



Ralph Tench
Liz Yeomans

Third Edition

Exploring Public Relations

Exploring Public Relations

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Exploring Public Relations

Third edition

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Lecturer Resources

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Guided tour of book

CHAPTER 2 Sean Dodson

Media context of contemporary public relations and journalism in the UK



Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- identify the structure of the UK media and understand how and why it is undergoing a period of profound change
- analyse the role of the network society and evaluate how the media is being reconstructed by the growth of telecommunications networks
- understand how ownership of the media affects democracy
- examine the role of self-regulation in the media and be able to discuss whether its limitations have been reached
- discuss the role of media regulators, and be able to think through ideas of self-regulation when applied to the press
- consider the ways in which the contemporary media creates problems for the ethical behaviour of journalists and public relations practitioners

Structure

- The media landscape in the UK
- Media outlook
- A free press
- The public sphere

Learning outcomes at the start of each chapter help you to focus on the key points you should understand by the end of the chapter.

The **Structure** section gives you a quick-reference guide to how the chapter will play out.

Explore boxes encourage you to deepen your understanding of the chapter material through exercises that link theory with real-world situations

24 Part 1 THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Explore 2.1

Evaluating media bias

Take a large sheet of paper and draw on it a semi-circle, with the baseline at the bottom of the page and the 180° arc sweeping from left to right. Now bisect the semi-circle with a vertical line exactly through the middle. This represents a political spectrum, a way of modelling political positions. The far left of your circle will represent communism, which is seen as the 'hard left' of politics. The far right therefore equals fascism, the 'hard right'. The vertical line is the centre of politics, usually referred to as liberalism. In the UK, the Labour Party would be represented at 45 degrees along your arc (halfway between communism and liberalism). The Conservative Party would be at 135 degrees (halfway between liberalism and fascism).

Now draw up a list of national newspapers in the UK (or in your own country if it is more suitable). Cut them out and, next, start placing the names of the newspapers on your political spectrum according to where you think their political loyalties are situated. Where would you place *The Sun*? Or *The Mirror*? Ask yourself, is *The Independent* truly independent? Or what position *The Guardian* protects? Is the *Financial Times* left or right wing? Can you think about adding other titles, such as *The Economist*, for example?

If you are unsure of the political sympathies of your list of publications, simply look them up on Wikipedia or some other Internet site. Once you have all the papers, take a step back and look at your spectrum. Ask yourself one question: where does political bias in the print media of your country reside? Left or right?

by Rupert Murdoch's News the UK's leading supplier of pay-TV services and also stic ation services (broadband some analysts (Enders 2010) accounts for approximately subscribers to subscription of the sector's market revenue BSkyB dwarfs any other including the BBC, BSkyB ce compares with the £2.4bn licence fee (Hud). (The licen UK who watches TV at the various devices. The licen online services.)

Radio

Although the digital switch least two years behind ad planned switchover for rad longer delays (Midgely 2011 analogue signals will be swit This leaves two overlapping with the vast majority of with the established analog a complex network of radi national analogue stations (the BBC Asian Network cat and 38 local stations. The stations on the digital audio (BBC iXtra, BBC 4 Extra, Music). All are funded thro

The BBC also operates th to be the world's largest broadcasts in 27 language through a variety of analog estimated that the service's average of over 100,000

Box 2.1

Liberal pluralism

The UK media practises a system of 'liberal pluralism', meaning that it is free (liberal) and pluralistic (contains many different voices). Liberal pluralism is admittedly a loose theory that perhaps represents an aspiration (as we will examine throughout this chapter) rather than a solid reality. But at its best liberal pluralism allows the media to present a variety of information to its audience. This, in turn, helps form public opinion, which scholars such as Walter Lipmann (1922) cite as being necessary to any functioning democracy. In practice (Mosco 1996; Davies 2008) the diversity of views can be surprisingly narrow and influenced by a range of factors, not least elements that seek to manipulate public opinion to their own ends: namely corporate ownership, advertising and public relations. Furthermore, the temptation to oversimplify complex arguments and to trivialise serious subjects in order to reach the largest possible audience has been a feature of the UK media, to the lament of commentators and scholars alike (Collins 2011).

Boxes contain a wealth of additional information and interesting viewpoints on the public relations industry.

About the authors

Professor Ralph Tench is professor of communication education and acting director of research for the Faculty of Business and Law at Leeds Metropolitan University, with responsibility for the research strategy for over 150 academics representing law, accounting and finance, strategy and economics, marketing and communications and human resource management.

