnership with WNBA team the Indiana Fever.

What were some of the ethical and legal issues?

- There are always concerns with brands that expand their presence and promotional efforts during a time of layoffs and price increases. Netflix has had both of these issues come to the surface, and many may question whether PR campaigns are a good way to allocate spending instead of investing in employees and customer loyalty.

What are some major takeaways to learn from this case?

- Understanding the role of entertaining and allowing people to experience your brand—and having a proactive approach in bringing forth audience members who could engage and interact with a brand to form relationships—is still key.
- Creative ideas are not just limited to digital and emerging media channels. Traditional landmarks and place-based media channels can be the best medium to generate buzz, traction, and brand awareness for a campaign.
- Innovative ideas are great to have, we must execute them soundly. It is important to follow the ethical and legal guidelines set forth before implementing an idea so there are no additional challenges and rising concerns about the campaign.
- It is key to understand the perceptions of elaborate and expensive marketing campaigns in times of economic hardship.

SUMMARY

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

An alternative path that public relations can take is one that requires our innovation, creativity, and understanding of the balance needed to bring the science and art of our field together. This path is unknown and unexplored, which allows public relations to lead, through voice and vision, the other disciplines we work with. Public relations, like marketing and every other discipline, should have the opportunity to lead, grow, and foster a new way of approaching our professional activities. This is crucial to the progress of our field and profession.

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

APR EXAM

- Definition of public relations as a management function
- An understanding of the overall purpose of public relations
- Functions of public relations
- Audience identification
- Public relations process

KEY TERMS

Advertising
Engagement
Marketing

Public relations
Publics
Stakeholders

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your overall impression of the field of public relations?
2. Discuss the skills that a PR professional needs to have. Which two skill areas surprise you the most?
3. Public relations has traditionally been integrated with many associated disciplines, and it almost appears that the barriers between advertising, marketing, journalism, and others are diminishing. What makes public relations stand out as a field? Explain your rationale and provide a current case study as an example.
4. Public relations is about relationships. What are some of the benefits and challenges of this perspective?

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