

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL HISTORY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS CONFERENCE 2013

Held at Bournemouth University

June 24-25, 2013

Presentations from speakers: Ahmad to Chorazy

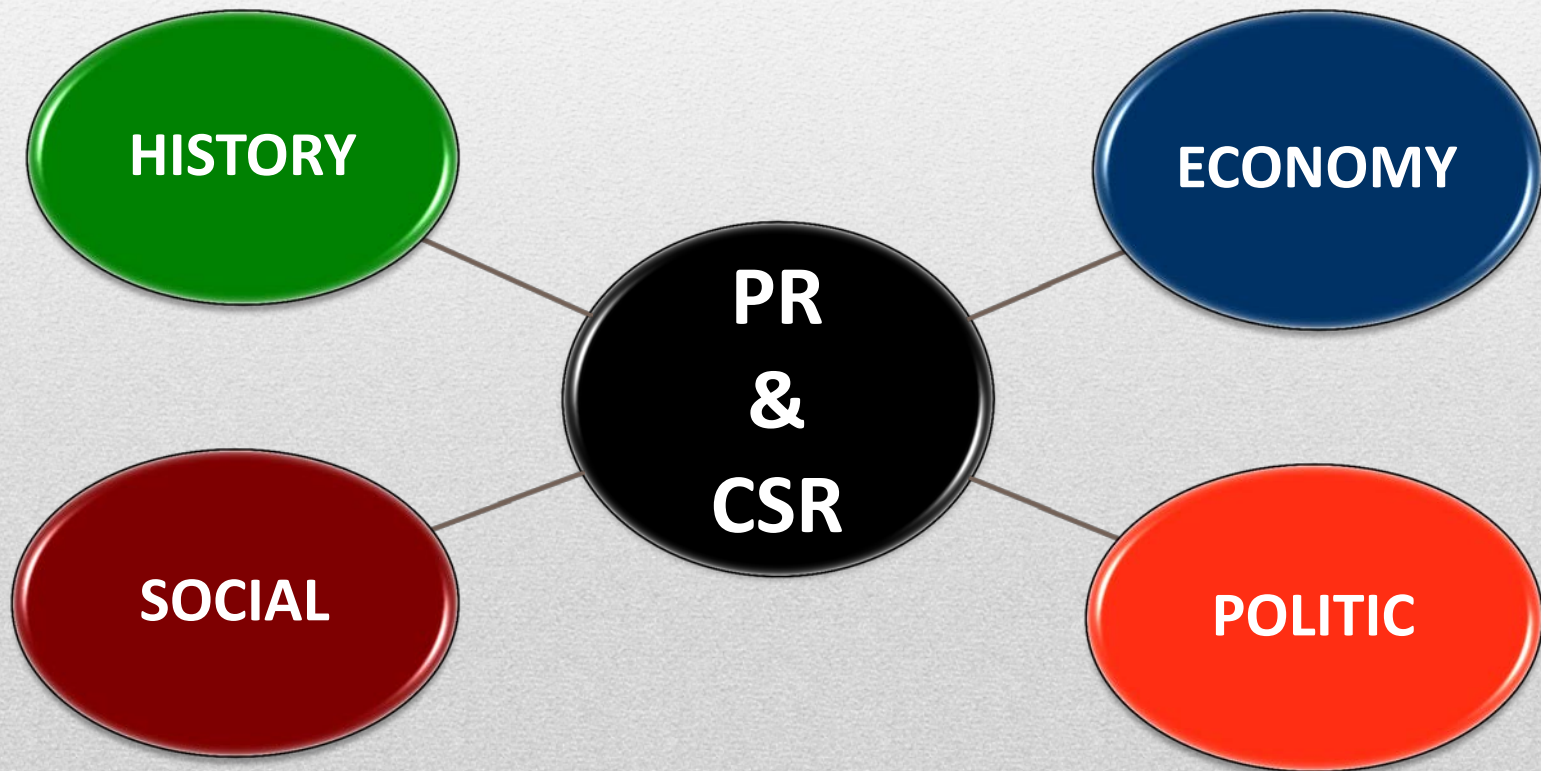
Author(s), affiliation and email	Paper
Zeti Azreen Ahmad, International Islamic University Malaysia	Public Relations (PR) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Malaysia: A Critical Reflection
Richard Bailey, Leeds Metropolitan University	'The Prince and the Courtier': Lessons in Public Relations from the Italian Renaissance
Thomas Beke, University of Stirling	Exploring British Litigation PR: A short history
Thomas H. Bivins, University of Oregon	"And so there developed a special profession": The effect of early journalism codes and press criticism on the professionalization of public relations
Julio Cesar Lemes de Castro University of São Paulo	Edward Bernays and Freudian group psychology
Ella Chorazy, Queensland University of Technology	Spinning the Spinners: Representations of Political Public Relations in <i>The Hollowmen</i> and <i>The Thick of It</i>