Dr Tench is the former subject head for public relations and communications at Leeds Metropolitan University, where for ten years he oversaw the expansion of the undergraduate, postgraduate and professional course portfolio. As professor he teaches on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, as well as supervising MA and PhD research students. His current focus is on developing and delivering major research projects in public relations and strategic communication in the UK and worldwide. Current projects include the ECOPSI (European Communications Practitioners Skills and Innovation) programme, the largest EU-funded public relations programme awarded at 360,000 Euro. This project explores the education, skills and competency needs of European communication practitioners (www.leedsmet.ac.uk/ecopsi). The aim is to influence both theory and practice with this project by building knowledge, understanding and practical outputs. This research builds on another international longitudinal research project (since 2007) funded by European bodies and private sector business, the ECM survey. The European Communication Monitor (www.communicationmonitor.eu) is a qualitative and quantitative trend survey of European communications directors using a sample of over 3,000 practitioners from 42 countries. Reflecting the breadth of his research experience and application, Professor Tench has recently directed a research project into communications issues in delivering weight management programmes for young people for the UK NHS, for the Carnegie Weight Management Institute (MoreLife) and a consulting project into CSR in Turkey funded by the EU.

Professor Tench is a past external examiner for many UK and European universities, as well as a visiting professor. His doctoral students are engaged in research on issues of strategic communication related to trust, responsibility, branding and relationship management. He also supervises

students on issues of professionalisation and the development of the public relations discipline. He has chaired over 30 PhD examinations and sat on panels for candidates in the UK, Ireland, Australia and Denmark.

Professor Tench is an active member of the European Public Relations Research and Education Association (EUPRERA) and is currently the chair for the annual congress academic papers. He is a member of the International Communication Association (ICA) and sits on the editorial board for the *Journal of Communication Management*, the *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *Public Relations Review* and the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*.

Ralph is a regular guest and keynote speaker at academic and practitioner conferences and his research has been published and disseminated in books, journals and conferences worldwide. Previous editions of *Exploring Public Relations* have been translated into several European languages. Currently Dr Tench is editing two volumes on his research interests in corporate social responsibility with Emerald – *Corporate Social Irresponsibility: A Challenging Concept* (2013) and *Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility* (2014).

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Liz has extensive experience in academic quality systems and processes. She has held external roles at Southampton Solent University, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, the Manchester Metropolitan University and London Metropolitan University. She is a current external examiner at Bournemouth University and Cardiff University.

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Liz's research is concerned with the experiences and interactions of individuals inside organisations in relation to their occupational and social contexts. Her doctoral work has involved developing perspectives in PR, drawing on gender and emotional labour theories within the sociology of work. Liz has recently published in the online journal *PRism*, contributed an entry on gender and public relations to *The Encyclopedia of Public Relations* and a chapter to *Gender and Public Relations*, edited by Christine Daymon and Kristin Demetrious, which is part of the Routledge *New Directions in Public Relations and Communication* series. Liz's earlier research has been published in the *Journal of Communication Management*, the *Journal of Public Affairs* and *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. She has presented research papers at EUPRERA, BledCom and ICA. Liz has acted as reviewer for EUPRERA congresses, the *Journal of Public Relations Research* and the *Journal of Public Relations Inquiry*. Liz is a member of EUPRERA's Women in PR project team.

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Ryan Bowd is the head of active (sports) at IMG Consulting. His client work includes the Abu Dhabi International Triathlon, Adidas Eyewear, Asics, Gatorade, GE, GE Capital, IHG (Holiday Inn brand), Inov-8, NHS (UK National Health Service), Sailfish, Tata Consultancy Services, Virgin Active London Triathlon and Olympic, Commonwealth, Ironman Triathlon and adventure athletes. Prior to joining IMG Consulting, Ryan was an award-winning PR practitioner and until 2009 was a senior lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University. He has also taught PR and marketing at Leeds University and Manchester Metropolitan University. Ryan started his career at Weber Shandwick, before running his own agency, 1090 Communications, which he sold to Connectpoint PR (now Amaze PR). Ryan's publishing and research background is in corporate and financial communications, PR, CSR and now sports marketing.

Wendy Carthew has worked as a part-time lecturer and associate of the Centre for PR Studies at Leeds Metropolitan University since 2010. She has taught on undergraduate, postgraduate and Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) professional courses. She is an independent internal communication consultant following a 15-year career in corporate communications, specialising in employee

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Professor W. Timothy Coombs, PhD, is a full professor in the Nicholson School of Communication at the University of Central Florida. His research areas include crisis communication, activist use of the Internet to pressure organisational change and issues management. He is past recipient of the Jackson, Jackson and Wagner Behavioural Research prize from the Public Relations Society of America. His articles have appeared in a variety of international journals and his book chapters have appeared in major works in the field of public relations, including the *Handbook of Public Relations* and *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*. His crisis books include the award-winning *Ongoing Crisis Communication*, *Code Red in the Boardroom* and he co-edited *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* with Sherry Holladay. His other books include *Public Relations Strategy and Application: Managing Influence*, *Managing Corporate Social Responsibility: A Communication Approach* and the award-winning *It's Not Just PR* (all co-authored with Sherry Holladay). He has twice been Chair of the Public Relations Division of the National Communication Association in the USA.

