

Presentación Presentation

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European public relations research: internationalization, institutionalization and reflection to new professional challenges from a socially oriented perspective

Investigación en Relaciones Públicas en Europa:
internacionalización, institucionalización y reflexión sobre los
nuevos retos profesionales desde una perspectiva de orientación
social

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Public relations and communication management research in Europe are going through an excellent phase of scholarly development and impact. This effect is being felt because there is an increasing number of educators and researchers bringing a breadth of qualifications and experience to the research field and consequently providing international prominence and recognition. An increasing number of transnational projects between European researchers and universities are being made each year which is also translating into public relations and strategic communication receiving acknowledgment and legitimation as a

target for significant funding awards from the EU. Moreover, the results and dissemination of those large-scale research projects made in Europe in the field of public relations or strategic communication are now further expanding outside the continent and achieving an important representation in academic forums and journals globally.

Europe, has been able to consolidate the largest annual study about the public relations and communication management profession worldwide, and is now in its eight consecutive edition of the European Communication Monitor (ECM 2014), in which 2777 professionals from 43 countries participated.

This special issue of International Journal of Public Relations (Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas), offers a collection of public relations and communication management research in Europe, with a wide selection of papers from the mentioned main Europe-wide study, through an example of a trans-regional study between Sweden and Denmark to a range of national based studies in countries such as the UK, Sweden, Russia, Italy, Portugal and Spain. The special issue ends with the book review for “Corporate Social Responsibility: Perspectives and practice” recently published in Europe, and doubly reviewed by Dr Ralph J Bathurst from the School of Management (Albany) at Massey University, New Zealand and Dr Adrian Zicari from the ESSEC Business School of Paris.

From the range of research offered in this special issue of the journal, four tendencies of European public relations research emerge: institutionalization, interdisciplinarity, society oriented approaches and reflections on the changing communication landscape.

The European Communication Monitor is a perfect example of the degree of institutionalization that European public relations research is achieving with the support of institutions such as EUPRERA (European Public Relations Research and Education Association), EACD (European Association of Communication Directors), national associations and agencies and the EU. Furthermore it entails the achievement of an old challenge: the increasing transference of knowledge between academic and professional fields. Extensive comparative studies are still rare in public relations, yet Europe has successfully completed the unique academically rigorous and systematic, longitudinal research in public relations practice which started in 1998 with the qualitative research project, the European Public Relations Body of Knowledge project (EBOK). Since then the

field has expanded and been significantly contributed to from 2007 with the quantitative empirical project, the European Communication Monitor (ECM). The fruit of those efforts allow us to count on the presence of an updated longitudinal analysis of the key issues of public relations in Europe which capture the last eight years in the paper by Vercic, Verhoeven and Zerfass.

The research of Navarro and Humanes about leadership in public relations in Spain is another example of the internationalization of European research, with the participation of researchers and universities from the old continent in worldwide projects.

Interdisciplinarity through the collected papers is shown both in the theoretical sources and the methodology. Falkheimer, for example, presents a theoretical framework where strategic communication theory is brought together with communication theories of agenda-building and framing and the marketing approach to place branding. The body of papers shown in addition reflect a diversity of methodologies and methodological triangulation: conceptual research, empirical quantitative research through national and international surveys, qualitative interviews, case studies, content analysis and narratives analysis and even historical methods, as used by Gisela Conçalves for reconstructing the French and Portuguese associations in public relations and also by Rebecchi in analysing the role of promoters of the rationalization of work in consolidating public relations in Brazil and France in the 1950s.

However, if there is one thing that characterises European public relations research it is its critical socially-oriented approach. This is the approach used to understand place branding in the Oresund region as a mediation society. This is also underlined in the paper *Creativity caged in translation* by Fredriksson, Olsson and Pallas where crisis communication is analysed from a neo-institutional perspective. The work of Chiara Valentini about public relations practitioners and journalist perceptions of their relations also focuses on the importance of social representations on influencing the behaviour of individuals in their society. Similarly Katerina Tsetsura chose a critical narrative analysis method for studying the feminization of the public relations profession in Russia. Yeomans and Baxter also look at roles and their interplay as they take a relationship perspective to understand the roles of bloggers and PR practitioners in the hospitality sector.

Finally, the collections of papers presented in this special issue reflect the challenges that the public relations profession is facing with the changing landscape of media and new technologies and the unprecedented relations with media organizations. These challenges are in evidence from the perspective of practitioners in the paper of Navarro and Humanes about public relations leadership in Spain and in the paper by Simon about the incorporation of social media in Spanish universities. Invernizzi, Murtarelli and Romenti also focus their paper on the profession and focusing on institutionalization of the communication function within large Italian corporations and through the lens of the chief communication officer and their role function. The stakeholder perspective is explored in Laskin's paper about the XXII Winter Olympic Games in Russia, and the perspective of the media systems, with the new models of mediatization are emphasized in Sweden and Denmark by Falkheimer and in Italy by Valentini.

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