PR and CSR in Malaysia: A Critical Reflection

Zeti Azreen Ahmad

International Islamic University, Malaysia

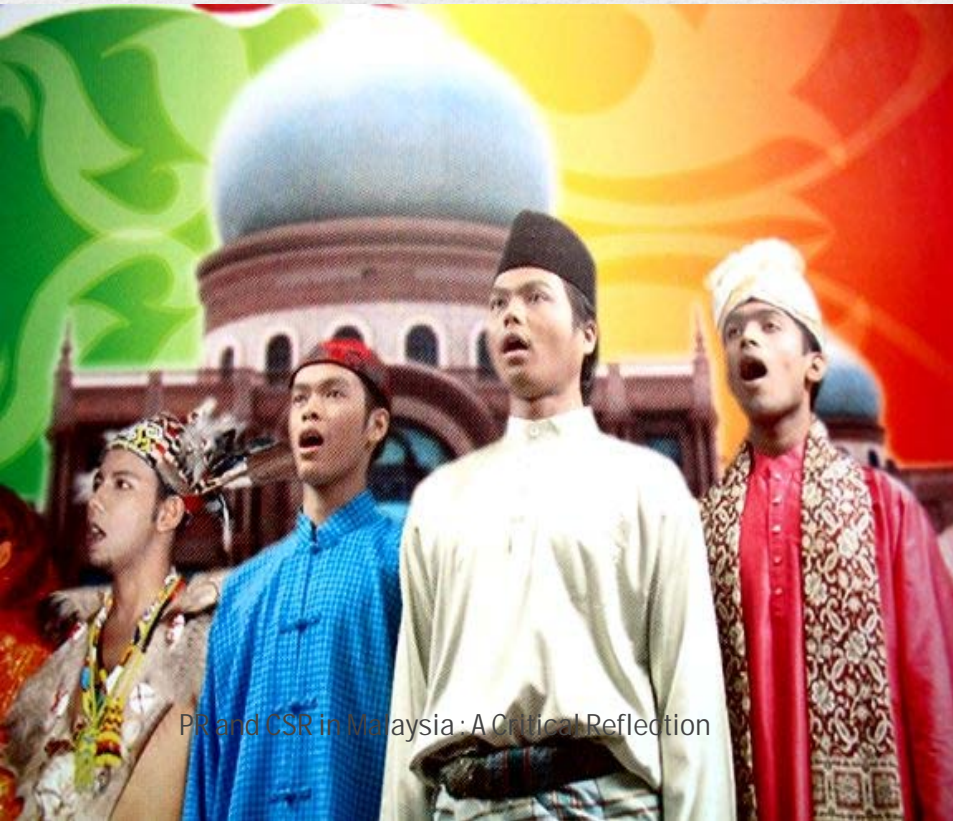
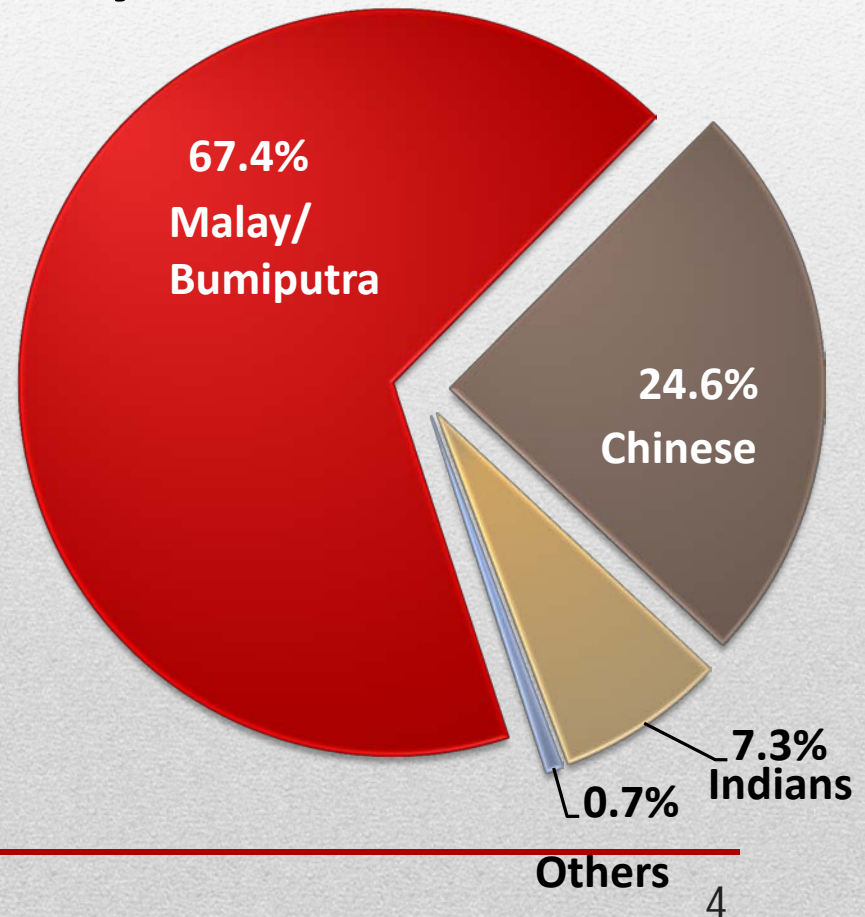
FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO PR & CSR DEVELOPMENT





SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

Percentage distribution of the population by ethnic group, Malaysia, 2010



PHASES OF PR DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA

COLONIAL PERIOD	EMERGENCY, INDEPENDENCE & CONFRONTATION	RACIAL RIOT & NATIONAL POLICIES
Public Information Department (1939)	Department of Information & Services (1952)	Racial riot May 13 1969
Public Information & Publicity Department (1940)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	NEP 1970
PR Department (1946)		Privatisation , Industrialization policies
PROPAGANDA - PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE - NATION BUILDING - GOVERNMENT MOUTHPIECE - MARKET DRIVEN		