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Foreword

Like most people in the public relations scholarly community, I have studied numerous books on public relations and on corporate communication, or communication management as the field is often called in other countries. Most books are very technical, 'how to' books, promising that you will be able to do the job as long as you follow the tips of the author. Some books are very theoretical, analysing merely one single theoretical focus, with the promise that you will become a good practitioner as long as you follow this approach. *Exploring Public Relations* is none of these, or, to put it differently, it is all of these books in one. It is theoretical and practical at the same time, it provides an insight in almost all theoretical approaches and different ideas on how to do public relations and it raises unsettled questions about the definition, the tasks of the professional, the debate about professional ethics and the issue of its impact. This is the most open-minded book I know.

Look at the prudent way in which the editors have challenged almost everything that commonly is left undiscussed in the educational and practical fields of public relations: that public relations has to do with persuasion and also with propaganda; that the public relations field has a problem with its legitimacy; and that there is no consensus whatsoever about what public relations is and what its value is for organisations of all kinds. The authors try to avoid taking a stand, leading us through all the discussions, rumours and evidence about these issues. What a book! It is fresh and good, it covers all the current topics and simultaneously opens up a lot of perspectives. And all this in a very user-friendly manner. This book starts with the idea that a textbook should put the student at the centre of the learning experience. And that is exactly what it does.

It is an excellent book for undergraduates who want to know more about the field. But at the same time it is also very practical for associating it with different approaches and models within the discipline of PR, and for interdisciplinary connections with communication studies and the wider context of social sciences. This makes the book also relevant and important for masters programmes in public relations. Leeds Metropolitan University has a history as one of the largest public relations faculties in Europe, and

that breadth of experience pays off in the depth, diversity and range of topics and approaches presented here. Public relations is an evolving discipline, and its growth requires continual questioning to challenge its boundaries and establish its terrain. The authors have succeeded brilliantly in doing that.

The first edition of *Exploring Public Relations* was a milestone. It was both very British and very international. *Exploring Public Relations* not only provided helpful guidelines to practical action, but raised unsettling questions about impact and implications as well. It was diverse, different and consistently thoughtful in departing from the US norm. Instead of simple platitudes about equal exchanges, *Exploring Public Relations* looked at how to actually perform public relations in an ethical manner across very diverse cultures. It was also theoretically inclusive, with a light touch that left students able to make up their own minds at the same time as they learned how to become competent practitioners. It was not uncritical of a field where technical mastery can override moral behaviour, as my colleague Professor David McKie from Waikato Management School, University of Waikato, New Zealand, wrote in his foreword for the second edition.

This third edition is updated in an enviable way, including all kinds of new issues – for example, about the media context of contemporary public relations and journalism (Chapter 2), about the intercultural and multicultural context of public relations (Chapter 5), about corporate image, reputation and identity (Chapter 10) and last, but not least, about research and evaluation (Chapter 9). The book therefore includes reference to almost everything that has been written in the last couple of years. What an effort! It is updated with the newest insights on financial public relations, public affairs, issues management and crisis public relations management.

The European Communication Monitor 2012 describes how social media changes the field of public relations. It is all included in this third edition. Technology, communications and our ever-growing need for credible content were top of mind with business communicators during the International Association of Business Communicators' (IABC) 2012 Annual Conference. These topics are widely

discussed in *Exploring Public Relations*, too. In 2010, the Global Alliance of Public Relations and Communication Management engaged more than 1,000 practitioners, academics and PR association leaders from some 30 nations in developing the Stockholm Accords, a bold brief for the role of PR/communications in governance, management, sustainability and internal and external communication, but also a rather idealistic approach to the practice. *Exploring Public Relations* discusses these ideas and challenges the outcome of the Stockholm discussion with daily practice and other codes of conduct.

This is a book every public relations author wishes she or he had written. It will help students to get introduced to the field and it helps teachers to discuss important topics with their students. You will not be disappointed.

