

From facts to stories or from stories to facts? Analyzing public relations history in public relations textbooks

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Abstract

Leading PR-historiography provides a picture of an evolutionary process of public relations activity in which PR develops from a manipulative to a two-way, dialogue-oriented communication process. We analyzed a number of public relations textbooks to determine how their authors present PR history. Our major findings are: (1) The construct of the progressive development of PR is evenly spread throughout textbooks; (2) The majority of textbooks simply rely on storytelling and not on a theory-driven approach to PR history as we would prefer to see in PR textbooks that are used to teach university students; (3) The PR history presented in the books seems to be influenced by a paradigmatic stance. However, citation context analysis did not enable us to trace back the dissemination of this viewpoint to one paradigmatic author, and so we assume that the so-called obliteration effect prevents this proof. © 2007 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction and method

Frequently, it is possible to detect a belief in a process of maturation in books and essays about the history of public relations (e.g., Vasquez & Taylor, 2001) whereby PR develops from one-way manipulative communication to the ideal of dialogic and symmetric communication. Only seldom, however, do people ask if this perception of history is the only way to interpret the evolution of PR, and we assume that the same applies when it comes to PR textbooks, which play an important role in imparting knowledge. Therefore, the objective of this essay is to determine how PR history is portrayed in textbooks, and which perception of history is imparted by them. Textbooks solidify disciplinary knowledge and offer commonly accepted expertise. However, through their structure, textbooks partially recompose and didactically edit existing knowledge (Smyth, 2001). Textbooks play a particular role in the education of students. They shape the students' thoughts and give cognitive orientation (Barnes, 1982) which is why textbooks are such an appropriate subject for an analysis of disciplinary self-assurance and challenge.

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Table 1
Analyzed textbooks

Author(s)	Title	Year
Cutlip, Center and Broom	Effective public relations	2006
Wilcox and Cameron	Public relations; strategies and tactics	2006
Lattimore et al.	Public relations; the profession and the practice	2004
Newsom, VanSlyke Turk and Kruckeberg	This is PR	2004
Seitel	The practice of public relations	2004
Simon	Public relations: concepts and practices	1986
Moore and Kalupa	Public relations: principles, cases and problems	1985
Grunig and Hunt	Managing public relations	1984
Lovell	Inside public relations	1982
Marston	Modern public relations	1979
Nolte	Fundamentals of public relations	1979

This paper wants to investigate three particular dimensions of the historiography of public relations in relevant textbooks: (1) The mode of historiography; (2) The existing perception of PR history; (3) A dominance of a specific historical perception (paradigmatic influence).

It would, of course, be too ambitious to analyze all those works which have been published since the publication of the first PR textbook in 1952. Thus, the present study focuses mostly on works which have already been analyzed in previous studies of PR-textbooks.¹ Our selection of eleven books has, however, purposefully included not only the most widely used textbooks in their latest edition, but also earlier books so that we could investigate whether, and to what extent, other historical conceptions were taught in the 1970s and 1980s (Table 1).

In the following sections the theoretical framework is developed. We first look at general perceptions of PR history (Section 2), and then introduce the concept of paradigmatic knowledge and textbooks (Section 3). The theoretical framework closes with a section about historiography (Section 4), which leads to the modes of historiography used in PR textbooks (Sections 5–7), and to the analysis of the paradigmatic shape of this historiography using citation context analysis (Section 8). The closing section addresses ideas for further research (Section 9).

2. Perceptions of public relations history

Many writings in PR history focus either on dates and facts or on individuals and PR campaigns (e.g., Cutlip, 1994; Hiebert, 1966; Hudson, 1986). Abstractions, sociostructural references and theorization are rarely found. Those publications, however, that attempt to abstract PR history and employ elements such as periodization assume an evolutionary process in public relations with PR, for example, evolving from a public be damned era to a public be informed era to a mutual understanding era (Bernays, 1998 [1977]) or even a mutual adjustment era (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006). PR scholars thus outline the ethical and technological maturation process within PR communication.

