

From Plato to Twitter: a history of influence, media and public opinion / Com 9660

Instructor

Shelley Spector
Adjunct Professor
President, Spector & Associates; Founder, Museum of Public Relations
phone: (212-943-5858)
email: shelley@spectorpr.com

Class meetings

Term: Spring 2015
Thursdays, 01/29/2015 to 05/21/2015 6:00–9:00pm
VC 3-190 (Occasionally, Room #520, Newman Library)

Course description

While the profession of public relations is only a century old, man has been practicing the art of influencing public attitudes since the dawn of civilization. In fact, looking back at world history through the lens of public relations, one can see how many of the events that have changed the course of history were triggered through campaigns to influence attitudes, opinions and behaviors. And while the channels may have evolved through the years — from stone tablets and papyrus scrolls to Tumblr and Instagram — the underlying magic of influencing opinion is still the same: understanding human behavior.

This is as true for today's practitioner conducting a You Tube campaign as it was for Thomas Paine to hand out pamphlets. In order to shape attitudes and ultimately, change behavior, the public relations professional today still must build credibility with his audience, appeal to its emotions, and build up a logical case with facts. In fact, this very formula — ethos, pathos and logos — came from Aristotle himself, 2,500 years before the field of "public relations" was born. By studying the strategies behind the most successful campaigns of the past — the ones that influenced societies to seek independence, adopt new religions, or even buy Ivory Soap — we can better understand how best to build successful public relations campaigns today.

NOTE: Students will have the opportunity to have their term papers published with full credit in a book co-authored by Professor Louis Capozzi and myself. The papers, with supporting visuals, will also be exhibited on prmuseum.org and archived at the Museum.

Students must first sign permission forms.

Learning goals

Become a more successful professional by learning how to apply "best practices" of the past to the campaigns you develop today.

- Understand the influence that public relations theories, practices and strategies have formally and informally had on the shaping of world events.
- Recognize the role that public relations has played in shaping social movements and culture around the world: from the spread of Christianity, to the growth of the suffrage movement, to the “hippie” era and up through the most recent elections.
- Appreciate the evolution and development of media technologies, from the invention of papyrus to PowerPoint.
- See how public relations strategies and propaganda have been used by governments around the world to build public consensus and shift attitudes to support distinct military, political and economic goals.

Session 1 — January 29

Intro to Museum, its assets, exhibits, mission

Discussion of using archival materials for research — Sandra Roff, chief archivist, Baruch College.

An up-close “hands on” review of the museum holdings: from original speeches, letters, video interviews, and photos to the social science books that influenced the thinking of the first professional PR practitioners a century ago. Learn about the evolution of media technologies, from cave drawings, papyrus, radio to social media. Discussion of how studying history of PR can add value to practice today.

HW assignment: draw up a timeline showing evolution of media technologies.

Session 2 — February 5

The role of influence, media and public opinion on history:

How ancient ideas can make PR more powerful

How planned communications have been used to shape public opinion, behavior and attitudes throughout world history. Role of philosophers, politicians, rhetoricians, writers, social activists, military leaders, as well as the role of social scientists, such as anthropologists, political theorists, psychologists, and social psychologists. What are the various definitions of public relations (vs. publicity, advertising, marketing).

HW assignment: write a two-page essay on how the Egyptians conducted public relations during ancient times (8000–2000 BC) Focus on strategies (e.g.: promoting the dynasties of King Tut, Ramses II, Cleopatra); media technologies (e.g.: papyrus, stone); tactics (e.g.: hieroglyphics, monuments, tombs); and strategies (e.g.: how the rulers were “positioned” through words, stories, symbols and art)

Session 3 — February 19

Public Relations in Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome; Plato/Aristotle, Caesar and the

Manuscript Era

Communicating with the masses vs. elites. Explore political censorship, Plato's Noble Lies, Aristotle and framework for persuasion: ethos, logos, pathos. The growth of the "manuscript society" and its impact on society, culture, politics, education and government. Julius Ceasar (60 BC) and the start of government use of "social media" in the town square "Acta Diurna." How his writings influenced the rise of the Roman Empire.

HW assignment: Prepare a 5-minute presentation to demonstrate how one of the ancient philosophers would have counseled a particular company today enveloped in a crisis. Only media technologies used in ancient times can be used. Crises will be suggested based on current news.

