The Impact of Divergent Historical and Cultural Factors on Convergence in Global Communication Practice

Mark Sheehan, Deakin University
Noel Turnbull, RMIT University

Abstract

Communication practice is increasingly converging around globally consistent approaches and techniques shaped by both globalisation and globalising communications technologies. However, this paper argues, national and regional practice histories and cultural characteristics have shaped, and continue to shape, practice in individual markets. The paper analyses the extent of that these divergent histories and cultures have shaped the structure and practices of the public relations industry in Australia and other countries. The paper challenges the common assumptions about public relations development and industry practice having developed from a predominantly US-based model progressively disseminated globally. It traces the history of public relations in Australia, counter-pointing its distinctive origins, to the US-origin thesis. It also examines the impact of demography and diverse national culture on industry shape and practice, comparing the Australian industry to that of other industries around the world. It uses mini-case studies of campaigns in specific countries to assess the extent to which they are culturally bound by historical and cultural differences and the extent to which they are capable of being transferred or adapted to individual markets. For instance, assumptions about globally consistent brand identities are contradicted by McDonald's' branding practices in markets such as Canada and Japan. The paper also discusses how emerging market PR industries are being shaped by distinctive and divergent cultures and development paths and may create new structural and practice models as the emerging economies becoming dominant internationally. The authors suggest that history and cultural diversity continue, and will continue to, shape national and regional practices.

Keywords: History, cultural factors, language, politics, crisis management

Introduction

For the last half of the 20th century it can be argued the dominant research paradigm regarding public relations history and indeed practice was US-centric.

In this paper we seeks to explore the limitations of this US and Euro-centric approach, how it is currently being modified, and argue that PR history, education and practice needs to consider divergent historical and cultural factors such as differences in cultural sensitivities, cultures, and economic, political, national and corporate structures. We adopt a case study based approach to illustrate how these differences affect practices and consider some of the implications of this for PR education. We also seek to put all these considerations within the context of some broader historiographical theories and compare and contrast these historiographic approaches to some common approaches to PR history, especially within Australia.

Marston (1963) remarked that in democratic nations public relations was a growing business and that 'public relations practices and principles resemble those in the United States'. Public relations was assumed to have started in the late 19th century in the US and was developed through the activities of early practitioners such as Lee and Bernays.

In the early 21st century the historical paradigm has increasingly been replaced within public relations academic circles by scholarship exploring the history of public relations in many countries ranging from Iran (Bagherian, 2005) to European nations (L'Etang & Piezcka, 2006; Salcedo 2008) and Australia (Griffen-Foley, 2004). Yet so far the implications for public relations practice of differing national and regional histories, cultures and societies has been relatively less studied.

Studies of public relations history have also often been undertaken from a distinctly industry perspective, which has often failed to recognise relevant developments in mainstream historical studies around the representation and image of rulers and institutions, mainly of a religious nature, and the use of persuasive techniques to shape those images and representation and maintain consensus among the ruled.

Trends in public relations history

Within this context there have been four broad trends in the development of this history of PR represented by first, the US-centric periodisation of public relations history as exemplified by Bernays (1965); second, the US-centric event and fact-based narrative public relations history such as Cutlip (1994, 1995); third, the emerging history of public relations globally and in

individual companies (Miller, 1999); and, fourth, the mainstream historical research on communication, representation and image undertaken for example by Eisenstein (1979), Sharpe (2009), Burke (1992), Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and others. Recently these latter trends have had a significant impact on US scholars who have, in response, extended their consideration of public relations history to earlier times with, for instance, Cutlip (1995) extending the US public relations history to events such as the Boston Tea Party and reinterpreting that incident as a form of public relations event.

Raaz and Wehmeier (2010) remark that most of these public relations academic trends have lacked theoretical underpinnings beyond a periodisation model in which 'linear maturation' is the major feature. L'Etang (2008) has also reflected that the US bias in public relations history writing 'may have limited theoretical developments' and has 'profoundly shaped the discipline'. There are many examples of this: Olasky's interpretation of public relations history 'in the context of his reading of the United States Constitution' (Pearson, 1990) and Vos' statement that 'PR practitioners will likely find it easier to embrace a field that is American rather than un-American' (Vos, 2011). The situation is further complicated by confusion about the nature of the word propaganda', a word freighted with negative connotations from the 20th century, but which had previously had a more straightforward meaning closer to that of other persuasive techniques. A further complication arose as a result of an anachronistic imposition of concepts of symmetric and unidirectional communication and asymmetric communications on previous public relations history aiding the development of the Whiggish (Butterfield, 1931) historical periodisation model in which public relations inexorably progresses from press agentry, asymmetry to symmetric communications and social media while ignoring the fact that not all modern public relations practice necessarily follows a symmetric model.

Equally anachronistic is the tendency in some histories of public relations to use the search for the first appearance of the words 'public relations' as the beginning of public relations history. This is lexicography rather than history. Moreover, in the past few decades there has been a proliferation of terms used to describe public relations function ranging across corporate relations, corporate affairs, corporate communications and so on. If there is not common agreement on what terms describe the function today it is unproductive to ignore the possibility of different terms describing the function or activities in the past. Indeed, in historiographical terms this entire approach is antiquarian (Woolf, 2011) rather than historical.