Yet we must question whether the developmental stages presented in these perceptions inevitably result from historical data or whether other perceptions of PR history can be detected. Scholarly literature shows that alternative perceptions of PR history do exist: Olasky (1987, 1984), for example, criticizes the picture of a historic evolution. He does not detect understanding and democratic discursive processes but rather sees more resourceful persuasive forms of control techniques, which do not serve capitalist interests but are intended to prevent market economic and individual interests from evolving freely: In Olasky's view, therefore, Ivy Lee is not a "champion of democratic ideals, he is just the opposite, a master controller and propagandist" (Pearson, 1990, p. 35).

Miller (2000) criticizes the dominance of corporate PR historiography which places the origins of PR in the era of industrialization. Her approach relates social and cultural history to PR in order to obtain an alternative and more detailed view of PR history. Brown (2003) criticizes the fact that the established PR historiography places the beginning of dialogic PR-communication in the second half of the twentieth century. Citing the example of the apostle

¹ During the last decades other topics of PR textbooks have been analyzed (see for example Culbertson, 1983; Duffy, 2000).

St. Paul, Brown wants to show that the so-called modern symmetrical PR techniques can be traced back to ancient times.

Thus it can be seen that a number of scholarly interpretations of historical facts in public relations offer a perception of history that differs from established conceptions. However, we might ask why these interpretations do not receive as much prominence as the historiography of Bernays, Cutlip and others. Can we find answers within Kuhn's history of science: is PR historiography paradigmatic framed?

3. Paradigms and social orientation

The notion of a paradigm was popularized by the science historian, Kuhn (1996 [1962]), although Fleck was the first to discover the underlying principle (Fleck, 1980 [1935]). When describing paradigms, Kuhn refers to those components in disciplines that are fundamental for the selection of specific questions. Paradigms often unfold their power through their social orientation: In many of their courses students rely primarily on textbook literature (Kuhn, 1996). Students often "accept theories on the authority of teacher and text, not because of evidence" (Kuhn, 1996, p. 80). Scientists perform their work within the framework of this paradigm because paradigms are accepted by the majority of the disciplinary community. Venturing outside the scientifically accepted paradigm can be a career-damaging norm violation (Mulkay, 1975). Textbooks in particular are assumed to convey established findings. They are melting pots for paradigmatically influenced knowledge. However, knowledge is often presented without referencing sources or providing a developmental context for the findings. Thus certain scientific findings can be turned via "obliteration effect" (Campanario, 2003) into generally accepted and unquestioned "truths" which become part of the common knowledge of the given discipline and, therefore, are not cited anymore.

4. Historiography and models of public relations historiography

Basically, historiography can be performed in two ways: firstly, chronologically and narratively; and secondly, systematically and analytically (Schulze, 1996). The latter process includes reflexion as well as theorization. When operating on a level of systematic and analytic abstraction it is possible to visualize developmental lines behind the facts. Three modes of description that are relevant for this study can be found: (1) date- and fact-oriented narrative storytelling, (2) the periodizing approach, and (3) the theorizing analysis (Hoy, 2002).²

The narrative storytelling is the underlying concept of all historical description (Fuchs & Raab, 1990). It is the historiographer who puts past events in a chronological, sense-making and narrative order by means of emplotment (White, 1973). The intention of the periodizing approach is to give history a clear structure in its chronology and a characterization of its development stages (Vogler, 1998). Mostly, periodizing descriptions follow developments in political and economic history. According to Lutz (1997) four formal requirements for the parameters of periodization exist: (1) sufficient integration of the various aspects of historical events (society, politics, etc.); (2) suitable classification of a time period's dimension and structuring; (3) sufficient spatial relevance of the periodization pattern; (4) reasonable embedding in the real-life frame of reference of the respective present.

The theory driven analysis contributes to the selection and organization of historical knowledge by trying to visualize structural conditions. Here, historical theories are understood as explicit and consistent systems of notions and categories which are meant for the identification, understanding and clarification of specific objects that require differentiation and which can not be sufficiently derived from the sources themselves (Kocka, 1977). Theories enhance the rationality of scholarly discussion because they help to uncover structural clusters of historical processes (Wehler, 1980). It is assumed that a theorizing analysis seems the most appropriate alternative, yielding the highest heuristic potential for university studies because students are provided with analytical explanations that put facts into perspective (Table 2).