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Preface

The journey to a third edition

How time flies. It does not seem long ago that we were scoping out the structure and content for the first edition of *Exploring Public Relations*. We first conceived of this book in the early 2000s and it started with the idea that a textbook should put the student at the centre of the learning experience. While it is true that textbooks in general are becoming more student-centred for subjects as varied as biology, law, media and psychology, this was not, and has not been, the case in public relations. *Exploring Public Relations* very much led the way in this approach for our discipline, and the feedback and compliments the book regularly receives are testimony to this. With this approach we wanted students to have an improved learning experience by involving them in a personal journey that brought the subject to life on the page and spurred them on to find out more. And this is what we have tasked ourselves to do with this exciting third edition. Our second edition brought challenges, and so has this version of the book. But we have benefited from the ability to listen to students and academic colleagues in how they read, study with and educate using the first two editions of the book and its supplements. And through this listening we have attempted to answer any questions or gaps in the earlier versions to ensure it is fit for purpose in a challenging, changing world of communication.

The key areas we have addressed are the most obvious ones in contemporary life of how the techniques used in public relations and communication have been influenced by rapid technological change and its integration, particularly in the past five years. To reflect this we have ensured that all chapters consider the implications of technology and change on the theory and practice of the discipline. Clearly, some chapters have integrated these influences more than others. One of the key features of the book is that it is an edited textbook and all chapters are written and reviewed within a consistent framework. This means that the book has a particular style and consistency that we have been keen to preserve. This is partly achieved by only working with senior and experienced academics and

practitioners who share a mission to understand and explain the discipline. We are therefore pleased to be able to include contributors from around the world who are closely associated with us individually and collectively at Leeds, and have the same aspirations to improve the subject knowledge and application of public relations in society. Again, we feel this was and continues to be a unique feature and strength of the book as it has evolved.

So, who to write such a comprehensive text? For this we looked to our colleagues – people who are part of the Public Relations and Communications Subject Group at Leeds Metropolitan University who teach on our well-established undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes. We also looked to our wider network – senior academics and practitioners who have contributed to our subject area and programmes, former colleagues who have moved on to careers elsewhere and past external examiners.

Target audience

Feedback suggests there is a diverse range of readers for *Exploring Public Relations*, from senior practitioners to undergraduate students. It is the preferred textbook for universities around the world, as well as for the professional body and professional courses that adopt it as their core text. Its content is comprehensive, which perhaps explains this broad appeal. That said, the book is written in a way that it can be used and read by someone who is totally new to the discipline as well as a student or practitioner with significantly more depth of understanding. The contents pages of the book demonstrate how it can be used to support more practical and theoretical aspects of the discipline and at different levels. Therefore, it is a perfect accompaniment for undergraduates and postgraduates who are studying public relations as a single subject (i.e. a bachelors or masters in public relations), jointly with another subject, or as a single module or unit within a wider programme.

Book style and structure

The book is divided into four parts. Part 1 provides important background knowledge to help students understand the broad business and societal context in which public relations plays a role. Included here, for example, are chapters on democracy and on the intercultural and multicultural context of public relations. In Part 2 there is a chapter on the related, but often ignored, topic of persuasion and propaganda to help you arrive at your own definitions; while Part 3 includes emerging specialisms such as issues management, community involvement, financial PR and public affairs. Part 4 comprises chapters that are not conventionally included within a public relations textbook. In this section, for example, there are chapters on pressure groups and NGOs, health communication and public relations and celebrity. The final chapter looks to the future and provides some themes and questions that we hope student readers will take up as topics for investigation and research. Public relations is an evolving discipline and its growth requires continual questioning to challenge its boundaries and establish its terrain. As students, teachers, researchers and practitioners we are all responsible for achieving this aim.

Pedagogy and its place

This is an educational textbook for public relations and therefore includes a number of devices that we hope will help both students and tutors to get the most out of the material. First, each chapter begins with a list of the **Learning outcomes** that students should achieve after engaging with the material. We have structured the book to have a range of consistent pedagogy that support the reader in understanding the chapter subject. For example, there are regular **Explore** features that give instructions on where to look for further information or how to engage further with topics. **Think abouts** are included to encourage reflection and for the reader to pause and think a little more deeply about the issues and ideas that are being presented and discussed. We have attempted to define as many terms or phrases as possible that may not be universally understood or that form part of the specialist language related to that topic or area of study, which are included in a glossary at the back of the book. Finally we have included many case studies (**Case studies** and **Mini case studies**), which aim to exemplify and apply the principles under discussion.

Over to you

We have been delighted and occasionally surprised at the warm response to our first two editions. These have been read and used for teaching literally all over the world, and with gratifying endorsements of our original pedagogic strategy of making clear links between theory and practice. However, there are many questions about public relations and its practice that remain under-explored. These we aim to highlight in this book and inspire readers to investigate further, possibly through detailed research for undergraduate and postgraduate projects and dissertations. We hope this revised third edition continues to bridge the divide between theory and practice and, above all, is a thought provoking and enjoyable read for students, practitioners and tutors alike.