BACKGROUND

Pervasive interest among organizations to embrace CSR

PR often seen leading the CSR practices

The formation of CSR departments

LITERATURE: PR & CSR



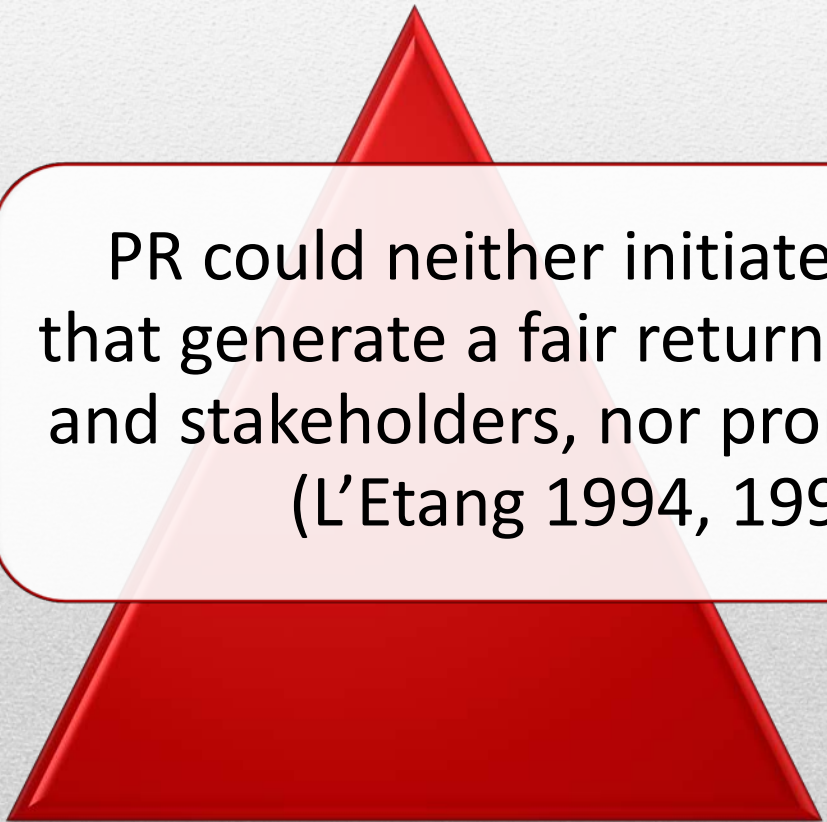
PR are instrumental in helping organizations to be socially responsible (Daugherty 2001)

PR leaders are capable to take purview of CSR (Freitag 2007)

PR has a significant role in CSR practice (Kim & Reber 2008)



LITERATURE: PR & CSR

A large red 3D pyramid graphic is centered on the slide. A white rounded rectangular box is superimposed over the middle of the pyramid, containing the text.

PR could neither initiate CSR initiatives that generate a fair return to both business and stakeholders, nor promote ethical CSR (L'Etang 1994, 1996, 2006)



PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

This study aimed to extend the literature by :

- critically examines the role of PR in CSR practice in Malaysia



OTHER OBJECTIVES

- to explore multiple realities of PR's role in CSR
- to offer alternate readings in Malaysian PR literature which are dominantly quantitative in nature



METHODOLOGY

Research question

- How is CSR practised in Malaysia and why ? What is the role of PR in that practice

Sample

- ACCA Malaysian Sustainability Reporting Awards 2006 & 2007
- The Prime Minister CSR award 2007
- Star-Biz CSR award 2008



METHOD

Data

- Semi-structured interviews
- Executive messages from CSR report

FINDINGS

CSR is a state project

- Nation building
- Recipients participation in the decision making process
- Evaluations of CSR

CSR has a strong business motive

- Financial stakeholders
- Positive impact of CSR as business rhetoric
- Engagement with stakeholders has been absent

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

BUSINESS CASE MOTIVE

Priority to maximise wealth & meeting the needs of the 'elites' makes PR function in pursuing CSR problematic

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

IMPLICATIONS

- Serves as a stumbling block for PR to create sustainable impact and value to other than its client or paymaster
- PR role to meet mutual interests of both business and society would not be achieved

CONCLUSION

PR CONTINUES TO SERVE THE DOMINANT ELITES

- PR's role in pursuing CSR has no difference than what has been practiced in the past.
- It is time for PR to reflect on this common practice and its implications to client, society and its profession as a whole.



THANK YOU



‘The Prince and The Courtier’

*Lessons in Public Relations from the
Italian Renaissance*

Richard Bailey FCIPR

Machiavelli and Castiglione

	Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527)	Baldesar Castiglione (1478-1529)
Achievements	Diplomat, adviser, historian, playwright	Courtier, diplomat, poet, scholar, soldier
Main locations	Florence	Urbino and Rome
Main works	The Prince (1513) The Art of War (1521) Discourses on Livy (1531)	The Book of the Courtier (1528)
Placed on the Index of banned books	The Prince	The Book of the Courtier

Historiographic note

- As advisers to princes and as diplomats Machiavelli and Castiglione were exemplars of early (or proto-) PR
- If the ancient world looked back to a (mythical) 'golden age', the modern world looks forward to progress.
 - **Castiglione** wrote: 'If the world were always growing worse and if fathers were generally better than their sons, we would long since have become so rotten that no further deterioration would be possible.' (p107)
- **Machiavelli** is frequently cited in political and public relations texts. This is an original context in which to consider **Castiglione**.
- Role of women

Machiavelli on public relations

- **Machiavelli** makes one tantalising reference to public relations in *The Prince*:
 - ‘A prince can gain [the common people’s] favour in various ways, but because these vary according to the situation, no fixed rules can be given for them, and therefore I shall not discuss them. I shall conclude by saying only that the prince must have the friendship of the common people. Otherwise, he will have no support in times of adversity.’
(p36)

On truth

- In Chapter XV of The Prince, **Machiavelli** contrasted reality with an imaginary world:
 - ‘Since my intention is to write something useful for anyone who understands it, it seemed more suitable for me to search after the effectual truth of the matter rather than its imagined one.’ (p53)
- **Castiglione** addresses the way in which courtiers can speak the truth to those in power:
 - ‘The end of the perfect courtier is ... so to win for himself the mind and favour of the prince he serves that he can and always will tell the truth about all he needs to know, without fear or risk of displeasing him.’ (p284)

On flattery

- **Castiglione** recognises that courtiers should avoid causing offence:
 - ‘Our courtier will avoid foolish arrogance; he will not be the bearer of bad news; he will not be careless in sometimes saying things that may give offence, instead of striving to please; ... he will not be an idle or lying babbler, nor a stupid flatterer or boaster, but he will be modest and reserved, observing always, and especially in public, the reverence and respect which should mark the attitude of a servant towards his master.’ (p126)
- **Machiavelli** sees the danger in a prince being surrounded by ‘yes men’:
 - ‘there is no other way to guard yourself against flattery than by making men understand that by telling the truth they will not injure you. But when anyone can tell you the truth, you lose respect. Therefore, a prudent prince should follow a third course, electing wise men for his state and giving only them permission to speak truthfully to him, and only on such matters as he asks them about and not on other subjects. (p81)

The art of the adviser

- **Castiglione** on how a courtier should give advice:
 - ‘If at all possible, he should always be well briefed and prepared for everything he has to do or say, though giving the impression that it is *off the cuff*. As regards matters in which he is unsure of himself, he should treat them merely in passing, without going too deeply into them, but in such a way as to make people credit him with far more knowledge than he displays, as sometimes happens with poets who sometimes hint at subtle matters of philosophy or other branches of knowledge, and doubtless understand very little about them.’ (p148)

What is *sprezzatura*?