5. Fact- and event-oriented approaches

The first two textbooks analyzed (Marston, 1979; Moore & Kalupa, 1985) develop only a rough structure of public relations history (see Appendix A). Both understand PR as a twentieth century phenomenon whose fundamental

² This triple matrix expands Bentele's (1997) two-dimensional approach to PR history. Bentele divides PR historiography in fact-based and theory-based approaches.

Table 2

Three approaches of (PR-) historiography (authors' illustration, partially based on Bentele, 1997)

Criteria	Approaches		
	Fact-/event-oriented	Periodizing	Model-/theory-oriented
Methods	Fact gathering, historical order	Periodization characterization of development stages	(a) Theory-guided gathering; systematization; (b) structural-historical procedures
Objectives	Description	Description and partly explanation	Description and explanation
Theory foundation	None	Notions, theoretic constructs	Notions, typologies, theories
Functions	Attraction for occupational field, scientific beginnings	Attraction for occupational field, scientific function, first level of abstraction	Scientific functions
Examples	Biographies, Cutlip	Cutlip/Center/Broom	Grunig/Hunt

elements can be traced back to the beginnings of civilization. Without giving any explanation Moore and Kalupa state that PR practitioners following Ivy Lee realized a transition from providing mere information to the analysis of public opinion. Although social conditions are partially integrated in the last section when they describe PR in the context of various developments such as *consumerism* and *recognition of social responsibility*, the description is based on the activities of individuals. Marston's "Modern Public Relations" (1979) follows a principle that likewise is simple.

The structuring of the history chapter in Seitel's "The Practice of Public Relations" (Seitel, 2004) alone suggests that it is a typical example of fact-based narration. The first part *Ancient Beginnings* primarily describes communicative activities in ancient Greece and Rome. The following sections *Early American Experience* and *Later American Experience*, dealing with Barnum and Muckraking Journalism, are characterized by chronology, whereas the fourth section *Ivy Lee: The Real Father of Modern PR* is comprised of biographical data on an individual. The concluding two sections *The Growth of Modern Public Relations* and *Public Relations Comes of Age* connect PR activities to social factors such as globalization. Overall, Seitel presents an inconsistently structured description of PR history.

Wilcox and Cameron (2006) describe PR as a phenomenon of the twentieth century whose origins can be traced back to earliest history. PR history itself is based on the *Evolving Functions* which they identify as press agency, publicity and counseling, here referring to the activities of Lee which mark the transition to the modern PR. The third section (*Public Relations Comes of Age*) structures PR development according to the determining conditions of the global economy and the rapid spread of new media technology. Here the authors refer to the four-stage model of Grunig and Hunt (1984). Overall, it is hard to detect a sensible periodization. Sometimes, certain PR activities are presented as a delimiter on the one hand, while sometimes significant events in world history or society are consulted on the other.

6. Periodizing approaches

The following four textbooks show more distinct attempts at periodization. However, it should be noted that the first three books meet Lutz's criteria only partially. According to Nolte (1979), the early form of PR (e.g., 4,000-year-old cuneiform writings containing harvesting advice) is followed by publicity in the time of the American Revolution. Kendall's political activities, as well as Barnum's show business activities, triggered the transition to a *New Era* and to a modern concept of PR. Interrupted by an expansion phase of economic PR, the focus of PR during the World Wars was on political realms. Nolte's description follows events of political history which are per se linked to certain periods, but he employs them only as defining highlights for structuring purposes and so mainly remains within the limits of the fact-oriented approach. An analogous approach that may initially seem like a periodization but is scarcely more than a narrative is offered by Lovell (1982). He structures the history of PR using notions such as *Colonial Period* or *The Muckrakers*, and also influential individuals (*The Rise of Ivy Lee*).

Simon's (1986) historical overview has a rough periodic structure. The first period, *Revolution through Civil War*, is fixed on individuals such as Adams and Kendall. Simon spans a *Post-Civil War Period* from the mid-nineteenth century to 1945 which includes both World Wars without providing a suitable theoretical explanation for a PR-specific characterization. Even in the *Modern Era* as an expression of an independent and widely applied field of

practice appropriate dimensions of the time-periods or a sufficient integration of the various aspects of historical events such as politics are hardly recognizable. A formal designation of periods can be found within only Simon's overview.