Ralph Tench and Liz Yeomans, 2013

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PART 1

The context of public relations

This first part of the book provides you with the background knowledge you will require to understand the role and purpose of public relations (PR), set against the broader business and societal contexts in which it plays an active role. Chapter 1 discusses how public relations is defined in different ways and how it has evolved as a contemporary practice in the United States, Britain, Germany and Sweden. Chapter 2 discusses the contemporary media environment with specific reference to the UK context, while acknowledging the global

reach of news distributed online. Arguably, public relations is essential to modern democratic societies. In Chapter 3 the relationship between democracy and public relations is explored. Chapter 4 examines the societal context of public relations from the organisation's perspective, highlighting the theme of corporate social responsibility. In Chapter 5, the international and multicultural context of public relations is introduced. Finally, we turn to the role of the public relations practitioner in Chapter 6, to focus on what public relations practitioners do.

Public relations origins: definitions and history



Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- identify the key definitions of public relations used in practice today
- recognise the debates around the nature of public relations and what it means
- understand the emerging science of public opinion and its role in the development of public relations
- describe the key features of the history of public relations in the United States, Britain, Sweden and Germany
- understand the social and cultural dynamics that led to the emergence of the profession in these countries.

Structure

- Public relations definitions
- Public opinion: justifying public relations
- Business, politics, society and public relations: country case studies

Introduction

What is public relations? And when did public relations begin? This chapter briefly reviews why it has proved so difficult to define public relations work or reach a universally agreed definition of what the job entails. It outlines what is known about the emergence of public relations as a modern occupation, drawing primarily on the histories of the United States, Britain, Germany and Sweden (but acknowledging developments in other countries). The discussion of both definitions and histories reflects the fact that public relations is a product of the social, cultural, economic and political circumstances of its time

and evolves according to the needs of these broader environments. Thus, it has both good and bad consequences, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed.

Public relations is now a global occupation and implemented in many corners of the world in different ways. However, written histories of public relations reflect the dominance of the United States on the academic field of public relations and tend to focus on its origins in the United States rather than in other countries (McKie and Munshi 2007; Wehmeier et al. 2009). Exceptions include the comprehensive history of

public relations in Britain by Jacquie L'Etang (L'Etang 2004a), discussed in this chapter, a number of important texts about public relations in Germany (Binder 1983; Bentele 1997; Hein 1998) and *The Global Public Relations Handbook* (Sriramesh and Verčič 2003, 2009), which offers a range of 'potted' histories of public relations in different countries. Here, the limitations of existing histories will be considered and should be taken into account when reading the case studies. There is much still to be said and understood about the emergence of this occupation (see also Chapter 3).

Public relations definitions

Definitions are important because they shape expectations of what public relations (PR) could or should be about. For both academics and practitioners, definitions establish the 'territory' of public relations and therefore help justify budgets, salaries, funding for campaigns, teaching and research. Consequently, debates about definitions are important and ongoing. Agreeing on definitions about PR is, however, a tricky task. One reason for this is that PR is used by organisations of all types for a wide range of purposes. Governments may use it to promote policy decisions and prompt behavioural change among voters, businesses to sell their goods and services or publicise their socially responsible activity, and non-profit organisations to prompt financial or other forms of support among their target audience. A second reason is that the standpoint from which to define PR is a matter of opinion. If one is focused on strategies and tactics, then an organisation-centric definition may be appropriate. However, if one is more interested in its social effects, then a more appropriate starting point may be the organisation's audiences, or the social world in which it operates (Toth 2010; Edwards 2012). As a result, the likelihood is that if you ask three practitioners and three academics to define PR, all six answers will differ. Nonetheless, most will be based on the assumption that PR is something organisations do, which has certain desired effects on the people with whom those organisations wish to have a relationship. The following section outlines some of the most common definitions among academics and practitioners (Cutlip et al. 2006). See Explore 1.1.

Explore 1.1

Defining public relations

With a group of friends, write down your definition of PR. Now think about how you arrived at that definition:

- Is it based on your experience of PR and what you observe PR practitioners doing?
- Is it based on what you read about PR in the newspapers?
- Is it based on what your tutors have told you about PR?

Now compare your definitions:

- How different are they?
- What do they have in common?
- What are the differences and why do you think they exist?

Each of you will have different thoughts about what should and should not be included in the definition. See if you can agree on a common set of ideas, then test them on other friends and see how far they agree or disagree.