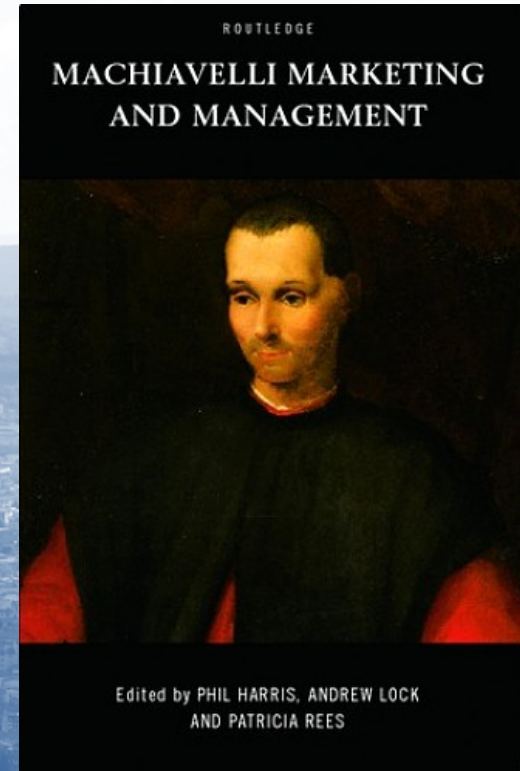
- **Castiglione** gave new meaning to this word (literally: ‘setting no price on’ something)
- It refers to the quality of giving considered advice as if effortlessly or ‘off the cuff’
- No word in English, though most often translated as ‘nonchalance’. Its opposite is ‘affectation.’
 - [The courtier should] ‘practise in all things a certain nonchalance which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless.’ (p67)

The perfect courtier

- **Castiglione** sums up the qualities of the perfect courter:
 - ‘The end of the perfect courtier is ... so to win for himself the mind and favour of the prince he serves that he can and always will tell the truth about all he needs to know, without fear or risk of displeasing him. And, *if he knows that his prince is of a mind to do something unworthy, he should be in a position to dare to oppose him, and make courteous use of the favour his good qualities have won to remove every evil intention and to persuade him to return to the path of virtue.* Thus if the courtier is ... quick-witted and charming, prudent and scholarly and so forth, he will always have the skill to make his prince realize that honour and advantages that accrue to him and his family from justice, liberality, magnanimity, gentleness and all the other virtues befitting a ruler, and on the other hand, the infamy and loss that result from practising the vices opposed to these virtues. ... Its real fruit is to encourage and help his prince to be virtuous and to deter him from evil. (p284-5)

Reaction

- **Machiavelli** has been cited in numerous texts on politics, public relations, marketing and management
- This paper's claim to originality is in linking **Castiglione** to public relations



The New Machiavelli

- Jonathan Powell, Chief of Staff at the court of Tony Blair, writes:
 - ‘I studied Machiavelli’s *The Prince* as a student, and in Number 10 I often felt the need of a modern handbook to power and how to wield it’ (Powell 2011 p 3).
 - ‘This ... was Tony’s problem. His way of managing Gordon was to string him along indefinitely without ever addressing frontally the difficult issue of who was in charge.’ (Powell 2011, p108)
 - ‘In retrospect Tony should have sacked Gordon early on. Machiavelli’s advice was ‘that to a person to whom offence has been given, no administrative post of importance should subsequently be assigned’. (Powell 2011, p127)
 - ‘To avoid becoming the victims of blackmail, leaders should make sure they have a choice of more than one possible successor and cultivate competition between the candidates... As Machiavelli says, you have to deal with threats like this early or it is ‘too late to resort to severity; while any leniency you may use will be thrown away, for it will be seen to be compulsory and gain you no thanks.’ (Powell 2011, p132)

Sources

Key sources (primary):

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Machiavelli, N (1513/2005) *The Prince* (translated by Peter Bondanella), Oxford: Oxford University Press

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‘The Prince and The Courtier’

Questions and discussion

Richard Bailey FCIPR

Exploring British Litigation PR: a short history

Thomas Beke, Ph.D
Buskerud University College, Norway
School of Business and Social Sciences

University of Stirling, UK

E-mail: tbekedr@gmail.com

The paper

- This paper addresses the history of a new PR branch.
- As one of the few if any academic account addresses the evolution of Litigation PR in England the paper intends to accomplish two things:
 1. It wants to clarify past events in British legal communications history in light of what is known today.
 2. It intends to be a well crafted historical account and tell a good story.

Exploring Litigation PR in England

A small field with a short history

The paper is arranged around two distinct periods:

1. Events, reforms and the evolution of legal case promotion in the decades before 1992
2. The first formal use and the expansion of Litigation PR in London after 1992

Events, reforms and the evolution of legal case promotion in the decades before 1992

- This first period introduces the traces of the evolution from the early ages; however, in fact, this communication technique in the legal process had been identified in England only from the 1970s.

Events, reforms and the evolution before 1992

- Before the 1960-70s, litigation communication was not a distinct concept in England.
- In the 1960-70s marketing and business promotion practitioners dominated the legal communications market. However, an early form of litigation communication practice also occurred in London very early on in the 1960s.

Events, reforms and the evolution before 1992

- From the mid-1980s there has been a growing group of lawyers in both legal professions, who understood that their role was to protect and promote their clients' cases not only with legal tools.