Cutlip et al. (2006) structure PR history into four sections. In the first section, *Ancient Genesis*, the public communication of Greeks and Romans is covered. The *American Beginnings* follow as a correlative of social changes such as increased literacy and the American Revolution. Manchester capitalism, rough publicity practices and press agency determine the *Middle Years*. The authors date the definitive beginnings of PR at the beginning of the twentieth century. Obviously inspired by Bernays' periodization (Bernays, 1952), they subdivide modern American PR history into six sub-periods (see Appendix A). Overall, until the twentieth century the description of PR history is strictly fact-and-event-oriented and structured according to events in political history. Nevertheless, with the beginning of the modern concept of PR a clear periodization emerges: The six periods are explicitly specified and dated, contain various aspects of historical events and have an appropriate magnitude. It is possible to reconstruct the subdivision criteria according to political and economic–historical events. Within the framework of a figure which states the milestones of PR, the authors develop four higher-ranking stages which subdivide the history of PR into the four eras: *Public be Damned*, *Public be Informed*, *Mutual Understanding* and *Mutual Adjustment*. However, while geared to Bernays description (Bernays, 1998), this theory-based concept is barely linked to the analyses of the chapter, and is barely explained, which is why the textbook is not associated with the theoretical approaches.

7. Theory-oriented approaches

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984) public-relations-like activities were already employed by political, religious, and economic leaders in the ancient world in order to communicate with their publics. These activities are followed by four models of PR: The *Publicity Model* includes the period from 1850 up to the turn of the century. During this period, demands for truth are subordinated at any cost to the attraction of attention. The period of 1900–1920 saw the emergence of the *Public Information Model* which puts true information from the public into focus as a reaction against the muckrakers. In the 1920s, the *Two-way Asymmetric Model* came up. New communication strategies based on empiric social research allowed for public feedback; this feedback, however, was mainly used to optimize processes of persuasion and manipulation by means of the “engineering of consent” (Bernays, 1947). In the 60s the *Two-way Symmetric Model* emerged, a model which stresses mutual understanding and symmetric communication.

Offering an approach comparable to the periodic approach of Cutlip, Center and Broom, Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, Toth and van Leuven (2004) choose an event-oriented form of description for the precursors of PR, but then move to a theory-oriented level when they describe the beginning of modern PR: for them, PR develops from the *Manipulation* stage (press agents) to the *Information* stage (Ivy Lee's Declaration of Principles) to the *Mutual Influence and Understanding* stage which began after 1910 with the Creel Committee. The subdivision into three periods represents an explicit and consistent system of concepts. The labelling of the periods includes a theory-based description of functional changes in public relations.

Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg (2004) construct consistently theoretic periods in which events like the two World Wars influence the PR communication; however, they are not important per se to the change in the predominant medium of communication. The focus on communicative and strategic aspects of the PR gives the perception of history a theoretic status. The authors differentiate between five different periods of PR development in the United States: The first three are linked to the political and economic history (*Preliminary Period* 1600–1799; *Communicating/Initiating* 1800–1899; *Reacting/Responding* 1900–1939), while the latter two go beyond politics and economy and correspond to changes concerning the entire society (*Planning/Preventing* 1940–1979; *Professionalism* 1980–present). Here, management functions and strategic aspects of international communication are underlined.

Taking into account that three of the four periodizing descriptions only partially satisfy the demands of a solid scientific creation of periods, we found seven more or less fact- and event-oriented descriptions and only one appropriate periodization. Three approaches are based on theoretic modelings. Consequently, just over a quarter of the textbooks offer such a conceptual pattern of regularity, a pattern which would allow a discursive access to PR history. The analysis sustains the assumption that PR historiography is paradigmatically influenced, as it is possible to distill the perception of a quasi-evolutionary progress from most of the approaches. The aspect of historiographic convergence becomes specifically evident when we compare the stages of the different theory-oriented approaches (see Table 3).