Academic definitions of public relations

People have been trying to define PR for over a century. Harlow (1976) found 472 different definitions of PR



Picture 1.1 PR is often a synonym for deception, or ‘spin’. The British publicity agent, Mark Borkowski, is associated with high-profile publicity stunts on behalf of his clients. (source: Getty Images)

coined between 1900 and 1976, and there have been many more since then. Most have tried to be relatively concise, creating a broad umbrella that can incorporate a wide spectrum of strategies and tactics that focus on organisational needs. Grunig and Hunt (1984: 6), for example, defined PR in one sentence as ‘the management of communication between an organisation and its publics’, later refined as ‘an organisation’s managed communications behaviour’ (Grunig 1997, cited in Grunig et al. 2006: 23). Grunig (1992) argues that this definition allows for differences in practice between practitioners in different contexts, but still includes important elements, such as the management of communication and the focus on external relationships. Kitchen (1997) is even briefer with his definition, suggesting that PR can be defined as ‘communication with various publics’, although he does add to this by arguing that PR is an important management function and has a strategic role to play.

Other definitions focus on ‘ideal’ communications practices: two-way communications and building positive relationships between organisations and their publics (Ledingham 2006). Some include its strategic importance to organisations and recognise its influence on reputation (Hutton 1999; Grunig and Grunig 2000). Cutlip et al.

(2006: 5) combine these aspects and suggest: ‘Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends.’

Some scholars suggest that these definitions inaccurately suggest that PR is a neutral communications channel and ignore popular understandings of PR and instead should take social context and costs into account (L’Etang 1996; Coombs and Holladay 2007; Curtin and Gaither 2007; Heath 2010; Edwards and Hodges 2011). Botan and Hazelton (1989), Kitchen (1997) and Cutlip et al. (2006), for example, all emphasise that PR is often a synonym for deception, or ‘spin’, and that everyday understanding of PR is usually determined by the visible results of PR activity (e.g. media coverage). However, the idea of *persuasion* has been left out of academic definitions, despite recognition of its importance in the profession’s history (see also Chapter 11 for further explorations of persuasion).

This approach tends to complicate PR definitions because it recognises the variety of work as well as its wide-ranging effects. Moloney (2006: 165), for example, defines PR as ‘competitive communication seeking advantage for its principals and using many promotional techniques,

Explore 1.2

Key debates

Why do you think academics disagree about definitions of PR? Is it because they don't understand PR or because they have different views about its contribution to society? Summarise, in your own words, the key debates between different PR definitions. How would you explain these definitions to your friends and family?

visible and invisible, outside of paid advertising.' Breaking down the concept even more, Heath (2010) suggests a three-dimensional understanding of PR as a 'social and organisational force', as a profession through which the identities of practitioners and their clients are constructed, and as a set of 'complex relationships by which interests and self-interests are enacted through structures, functions and shared meanings' (Heath 2010: 2). See Explore 1.2.

If PR overemphasises the interests of organisations over individuals or the privileged over the less powerful, then people will assume that it can serve only those interests. In fact, while privileged groups may be able to invest more resources in public relations, there are many examples of public relations strategies being applied effectively by 'minority' groups or individuals to challenge governments and corporations (Moloney 2006). Edwards (2012) has tried to address this by following the 'socio-cultural turn' in PR scholarship (Edwards and Hodges 2011) and developing a definition that may encompass both organisationally-driven activity as well as other effects of PR that may be of interest to scholars and practitioners alike. She defines PR as 'the flow of purposive communication produced on behalf of individuals, formally constituted and informally constituted groups, through their continuous trans-actions with other social entities. It has social, cultural, political and economic effects at local, national and global levels' (Edwards 2012: 15). Arguably, any definition of PR should recognise the breadth of possible contexts for activity and the social benefits of PR as a tool to increase discussion about matters that



Picture 1.2 The 1978 'Mexican Statement' has defined public relations as 'the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisational leaders, and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organisation and the public interest' (source: Peter Adams/Alamy Images)

Explore 1.3

Public relations and social awareness raising

The journey of the Olympic Torch to Beijing in 2008 was marked by pro-Tibet protests in every major city, aimed at highlighting China's human rights abuses in Tibet. Look up references to the 'Olympic Torch Relay 2008' on the Internet. How much of the coverage was about the torch's journey and how much comment was made about China's activities in Tibet? Based on this, how successful do you think the protestors were at raising the issue of Tibet's human rights in the context of the Olympics?

might otherwise be ignored, as well as the ways in which it can service the interests of some people over others. See Explore 1.3.

Practitioner definitions of public relations

Practitioner definitions of PR tend to be based more in the reality of the day-to-day job, often use the term 'public relations' interchangeably with 'organisational communication' or 'corporate communication' (Grunig 1992; Hutton 1999) and include concepts of persuasion, influence and reputation. Grunig et al. (2006) acknowledge that many practitioners still associate PR with media relations, although some do recognise its potential as a management function guiding interaction with publics. You could argue that this kind of flexibility means simply that practitioners have difficulty explaining exactly what their job entails – and indeed, this seems to be the case.