Events, reforms and the evolution before 1992

- The second half of the 1980s in England was the introduction of the age of distinctions in legal communications. This started immediately after the beginning of the increased need for diverse legal promotion and communications knowledge.

Events, reforms and the evolution before 1992

- The end of the 1980s presented a new role model due to the fact that legal communications practitioners needed a new idea, a new direction.
- A former freelance journalist from London could be considered as the first practitioner informally used litigation communication in England in 1990.

Events, reforms and the evolution before 1992

- From the beginning of the 1990s media coverage of health and business related cases dominated the legal market.

Events, reforms and the evolution before 1992

- The specialised demand for effective communication after personal injury compensation claims followed the health damages in the mining industry and famous accidents formally generated a brand new discipline in England called litigation communication.

Events, reforms and the evolution before 1992

- A famous case in 1991 is considered the first ever managed by a British media expert with litigation communication techniques.
 - Therefore, the beginning of the decade was the dawn of professional litigation support by case promotion.

Events, reforms and the evolution before 1992

- As a new role model to the prospective litigation communication market of the early 1990s, experts had to deal with financially and legally driven conflicts in the bank sector.

Historical events, cases and legal reforms of the decades after 1992: the first formal use and the expansion of Litigation PR in England

Litigation PR in the second period became a new and distinct concept, an offer evolving dramatically in the market under the direction of sophisticated PR practitioners.

- The signature case and the first formal use of Litigation PR in England in 1992.

Events, cases and legal reforms after 1992

- Year 1993 was the start of the expansion of various litigation communication tactics in London.
 - Strong Litigation PR practice was developed by very sophisticated public relations experts who knew the rules of defamation, libel and the regulation of prejudicial media coverage.

Events, cases and legal reforms after 1992

- 1998 was the year of strong expansion of professional Litigation PR in London.

Events, cases and legal reforms after 1992

- Regulations (e.g. *Civil Procedural Rules (CPR)*, *Access to Justice Act 1999*) created an incredibly high amount of communication and also gave Litigation PR a boost.

Events, cases and legal reforms after 1992

- A sort of public acceptance of marketing by law firms were introduced by *The Legal Services Act 2007*.
 - Changes of third party or independent funding of lawsuits may have a major impact on legal communications.
- In October 2009 the Supreme Court replaced the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords as the highest court.
- On 27 April 2009 the law changed on allowing the media access to Family Court hearings for the first time.

Events, reforms and the evolution before 1992

- In the first decade of the second millennium the range of litigation communication services became wider and wider.

Events, cases and legal reforms after 1992

- Since 2009-10, Litigation PR practitioners have applied Facebook and social media in litigation communications.
- Recently, social networking has become a serious problem in the English jurisdiction. The emergence of new technologies and forms of public broadcasting like Twitter and Facebook are challenging the strict rules of the English common law jurisdiction.

Thank you very much for your attention!

Thomas Beke, Ph.D
Buskerud University College, Norway
School of Business and Social Sciences

University of Stirling, UK

E-mail: tbekedr@gmail.com

The effect of early journalism codes and press criticism on the professionalization of public relations

Tom Bivins

University of Oregon

**“I think this Committee is
unanimously of opinion that there is
no greater menace to American
journalism than the publicity agent.”**

ASNE meeting on a new code, 1923

At the turn of the 20th century, journalism was under fire.

- The era of “Yellow Journalism” had passed
- But, sensationalism was still rampant
- By the end of WWI, the public was beginning to view any information, including news, as potentially propaganda,
- aided in no small part by the overt rise of public relations as a champion of business and industry.
- According to press critic and journalist Will Irwin,
 - It was “a time of transition for the century and for journalism.”

All of this started to change in the 1920s.

- As a direct response to years of criticism, journalism began to style itself as a “profession.”
- As part of the move to professionalize, state press association members used codes as a means of publicly stating their opposition to the growth of public relations.
- A parallel dialogue on journalists’ dislike of press agents also took place in the trade and popular press.

QUESTION

Was public relations' early pursuit of professional status a reflexive response to the criticism from the press (and and that embedded in early journalism codes), and an effort to legitimize its practice for many of the same reasons as journalism during this period?

During the pre- and post-war periods, from 1914 into the early 1920s, the terms *publicity* and *propaganda* were frequently used interchangeably, which exacerbated the problem of the movement to call the new practice “public relations.”

As early as 1916, one of the leading practitioners at the time, Ivy Lee, still professed problems with defining exactly what he did for a living.

- His response when asked during a hearing of the United Transit Commission in 1927, “What is the difference between the vocation you follow and that of the publicity agent?” was telling.
- “I don’t know, sir. I have never been able to find a satisfactory phrase to describe what I try to do.”



Others, however, had no such problem.

- Edward Bernays wanted to revive the image of propaganda as a positive influence in democratic life while introducing an entirely new concept of how and by whom it would be most effectively accomplished.
- The name he eventually decided upon and the category in which he placed his occupation were more than self aggrandizement,
- they were no less than a crusade to insert a new profession into a world in which its place was at once misunderstood and unwelcome.



Criticism of press agents and publicists in general

Criticism of the new practice of public relations was already widespread by the early 1920s when it was still conflated with press agency

- “[M]any of the direct channels to news have been closed and the information for the public is first filtered through publicity agents.”
(*Frank Cobb, editor of the New York Herald*)
- The publicity man is a “censor and propagandist, responsible only to his employers, and to the whole truth responsible only as it accords with the employers’ conception of his own interests.”
(*Walter Lippmann*)
- “The despised ‘press agent’ of an earlier day has developed first into the ‘publicity man’ and then into the ‘promotion’ expert. Now he often bears a still more dignified title... After a course in sophistry, necessitated by his self-esteem, he comes to regard himself as ethical, and his own careful statement of his functions exhibits him as a useful member of society.” (*Eric Allen, dean of the School of Journalism, University of Oregon*)

Allen also presciently warned that among his new titles, the press agent might even become a “professor of journalism, with duties to practice the lower functions of the profession rather than to teach the higher.”