Table 3
Theory-oriented approaches of textbooks

Newsom/Turk/Krucke-berg	Lattimore et al.	Grunig/Hunt
Preliminary period		
Communicating/initiating	Manipulation	Press agency/publicity
Reacting/responding	Information	Public information model
Planning/preventing	Mutual influence and understanding	Two way asymmetric model
Professionalism		Two way symmetric model

If we disregard Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg's *preliminary period*, a similar pattern of three to four evolutionary stages of PR emerges for all approaches.

8. Citation-context analysis

Instead of using the paradigm concept, one could argue that the historic facts lead all the authors to this sketch of PR development. However, as we have shown earlier alternative interpretations of the development of PR history do exist. We are now to find out, if this perception can be ascribed to one fundamental author. An initial heuristic look at the multiplicity of works on PR history brings Edward L. Bernays into focus. In his 1952 monograph "Public Relations", Bernays offers a periodization which outlines PR history as a progressive development. This work also contains the prominent periods *The Public be Damned*, as well as *The Public be Informed*. Although he modifies his periodization twice in later essays (Bernays, 1956, 1998), the core statement of an ethical progression remains unaffected. In its last and most compact form, originally dating from 1977, PR history consists of the two periods mentioned above in addition to a *Mutual Understanding Period*. With his perception of history, Bernays penetrates the academic field of PR strongly (Bentele, 1997), particularly as the second version of this periodization finds a place in the third edition of his standard work, "Crystallizing Public Opinion" (1961).

Next, we will analyze the paradigmatic influence of the perceptions of history using citation analysis (see Garfield, 1979; Nacke, 1980). Although paradigms may merge into scientific complexes of statements which are lacking in theory, we assume that they do reveal their function of orientation and order primarily in theory-oriented works. Given that the similarity of the descriptions has already been explained in detail, the following analysis is restricted to theory-oriented approaches only, as well as Cutlip, Center and Broom's approach because it already includes theoretic stages.

Verifiable citation of paradigm-competent opinions and authors is an indicator of an established paradigm. In order to determine if a certain idea defines the perception of PR's history in a paradigmatic way, we can divide references to theory-oriented approaches into three relevant categories. First, there is the possibility of nonhistorical references which are not directly related to PR historiography. Second, there are references which contribute to the mere compilation of facts or empiric substantiation. They are consequently identified as historic-cumulative references. Furthermore, there are historic-paradigmatic references. Their characteristic feature is to provide regulatory terms for and perspectives on historiography. The latter can additionally be identified by the positive citation of the author. The citations of the four chosen approaches are coded according to these three categories. As it is not possible to classify the material on the basis of the references alone, it is also necessary to ascertain the citation context. Those concerned are sections linked to the associated footnote which integrate the citation reasonably in the text (Small, 1984). Furthermore, the disciplinary origin of the references was ascertained as a potential paradigm of PR historiography would presumably have to emanate from PR research as well. The following table clarifies the systematics with the help of examples (Table 4).

If a paradigm of PR historiography is to be proven through a citation analysis, the following two criteria have to be met: (1) (almost) all of the works which are to be analyzed contain historic-paradigmatic citations; (2) these citations are so-called "concept symbols" (Small, 1978, p. 328; Allen, 1997) which signifies that they constitute symbols for a certain prevalent perception of history, and are utilized as persuasive referencing (Gilbert, 1977).

Our analysis shows that a proportion of approximately 95 out of 100 of the total citations ($n = 407$) of the four analyzed historic chapters can be classified as historic. Nevertheless, the underlying citations are to be assigned entirely to the historic-cumulative function of citations. Even Bernays, the hypothetical originator of the paradigm or the style of

Table 4
Dimensions of the citation analysis (authors' illustration)

Citation function	Citation context	Discipline
Historic-paradigmatic	The works of Grunig and Hunt (1984) constitute an appropriate and plausible classification of PR history"	PR
Historic-cumulative	"Promoter Barnum even employed his own press agent, Richard F. 'Tody' Hamilton"	PR
Nonhistoric	"That research led to what organizational theorists now call a contingency view of management"	Business administration

thought, is exclusively cited in a historic-cumulative way, which means that no textbook explicitly refers to his idea of evolution of public relations.