In 1978, the First World Assembly of Public Relations Associations in Mexico defined PR as 'the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisational leaders, and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organisation and the public interest' (Newsom et al. 2000: 2). The definition offered by the Public Relations Society of America, coined in 1988, is similarly broad but recognises the assumption of two-way engagement that underpins many understandings of practice: 'Public relations helps an organisation and its publics adapt mutually to each other' (Public Relations Society of America 2011). In the UK, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) defines PR as: 'About reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public relations is the

Explore 1.4

Developing your own definition of PR

Find five different PR consultancy websites and look at the definitions of PR that they use. How do these definitions differ? How explicit are they about persuasion and manipulation of opinion? How do they measure success? What different services do they provide? Based on your findings, can you develop your own definition of PR that combines all their perspectives?

discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics' (Chartered Institute of Public Relations 2009). This definition is widely used in the UK and is included in some UK-based text and practitioner books on PR (e.g. Gregory 1996; Harrison 2000; Genasi 2002). In general, consultants will define PR in ways that highlight their own unique approach in a competitive market but emphasise the development of reputation on the basis of goodwill rather than manipulation (see Explore 1.4 and Think about 1.1).

Think about 1.1

Academics vs practitioners

Academics and practitioners have come up with very different definitions of PR. From the summary above, consider the following questions with a group of friends:

- What are the main differences between the definitions of academics and practitioners?
- Why do you think such differences exist?
- Is there a right or wrong definition? If so, why?
- Which definition do you think is most appropriate for PR and why?

Feedback

Consider the interests of the people creating the definitions. For example, are they trying to build theories about how PR works or are they trying to simply describe what it does? Who is the audience for the definition and how might the audience affect what is included?

Public opinion: justifying public relations

Using communication to influence the public is hundreds of years old, with its roots in ancient civilisations. Throughout history, governments, monarchs and powerful religious and secular institutions have used communication to generate support for their cause among the populace. But it was the emergence of the concept of public opinion that eventually formed the scientific justification for using PR and communications techniques in this way (Grunig and Hunt 1984; Cutlip et al. 2006; Moloney 2006).

Nowadays, the term public opinion is used frequently in the media, by government and by PR practitioners almost without thinking. However, it emerged from the philosophical traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rousseau, the French philosopher, is generally credited with first coining the term, in 1744, and its use quickly became more extensive in discussions about how democracies should and could incorporate the views of the populations they were supposed to govern (Price 1992). The context in which it is used today only emerged in the early years of the twentieth century, and is based on the seminal book *Public Opinion*, by Walter Lippman, published in 1922.

Two basic conceptions of public opinion have dominated the evolution of the term: public opinion as an abstract, **collective view**, emerging through rational discussion of issues in the population; and public opinion as an **aggregate view**, the sum total of individual opinions of the population governed by the democratic state (Piecicka 1996). There are limitations to both these views – for example, who is included in, and who is excluded from, the term ‘public’? To what extent does the rational debate required for the ‘collective’ view really take place and

does everyone have equal access to the debate? If not, then ‘public opinion’ may only be the view of a select number of individuals who bother to engage in discussions. Alternatively, if public opinion is interpreted as an aggregate of individual opinions, then what happens to minority views that are swamped by majority concerns? Where do they find expression?

In the early twentieth century, there was a prevailing political concern that individuals would be more persuaded by emotional arguments and events than logic in their political decision making. This presented a problem for the political elite, who were concerned that an emotional public would not provide the best guide for governments acting on their behalf. Elite political and economic leaders seriously doubted the ability of the public to understand the complexities of democratic processes and argued that it was the job of communications channels such as the media to simplify politics and government so that the public could understand matters of importance to them (Lippmann 1922; Bernays 1928; Schudson 1984; Ewen 1996; Moloney 2006). Managing public opinion, then, became a matter of controlling an unreliable public so that they are persuaded that what is good for them is that which political elites *think* is good for them.

At the same time, new social research techniques emerged that enabled ‘public opinion’ on particular issues to be defined and quantified – for example, through surveys. This led to the gradual dominance of the aggregate view of public opinion over the collective view. As a result, public opinion is interpreted today as the view of the majority, and we often see survey statistics in the media that suggest we all think in a particular way about a particular matter (see Explore 1.5).