Session 4 — February 26

Public Relations and the Rise of World Religions

Role of Crusades. Influence of Martin Luther's writings. The establishment of the first formal "PR Department:" *The Congregation de Propaganda Fide*, 1622: charged with propagation of Catholicism around world. How persuasive communications were used to spread Islam, Confucianism, Christianity and other religions.

HW assignment: Prepare a 5-minute presentation to discuss how you would advise one of the world's leading religious figures (e.g.: Mohammed, Confucius, Jesus, Buddha, etc.) on how best to impact today's millennials. Use an integrated campaign of today's communications technology to transmit the messaging from the past. Discuss how you would or would not reposition the figure to appeal to today's audiences.

Session 5 — March 5

The Printing Press Changes Everything

The role of movable type (Gutenberg) on freedom of expression. How the flourishing of knowledge and ideas impacted development of business, government and society. The rise and spread of newspapers.

Newspapers: Rome: Acta Diurna, China (734 BC) Kaiyuan Za Bao (Bulletin of the Court); Europe, avvisi cross border military and economic info. First real paper, 1605, Germany. Impact of printed works on the founding of the colonies, industry, emigration to West Coast. Impact of Thomas Paine, Alexander Hamilton. Impact of Boston Tea Party.

HW assignment: Identify a milestone event in history (1700–1900) in the U.S. or overseas during which newspapers or other printed materials played a significant role in influencing public opinion. 5-minute presentation with visuals.

Session 6 — March 12

Communications becomes "electrified"

Replacing carrier pigeons, messengers, pony express, a variety of ever more sophisticated

communications enabled instantaneous conveyance of news and two-way communications for the first time in history. A look at the impact of electricity and two electrical inventions it facilitated: the telegraph and telephones, to study how they shaped culture, politics and industry. Guest lecturer: Norm Brust.

HW assignment: Present a 5-minute analysis of the impact of the telegraph on American society in the 19th century. Identify a string of famous telegrams that may have helped influence the outcome of world events or social movements.

Session 7 — March 19

“People think in terms of the pictures in their heads” — Edward Bernays

How public attitudes were molded through photography. Invention of cameras, use of photos in newspapers, development of photojournalism. How photos impacted public opinions regarding war: Civil War, Spanish-American, First World War. Stereoscopes and its various uses to bring the news to life. The birth of newsreels (Edison) and its impact on public opinion of WWI.

HW assignment: Work on presentations.

MIDTERM — March

26 Presentation of PR “case studies” from the past.

Ideas include: building acceptance of the ‘horseless carriage’, bringing ovens and stoves for the homes; a reputation building effort for the Triangle Shirt Waist factory; promotion of Western U.S. expansion; acceptance for Japanese consumer products following WWII. Can use only the media technologies of the time.

Session 8 — April 2

Hucksters, Promoters and Sellers of Snake Oil

Unregulated and unrefined methods of attracting attention were rampant in the 19th century to promote the Gold Rush, sell consumer goods to Western frontier pioneers and even sell slaves. Posters, catalogues, newspaper ads, direct sales, paid editorial copy, unrestricted hype.

HW assignment: Choose a marketing/sales objective from this period (e.g: attracting people to the circus, selling goods to Frontier settlers, enticing miners to join the Gold Rush, etc.) and analyze the communications tools used to support the effort.

SPRING RECESS

Session 9 — April 16

Public Relations Becomes a Profession

How the Industrial Revolution spawned the birth of PR as a recognized profession. Early uses of PR for commercial purposes, and crisis management: Ivy Lee (Ludlow Massacre); Creation of the first PR firm: Publicity Bureau. Influence of the social scientists on the early theories of Edward Bernays.

HW assignment: Select one well-known social scientist of the 20th century and write about his views on influencing the public, understanding attitudes, changing behaviors within different groups of society. Consider Trotter, LeBon, Freud. 5-min. presentation.

Session 10 — April

23 Instilling patriotism through posters, newsreels and radio

Committee on Public information (CPI) during WWI; messaging during the Depression. Effectiveness of posters in recruitment, buying savings bonds, changing wartime behaviors. WPA photography use in Congress. Newsreels impact on attitudes, Hollywood's promotion of patriotism. Use of radio news bulletins, PSAs. FDR's Fireside Chats.