Our founder

Criticism within journalism codes

During the 1920s, more than a dozen ethics codes were approved by state associations

- Because the development of most of these codes followed closely on the heels of World War I, they also tended to deal with the subject of propaganda and the burgeoning influence of the new and growing occupation of public relations

- Codes developed and published during this time reflected the general concern over the potential effects of the “press agent,”
- often still conflated with anyone seeking free space in a newspaper for an individual cause or point of view—
- including advertising that editors considered a source of lost income when masquerading as publicity.

Some examples:

- “So-called news communications from private sources should not be published without public notice of their source or else substantiation of their claims to value as news, both in form and substance.” (ASNE Canons of Journalism, 1923, Article 3)
- “We will not permit, unless in exceptional cases, the publishing of news and editorial matter not prepared by ourselves or our staffs, believing that original matter is the best answer to the peril of propaganda.” (Oregon Code of Ethics for Journalism, 1922, Article 5)
 - “There is no place in journalism for the dissembler; the distorter; the prevaricator; the suppressor; or the dishonest thinker.” (Article 1)

Some examples:

- “In accuracy, partisanship or the taint of propaganda has no part and cannot be present in fair journalism.” (South Dakota Code of Ethics, 1922)
- “Some of the greatest advertising in the world has been stolen through news columns in the form of dispatches from unscrupulous press agents.” (Kansas Code of Ethics, 1910)
- “Beware of the seekers after free publicity. Remember that space in The Eagle is worth twenty-five cents a line. What you give away The Eagle cannot sell. Don’ help press agents cheat the advertising department.” (The Brooklyn Eagle Policy)

The confusion over terms and the blatant antagonism toward propaganda and publicity contributed to an environment in which any new attempt to redefine these practices was bound to meet with resistance.

Bernays' attempts to
redefine the publicity
agent and lay a
professional groundwork

Bernays' attempts to professionalize PR had many commonalities with those of journalism.

- Not only did he propose a new name for his occupation, he also aligned PR with traditional, socially acceptable professions.
 - The public relations counsel functions “primarily as an adviser to his client, very much as a lawyer does. A lawyer concentrates on the legal aspects of his client’s business. A counsel on public relations concentrates on the public contacts of his client’s business”
- Ironically, journalists were using a similar analogy.
 - Colorado’s state journalism code suggested that newspaper editors were on a par with doctors.
 - “The cure of social ills is the editor’s responsibility more than any other man’s”

Bernays' attempts to professionalize PR had many commonalities with those of journalism.

- Bernays was also urging training in communication through universities and schools of journalism.
 - He taught the first PR class at New York University to reinforce that idea.
- Supporters of professionalism within journalism were also pushing for better educated reporters and editors.
 - The Oregon code cited educational proficiency as a necessary component of high standards.
 - “Inaccuracy in journalism commonly due more to lack of mental equipment than to willfulness of attitude. The ill-equipped man cannot be more competent as a journalist than he can as a doctor or engineer.... We regard journalism as a precise and a learned profession” (Article II).

The press & others
react

The critics were quick to respond.

- Harold Lasswell didn't buy the legal profession analogy.
 - “[The propagandist] is bound by no special traditions of presenting his material (such as the rules of evidence), and he is subject to no umpire who exercises a continuous censorship over the formal validity of his contentions.”

***The New York Times* stood its traditional ground**

- “The public relations counsel, of course, is merely our old friend the press agent.”
 - We hope that something as simple as a name change will result in “a change in the ethics and manners of the press agent.” If that were the case, “people will be delighted to call him a public relations counsel or sweet little buttercup or anything he wishes.”
- *Times* critic Ernest Gruening noted that the new public relations counsel was, in fact,
 - “[the] publicity man of yesterday, the shabby, underpaid fellow who sought to worm a little free space out of the newspapers by devious ways, raised to the nth power.”

***Time* magazine was especially vitriolic during this period**

- Responding to a Bernays ad advocating PR as a profession:
 - “As the mongoose loathes the cobra, as the herring fears the shark, as the flapper dodges ‘lectures,’ so do editors shun the machinations of a species whose villainy is (to editors) as plain as the nose on your face and as hard to clap your eyes on. This species was for a long time called ‘press agent.’”

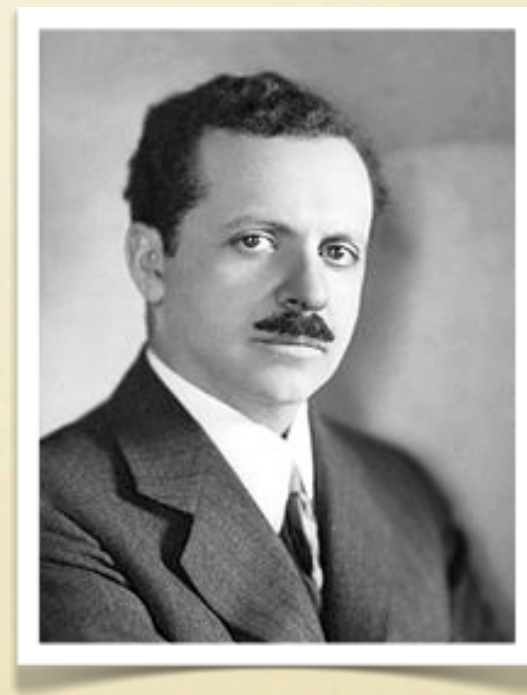
A perfect storm:
The irony of simultaneous
professional development

A confluence of variables that were born in the 19th century collided in the early 20th century:

- The fading of the Barnum-like huckster and the emergence of the “press agent,”
- the growing fields of psychology and sociology,
- the rise of the “new” propaganda and its nearly immediate fall from grace,
- the realization of mass communication on a global level,
- and the drive to differentiate among the various forms of modern communication vying for the attention of a truly mass public.

