

CALL FOR PROPOSALS
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION 2018 PRECONFERENCE

Theories in Public Relations: Reflections and Future Directions

May 24, 2018, 08:30-16:30,
Malá Aula room, Karolinum, Charles University
Ovocný trh 3, Praha 1 - Staré Město, 110 00
Prague, Czech Republic

Abstract Deadline: December 15, 2017

Theme and rationale

The field of public relations has grown in the last thirty years both academically and professionally, and is now a specialised, applied communication discipline. Most scholars and practitioners would agree that public relations is primarily a strategic organizational function that nurtures positive relationships with publics and stakeholders for organizations of all kinds: private, public, non-profit, activist, advocacy etc. However, some have taken a broader view of both public relations and the organizations it works for, focusing on their role as a source of interventions in social, cultural and political environments. As a result, the theoretical landscape of public relations has expanded beyond its organizational origins.

Despite increasing theoretical depth, however, recognition of public relations as an academic discipline and the quality and significance of its theoretical contributions are disputed within and beyond the public relations field. Its discrete body of knowledge and stock of theories have received little recognition outside the specific disciplinary domain. This may be because a universal understanding of the theoretical pillars on which the field is grounded is far from achieved.

Public relations scholars tend to agree that this is an interdisciplinary field and that many studies in public relations are rooted in diverse communication, sociological, cultural, managerial, and organizational forms of knowledge. Almost all public relations' established theories come from a wider field and/or have borrowed concepts and understandings and adapted them to public relations questions. Yet, to enjoy greater recognition and academic legitimacy, the theoretical contributions of public relations as a field in its own right must be able to both stand alone and contribute to fields beyond disciplinary boundaries.

In this pre-conference, we propose an in-depth reflection on the quality and significance of theoretical development in public relations scholarship. The aim is to discuss and reflect on what might be considered current *theories of public relations* and *theories for public relations*, as well as emerging bodies of work that are changing the shape of the field. We will consider their use, their ability to answer research questions of fundamental importance for the profession, their relevance to today's global problems, and the exploratory avenues of scholarship that could form the basis of new theorizing. Examples of questions relevant to this pre-conference are:

- What can be considered a classical or emergent public relations theory?
- What are the field's grand theories and middle-range theories? How do they shape our thinking?
- What are the emergent theories that can (re)define public relations?
- What types of problems has public relations addressed and through which theoretical lenses has it addressed them? Do these approaches remain adequate? How might they evolve?
- What should be the fundamental research questions which are capable of yielding theoretic development?
- Why do public relations theories have limited impact beyond the field?
- How does public relations theory need to evolve in order to become more widely recognized in organizational, media and communication scholarship?

At the pre-conference, conceptual and theoretical papers will contribute to building a 'big picture' of theory in the public relations field, and to discussions about the impact of established and/or emergent theories on thinking about public relations problems. Insights based on empirical data are welcome if they provide a basis for theoretical and conceptual discussions. We welcome a wide range of theoretical perspectives, and we aim to ensure a vibrant program that includes both senior and junior scholars, representing the whole spectrum of opinions and perspectives in the field.

Submission and selection procedure

Submitters should send a two-page abstract, excluding references (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt) in which they clearly state their theoretical position related to the preconference theme, as well as a clear statement of how the work contributes to the questions posed in the call for proposals. Each submission should include a third page with a short bio of the author(s). Abstract submission is due by December 15, 2017, to Lee Edwards, at l.edwards2@lse.ac.uk

Acceptance/rejection letters will be sent by January 12, 2018. Authors of accepted proposals are required to submit a full paper and a presentation prior to the preconference which will be shared with the other authors. Authors are expected to attend the pre-conference, present in person and prepare some questions for other panelists.

All participants, speakers or not, must register and pay fees. Participation fee (including coffee breaks and lunch buffet) is 45 USD for presenters and non-presenters. Special hotel rates are available for registered participants. To register to this pre-conference, participants need to go to www.icahdq.org and register online as part of their main ICA conference registration, or as a stand-alone registration.

Following the pre-conference, selected authors and participants will be invited to contribute to a peer-reviewed Special Issue of *Public Relations Inquiry*, titled "Theories in Public Relations: Reflections and Future Directions" to be published in 2019.

Timeline

- Deadline for abstract submission December 15, 2017
- Acceptance provided by January 12, 2018
- Deadline for submission of full papers and presentations April 22, 2018
- Preconference in Prague, CZ, May 24, 2018
- Invitation for Special Issue in Public Relations Inquiry, July 30, 2018

Location/venue: Malá Aula room, Karolinum, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

Division affiliation: Public Relations Division

Pre-conference organizers:

Chiara Valentini
Department of Management, BSS, Aarhus University, Denmark
Email: c.valentini@mgmt.au.dk

Lee Edwards
Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom
Email: l.edwards2@lse.ac.uk

Sponsor:

The pre-conference is generously sponsored by *Public Relations Inquiry*, a Sage journal. *Public Relations Inquiry* is an international, peer-reviewed forum for conceptual, reflexive and critical discussion on public relations. The journal aims to stimulate new research agendas in the field of public relations through interdisciplinary engagement and to encompass a broad range of theoretical, empirical and methodological issues in public and organizational communications in diverse cultural contexts.