HW assignment: Identify the impact of various forms of government propaganda (in the U.S. or overseas) that successfully influenced public opinion and behavior. What messages, images and media worked best with which groups of the public?

Session 11 — April 30

From the “Public Be Damned” (Vanderbilt) to “Serving the Public Interest” (Vail): Evolution of the Corporate Two-Way Street

How early heads of corporate PR departments, e.g.: Paul Garrett (GM), Arthur Page (AT&T), Moss Kendrix (Coca-Cola), worked to forge mutually beneficial relationships with their various publics. Examine the structure, mission, roles and influence of the corporate communications department within the Fortune 1000. Study proactive campaigns as well as reactive crisis management. Guest: Herb Schmertz, Mobil Oil.

HW assignment: Select a corporate communications leader pre WWII and discuss his challenges, campaigns and contributions to the field. Focus on his audiences (internal and external); tactics (e.g.: World's Fairs); positioning strategies and methods for communicating with target audiences.

Session 12 —

May 7

The giant impact of the small screen

Rise of consumerism, housewives, commuters. Impact on attitudes of live real-time TV coverage (McCarthy hearings, JFK, MLK assassinations). Political debates (Nixon/Kennedy).

HW assignment: Analyze and present how TV in the late '50s and '60s played a role in public opinion, politics, culture, social mores and consumer behavior. You can examine TV news, commercials, live political events, or even early TV programming (e.g.: soap operas). Include examples from YouTube. 5-minute presentation.

Session 13 — May

14 The Internet Age: The rise of bottom-up communications

How the Internet went from DARPA'S ARPANET to the WWW; what has it meant for society, business, education, politics and culture? How has the "two-way street" that Bernays imagined in 1919 been delivered through social media? A look at how the Internet has impacted our ability to influence the attitudes of our audiences, how we can shift and measure public opinion. How the Internet has changed the manner in which we execute both internal and external corporate communications and investor relations.

HW assignment: Today's CCOs are the first to have access to social media . The common contention is that the Internet is far more powerful than any channel that came before it. Yet, according to Harold Burson, the same thing was said when television came on the PR scene in the Sixties, and radio in the Thirties and newsreels in the Twenties. Do you agree or disagree with Harold? Explain persuasively in 5-min.

Session 14 — May 21

PRESENTATION OF FINAL PAPERS Choose one social movement in history and demonstrate how public relations strategies helped to influence its outcome. **Utilize the resources of the Museum/Library to research through primary materials and out of print books. Where possible, record oral histories of people who have knowledge of or expertise about the movement, including scholars, current and retired PR professionals. Utilize photos, supporting documents, existing video interviews. Papers to be published must be 10–15 pages. Papers plus supporting visuals and audio will be exhibited on prmuseum.org. Choice of topic must be approved prior.**

Required books (buy used any edition, rent or download on Kindle)

“Public Relations History” by Scott M. Cutlip

“A History of Communications” by Marshall T. Poe

“Communications in History” by David Crowley

“Century of the Self, documentary by Adam Curtis, BBC — Episodes 1 and 2
(<http://vimeo.com/85948693>)

Recommended Resources

Archives from the International History of Public Relations Conferences (IHPRC)

Museum of Public Relations (prmuseum.org): see videos, text and links to digital books and other reference materials.

[Facebook.com/PRMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/PRMuseum): see links to digital books, newsreels, historical notes, postings on PR field in other countries.

Professors and PR students from U.S. and overseas can be made available for term paper research. We can also arrange for you to have “pen pal” correspondence with overseas PR students (e.g.: Brazil, Iraq, Croatia, Vietnam, China, Russia).

“PR! A Social History of Spin” by Stuart Ewen

Grading

Weekly presentations: 20%

Midterm presentation: 20%

Final presentation: 30%

Class participation: 30%

All assignments will be graded on originality, creativity, research methods, and analysis, as well as content, visuals and presentation skills. You are encouraged to utilize any and all sources you can find on or off line; however, pay special attention to proper citation (APA style) for research. You are encouraged to use the primary resources in the PR Museum and other museums (such as the Met, New York Historical Society, and the Museum of Broadcasting), as well as interviewing experts on the subject matter. You may reference the books above, as well as books on the Classics, World History, Communications Studies and any public relations texts that cover history.

Our hope is that your research findings can add to the new body of scholarship documenting how public relations has shaped history.