A confluence of variables that were born in the 19th century collided in the early 20th century:

- Add to this mix the influence of rising intellectuals whose primary field of inquiry was mass communication (Lippmann, Lasswell, Bernays, and others), and competition, discrimination, and spontaneous juggling for position in the new order was not only predictable, it was a foregone conclusion.



In a sense, Edward Bernays was trying to do the same thing that journalism was attempting, at exactly the same point in time.

- Both were trying to differentiate between what they did and what propagandists and press agents did.

Despite Bernays' best efforts, the press continued to distance itself from publicity under any guise

- In numerous articles and within their newly minted codes they fumbled with understanding the transformation of propaganda and publicity into what Bernays was calling “public relations.”
- And, they continued to belittle Bernays' best efforts to reconstruct his occupation into a profession.
 - “No matter how effective he may be, or how much money he makes, it is still difficult to accord the press agent a professional status.” (Stanley Walker)
- Leading Bernays to plaintively recall,
 - “[T]he profession of counsel on public relations lacked the respect that I felt it deserved.”

What Bernays accomplished was not only the introduction of a new term into the mass media lexicon, but also a new way of thinking about and actualizing publicity, whatever it was construed to be.

St. John proposes that, “PR stimulated journalism’s professionalization movement, as evidenced in the rise of a postwar ‘anti-publicity’ movement in newsrooms across the country.”

- Although it may not be clear exactly who influenced whom, it does seem clear that journalism and public relations were both attempting to separate the wheat from the chaff during this pivotal time in American history.
- Where Journalism *imagined* it was under attack from public relations, Bernays realized that public relations was *actually* under attack from journalism.

- Journalism, under the instruction of Walter Lippmann, had begun a new era of truth seeking by donning the cloak of professionalism and setting itself apart from the other voices in “the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world.”
- The new objectivity championed by Lippmann soon became the driving force behind journalistic professionalism and its laying sole claim to scientific facts and the ultimate “truth.”
- The parallel birth of public relations not only challenged that claim, it redefined it.
- Like Lippmann, Bernays adopted the concept of the disinterested, morally mature, and intellectually developed expert who shaped meaning for the public.
- However, unlike Lippmann, Bernays *believed* in the “court of public opinion.”
- In order to argue in that court, one had to have an advocate, and Bernays felt he was that person—that counselor.

In 1928, in an editorial written for the *Boston Independent*, he reiterated his call for professional recognition, and again likened public relations to other professions.

- He suggested that public relations, as a profession like medicine and law, was, also like them, honorable and vital to the public welfare.
- “And so,” he wrote, “there developed a special profession—I have called it public relations counsel.”

Spinning the Spinners

Representations of political public relations
in *The Hollowmen* and *The Thick Of It*

Presented by Ella Chorazy

Institution: Queensland University of Technology

Email: ella.chorazy@qut.edu.au





For what it's worth

“By the way if anyone here [in the audience] is in advertising or marketing [or PR], kill yourself. No, no, no it's just a little thought. I'm just trying to plant seeds. Maybe one day, they'll take root – I don't know. You try, you do what you can. Kill yourself. Seriously though, if you are, do. No really, there's no rationalisation for what you do and you are Satan's little helpers. Okay? Kill yourself. Seriously. You are the ruiner of all things good, seriously. No this is not a joke, you're going, “there's going to be a joke coming,” there's no f**king joke coming. You are Satan's spawn filling the world with bile and garbage. You are f**ked and you are f**king us [society]. Kill yourself. It's the only way to save your f**king soul, kill yourself.”

Bill Hicks, Comedian (*Revelations*, 1992)



Navigating the darkness

I solemnly swear I am not the spawn of Satan,
and I don't think I/we have been doing the devil's
work...

An insight into how the spinners are being spun:

- The problem of political public relations
- Research questions and methodology of this study
- Summary of themes and key findings
- Significance of the research

Apologies for the lack of video examples!



But what is political PR?

Three types of people in this world.

Public relations (PR) is a “strategic management function” (Grunig 2006) that “establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its publics” (Cutlip et al. 2009).

Political PR (spin) is the process and the practice of mediating the relationship between a political entity and its constituency. Political PR professionals (spin doctors) are the political staffers/advisors responsible for managing/achieving this.



The problem with PR

The PR for PR is not good

The demonology of “spin”

Modern era of mediatised politics and the permanent campaign

Dumbing down of political discourse

Credibility crisis in politicians and the political process

Exploring cultural representations is a way to enhance our understanding beyond traditional scholarly and journalistic arguments



Selected texts

The Thick Of It (UK) (2005, 2007, 2009*, 2012*)

The Hollowmen (Australia) (2008)

Genre: televised political satire

Style: cinéma vérité (fly-on-the-wall) mockumentary

Programming: late evening public service broadcast

Ratings: average 1 million viewers per episode
(original screening) + multi award winning

Content: set in parliamentary backrooms where
political advisors make policy decisions on the basis of
spin potential, polls, and whatever will make the
Government look good



Research questions

What do the texts tell us?

1. How are political public relations practitioners represented in *The Hollowmen* and *The Thick Of It*?

What could this mean for us?

2. How might these representations contribute to audience's understandings of political PR as a profession and its role in liberal democratic systems?



Methodology

A postmodern approach to **critical textual analysis** that is informed by the theoretical paradigm of media studies .

“[Texts are] not only cultural artifacts worthy of analysis in themselves, but accessible points of departure for jumping into debates about [topical issues] in the twenty-first century. ... [Texts] are documents of society’s ongoing engagement with key cultural and political institutions.” (McNair 2010, 5)

Representations of PR in popular media texts are collective critical explorations of what PR stands for in society.



A shift in political power

“Today, a minister surrounds him- or her-self not with administrators but advisors – close political allies or specialists brought in above the departmental staff, who guide the minister through every waking moment, advising on how well a policy might play with a particular electoral group or selection of the media. The advisors are there not just to help formulate policy, but to make sure policy is subtly tweaked or drastically changed if it’s in any danger of getting a bad press. ... Media coverage has such a dominant hold over political life that appearance can often take greater precedence over substance.” (Iannucci 2007, ix)



The real power brokers

Politicians are bumbling idiots with a bad case of foot in mouth disease.