As literacy levels and the media industry expanded, the ability to quantify public opinion also opened up different routes for it to be influenced. Mass communication methods, such as radio, newspapers and (later) television, offered ready-made channels to communicate messages about complex issues in a manageable format to an increasingly literate population. The formation of public opinion became inseparable from these communication channels (Tedlow 1979) and, as we will see from the case studies outlined below, PR practitioners in business and government were not slow to take advantage of the rapidly growing media industries to put their views across in both logical and emotional forms to individuals who were open to persuasion (Ewen 1996).

More recently, however, attitudes have changed. The advent of Web 2.0, alongside more insightful studies of audience behaviour (Roper 2002; Kahn and Kellner 2004; Breakenridge 2008), have demonstrated that audiences engage with communication on all sorts of levels, are selective about what they do and do not take notice of, and are very ‘PR-savvy’ in ways they approach communications

Definition: ‘*Collective view*’ of public opinion refers to issues that emerge through rational discussion in the population. One example of such an issue is the general agreement among opinion formers (e.g. health professionals) that obesity in young children is caused through poor nutrition and a lack of exercise.

Definition: ‘*Aggregate view*’ of public opinion refers to the sum total of individual opinions of the population governed by the democratic state. One example of such an issue is banning smoking in public places. In the UK the views of the majority of the population, tested over time through polls, appeared to be in favour of a ban, and this was ultimately introduced in 2007.

Explore 1.5

Surveys and public opinion

PR practitioners often use surveys as a means of making a particular topic newsworthy. For example, you might see an article announcing the latest findings on levels of debt incurred by students taking a degree, or the amount of alcohol drunk each week by men and women in their early twenties. Take a look at the newspapers for the past two weeks and find an example of a survey that has created some 'news' about a particular topic and consider the following questions:

- To what extent do the views expressed in the survey findings correspond to your own views?
- How do your views differ and why do you think that might be?
- Would you support governments or organisations taking action based on these survey findings (for example, making new laws to limit alcohol consumption or reducing student fees)? Why/why not?
- Has the news story changed your view of the issue being discussed? Why/why not?

Feedback

Consider the motivations of the organisation carrying out the survey (they are usually mentioned in the news article). What motivations might they have for being associated with a particular issue? What kind of influence are they hoping to have on general views of the matter being researched?

from organisations. Consequently, the notion of 'managing' public opinion has largely evolved into 'communicating with' publics, and greater respect for audiences and their thinking has emerged. In PR scholarship, this has been accompanied by arguments that organisation-centric understandings of PR are no longer appropriate, and 'publics' need to be understood and acknowledged in more depth (Leitch and Motion 2010).

Business, politics, society and public relations: country case studies

Histories of public relations are only ever partial, in that they are constructed from a particular perspective and

with a particular purpose in mind (Miller 2000; L'Etang 2004; Hoy et al. 2007). Most often, this perspective puts the development of PR as a business function at the centre of the analysis, but as Miller (2000) points out, there are many ways to examine the evolution of PR, without necessarily prioritising its business-related role. When reading historical accounts of PR, then, it is important to recognise that these accounts are only one of many possible ways of understanding the evolution of PR in a particular context. Different social, economic and political factors come into play, and their effects on PR may be understood differently, depending on the perspective of the past that is being addressed. Importantly, histories are constructed as a means of understanding different aspects of the present: what one wishes to understand about today's PR will therefore shape the information that we select from the past to (re)construct it. They also tend to reflect a male view of the development of PR; the work of successful female practitioners has been neglected (Miller 2000). Hoy et al. (2007) point out that within the field of PR, histories have a way of repeating themselves: texts – and textbooks in particular – tend to reiterate the same basic story as a form of truth rather than as a specific account driven by specific interests.

Historical analyses of PR are still relatively rare, and the four case studies here represent the countries about which most has been written, perhaps because PR as an academic subject is well-established in these locations. PR elsewhere will have been shaped and constrained by different dynamics, and some brief accounts can be seen in, for example, *The Global Public Relations Handbook* (Sriramesh and Verčič 2003, 2009). When reading these cases, you should bear in mind the caveats noted above, as well as noting that inclusion in this chapter is not based on the relative importance of these locations to the field, but on the availability of information. You should also note that these cases are located exclusively in the Northern hemisphere and in 'developed' countries; in this, they reflect the overall bias of PR scholarship towards PR in these contexts, rather than in the Global South (or East). Let us hope that, as scholarship on PR continues to expand, histories from other areas of the world will become more available. See Explore 1.6.

The United States: private interests in public opinion

Many PR textbooks written by US scholars include a brief overview of public relations history in that country (Grunig and Hunt 1984; Wilcox et al. 1992; Cutlip et al. 2000, 2006). For the most part, they focus on the role of key companies and figures, including Ivy Lee, P.T. Barnum and Edward Bernays, in defining the practice and techniques