The paradigmatic status of a certain perception of PR history – such as the progressive transition from “bad” to “good” PR (Faulstich, 2001, p. 14) – does not appear to be provable by means of a citation context analysis in this case. This result is in stark contrast to the conclusions we made in the first part of the study which certify the significant congruity of the perceptions of history. Nevertheless an important result from bibliometric research is the conclusion that “important and influential discoveries are often incorporated by ‘obliteration’ in the common knowledge of a given discipline, and the original paper reporting is not often cited” (Campanario, 2003, p. 77). Thus, despite *and* due to having a scientifically successful career which should be detectable through content analysis, concepts which fall victim to the obliteration effect can no longer be identified through a citation analysis as they transform into “tacit knowledge” (Polanyi, 1958).

9. Conclusion and research perspectives

The perceptions of history developed in textbooks converge for the main part with each other as they maintain an ethical and technical progressive process of PR development in history, a development from manipulative beginnings to symmetric communication. Surprisingly, the fact that all authors of textbooks draw the same conclusions from the sources appears to be due to the fact that the image of the progressive development of PR is challenged by alternative historic interpretations. We assume that the progressive evolutionary construct is based upon a paradigmatic author, probably Edward Bernays. However, as we have not been able to provide evidence for this assumption, we suggest that the “obliteration effect” is able to explain this: The Bernays' perception of history which was published very early and very often is so widely used that it has already become a rarely questioned part of mainstream PR historiography.

The social orientation of the paradigm should be the objective of further research: To what extent do textbooks bring a more or less paradigmatically influenced perception forward? To what extent do they, due to an ignorance of critical perspectives, and perspectives doubting the paradigm, suppress competing opinions in research, and to what extent will they discuss alternative views, such as the current perspectives of Brown and Miller, in the future?

Furthermore, tools of empirical research – in this case, preferably, interviewing – could be used to try to answer those questions which could not be answered by means of the citation analysis. It would be possible, for example, to ask the authors of leading textbooks which role models they used for creating their particular perception of history. Through efforts such as these, it might be possible to support more plausibly the thesis of the diffusion of Bernays approach. However, we have to take into account that scholars tend to underestimate the impact of other authors theories on their own works: Reputation by the reclamation of self-contained thoughts is one of the central mechanisms in the scientific system (Luhmann, 1992). In terms of a discourse-oriented scientific education, the making of a new generation of textbooks which would follow a more differentiated, a more discursive, and a more self-reflexive portrayal of PR history would be desirable.

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Appendix A. Fact-oriented and periodizing approaches to PR history (major headlines only)

Author							
Marston	Moore and Kalupa	Seitel	Wilcox and Cameron	Nolte	Lovell	Simon	Cutlip, Center and Broom
Structuring headlines or periods							
A new communications medium	Ancient beginnings	Ancient beginnings	The roots of public relations	In the beginning	The colonial period	Revolution through civil war period	Ancient genesis
Public opinion and big business	The rise of mass production	Early American experience	The evolving functions: press agency, publicity and counseling	The American revolution	The penny press and P.T. Barnum	Post-civil war period	American beginnings
The muckrakers	Foundations of professional status	Later American experience	Public relations comes of age	The constitution	Temperance and slavery	The modern era	The middle years
The beginning of PR	Advertising as a tool of public relations	Ivy Lee: the real father of modern public relations		The new republic	The civil war period		Evolution to maturity: (1) Seedbed era: 1900–1917; (2) World War I Period: 1917–1919; (3) Booming twenties era: 1919–1929; (4) Roosevelt and World War II: 1930–1945; (5) Postwar era: 1945–1965; (6) Global information society: since 1965
	Reasons for the rapid growth of public relations	The growth of modern PR		The nineteenth century	The “robber barons”		
		Public relations comes of age		A new era	The muckrakers		
				World War I	The rise of Ivy Lee		
				Postwar developments	World War I		
				World War II	Edward Bernays, PR counsel		
				New developments	Enter the PR agency		
					World War II		
					The gray flannel suit		

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