Public service are red tape riddled rule sticklers who are too preoccupied with protocol.

Political PR is responsible for cleaning up the mess while making the mess look good regardless of what it takes to do so.

Political PR is also responsible for monitoring the media, drip feeding journalists, and ensuring all coverage and publicity is framed in the best possible light.



Breaking the fourth estate

The Thick Of It, Series One, Episode One

Ollie: We were just talking about why Angela [*Daily Mail* journalist] shouldn't do a big story on the big insider piece – kind of, day of spin, sort of spread – in the paper.

Malcolm: I don't know, maybe you should! Good idea! Oh, wait a minute, I know why you shouldn't – because if you did that, you'd be dead, to me, to this department, to the Government, and you'd never get another story, or a f**king whiff of a story, so long as you kept your sorry hack bitch face lingering around Westminster. And because I would call every editor I know, which obviously – that's all of them, and I would tell them to gouge your name out of their address books so you'd never even get a job on hospital radio, where a sad sack like you belongs. That's what I'd tell you. But maybe, I don't know, maybe you should do it.



An all consuming snake pit

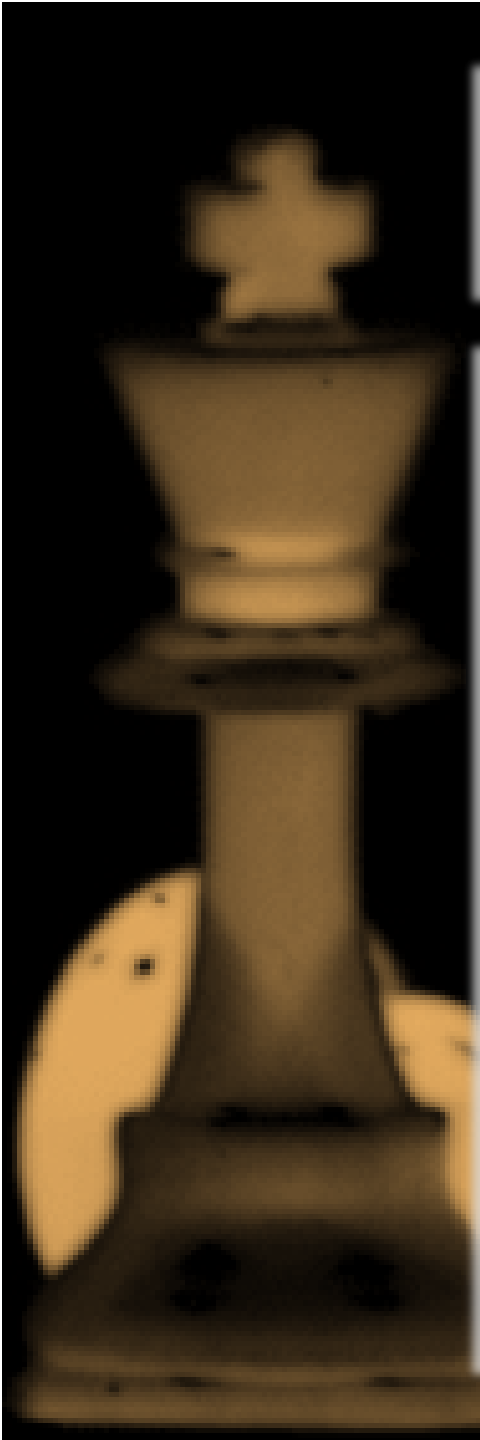
Tirades come thick and fast (particularly in *TTOI*).

Makes for good entertainment but paints a picture of bullying, backstabbing, and bitching.

Hierarchical structure between characters (enforcers, crawlers, and subserviants).

Practitioners portrayed as having an unwavering devotion and commitment to their work, though this is oddly coupled with a lack in job security.

Managing internal communications is shown to be just as important as external/media relations.



Glass ceilings and the gender imbalance

Minimal demographic diversity

Heavily gendered profession:

- Men in strategic decision making senior roles
- Women in box ticking technical front line positions

Overtly masculine culture and discourse (boys club) devoid of traditional feminine values

Femininity is seen as a limitation

Testosterone charged environment reflects the idea that politics and political PR is a mans world where “emotional labour” (Yeomans 2007) is necessary but significantly undervalued



Information control and “the loop”

PR practitioners as ring masters of the political circus where information control is the key to success.

Being in “the loop”, managing “the message”, and the “art of leaking” are the core obsessions of political PR.

Requires communication tactics that coordinate and regulate government activities where deviation is not tolerated – even if it’s a human error.

Response to accelerated media environment (24 hour news cycle), hyper-adversarial journalism, and the expected professionalisation of politicians.

Further emphasises political PR practitioners as holding the keys and knowledge to our contemporary democratic political systems.



But it's all just a joke right?

"Again and again, while making The Thick Of It, I've been consistently surprised by how our fiction turned out to be more real than what I thought of as the real world of politics. Time and again, I would dismiss stories and plotlines as too silly, too unbelievable, only to find that something similar and, indeed far worse, had actually happened."
(Iannucci 2007, vii)

- Power shift away from our elected officials
- Autonomy of the fourth estate is threatened
- The world of politics as immoral and untrustworthy
- Gender issues/imbalance
- Manipulation and lack of information transparency



Some long term vision

Points of significance:

- Texts as explorative and engaging narratives
- Critical intertextuality and hyper-awareness

Limitations:

- Textual analysis is inherently speculative
- This is MY interpretation of the texts

Scope for further research:

- Audience and/or industry research
- Representations of public relations more broadly
- Representations of political communication

QUESTIONS?

Presenter: Ella Chorazy

Email: ella.chorazy@qut.edu.au

Institution: Queensland University of Technology

International History of Public Relations Conference

Location: Bournemouth University, United Kingdom

Date: 24-25 June 2013

Acknowledgements:

Dr Stephen Harrington and
Professor Brian McNair