An Australian history

A narrative, event and fact-based view of Australian public relations history illustrates why the US-centric model of public relations history is not valid. For instance, interests representing Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) had undertaken public relations activities as part of tourist and immigration promotions from the 1820s when the artist Joseph Lycett (who never visited Tasmania) produced lithographs to encourage immigration and investment in the colony (McPhee, 2006). In the 1840s the same interests appointed John Jackson to 'lobby' on behalf of the colony and he did so by publishing and distributing pamphlets in London and ensured his activities were recorded in the Van Diemen's Land press (Penny, 1967). Official photographers were appointed from 1895 (Reynolds, 2012) to promote tourism. Smythe noted 'probably the first government film-making in the world' occurred in Australia in 1899 when a Queensland Government photographer filmed approximately 30 subjects, including street scenes in Sydney and Brisbane, with the aim of attracting immigrants. The films were shown soon afterwards at the Great Exhibition in London.

In the early 20th century Australian trade and tourism promotion by the Australian Government and the Australian Dried Fruits Board (Turnbull, 2010) mirrored similar UK efforts, especially the Empire Marketing Board and the Post Office, under the public relations leadership of Sir Stephen Tallents (Huxley, 1970; L'Etang 1999). Tallents undertook his duties as part of the Imperial Trade Preference and Imperial Trade Promotion campaigns throughout the British Empire, promoting the Empire to its citizens through its produce (Hudson, 1977). Tallents' influence was also seen in the activities of the New Zealand Public Relations Council based in London prior to World War II.

While this suggests Australian PR history mirrors that of other British Empire colonies with a focus on immigration and trade promotion, significantly a leading player in Australian trade promotion, Frank McDougall, not only worked in both Australia and the UK in this period but subsequently took senior roles with the Foreign Affairs Office (FAO), advised President Roosevelt on agricultural policy, and espoused an early form of social marketing around nutrition under the banner of 'marrying health and agriculture' (Everingham, 2002). In some respects the Australian public relations industry could also be regarded as a pacesetter. Eric White, a key figure in Australian public relations development, created what may have been one of the first multinational public relations companies (Turnbull, 2010; Sheehan, 2009) which, in 1964, was probably the first public relations company to be publicly listed on a stock exchange. Gavin Anderson, an Australian, also built one of the earliest multinational investor relations companies. However, it should be noted that a US-centric

interpretation of Australian history was until recently still pursued by some Australian authors of public relations texts. Zawawi (2000, 2009), for instance, emphasises Hollywood press agentry in Australia and has claimed it was highly influential in founding and shaping Australian public relations.

A historiographical approach

Currently public relations historiography falls well into the 'history as progress' that leads to a better future (Holtzhausen, 2012) view, especially if we apply a 'Grunigian analysis'. Watson (2013) has recently argued strongly against this approach and has exhorted researchers to push away from the Anglo-American focus and seek other voices. In heeding this call it is also worth considering the contrast of Western and Chinese historiography. Plumb has noted that 'the movement of the past in the West was linear, in the East cyclical, though not without the concept of betterment' (Plumb, 2004, pp. 11–12).

Many nations can now point to similar events and facts that push the public relations historical development further back and situate it within national contexts. Yet, while this corrects the US-centric view of public relations history, it does not provide a strong theoretical base or framework for understanding how and why persuasive techniques around representation and image have evolved. One way of reinterpreting this development is to turn to mainstream histories of human and national development. Within this context two hypotheses can be suggested. First, that the drive to communicate is inherent in the development of human consciousness since our earliest days, as illustrated by rock art (Lewis-Williams, 2002) and other prehistoric developments (Renfrew, 2007). Second, that how this drive to communicate developed, and was used as a conscious form of persuasion and public information, is rooted in the different historical, religious, cultural and economic developments within different countries and regions at different times. Thus Eusebius' fourth century biography of Constantine was polemical, hagiographic and a means of promulgating an image of Christian development; or consider the role of Glastonbury Abbey in promoting the 'national' brand of England (Croft et al., 2008); while portraits of Louis XIV (Burke, 1992) and Napoleon (Sagona, 2012) were representations designed to portray specific images directed to specific target audiences. The 18th and 19th century English evangelical campaigns around slavery and child labour (Turnbull, 2010) were a product of the specific social conditions of early British capitalism and an early example of combined publicity and lobbying campaigns.

Possible reasons for a US-centric view of PR history

The challenge is to relate this to modern public relations practice and to interrogate its implications for global public relations practice. To address the problem it is useful to look at the very persuasive reasons for adopting a US-centric view of public relations history and practice. In Australia such reasons include the impact of US textbooks on the body of knowledge explored by undergraduates studying public relations; the lack of knowledge of history and earlier forms of public relations; and the impact of globalisation and the power of US culture.

In the first case it is instructive to consider an early Australian public relations textbook (Tymson & Sherman, 1987). The book's bibliography cites 40 references, of which 30 are US-published texts (75%) and five (12.5%) are Australian, with one of these (Potts, 1976) some 20 years old at the time of the Tymson and Sherman publication. Another three Australian references were commercially published media directories. In contrast, the current first-year RMIT University undergraduate course in public relations has four prescribed texts. Two are Australian, one is a US text (Newson & Hayes, 2005), and one is a UK text. While this is not the same as a bibliography it is indicative of what texts students are required to use and the changes that are occurring in the sources of those texts. (RMIT, 2012)

The second issue is illustrated by our earlier discussion. Public relations academics looking at public relations history have only recently begun to investigate the distinctive histories of their own industries, and the mainstream historical research is only gradually becoming absorbed into considerations of public relations history, let alone providing theoretical frameworks for analysing the subject. The US texts on public relations history thus existed largely in a vacuum, which they successfully filled.

The third issue probably needs no comment beyond ritual mention of Hollywood and US popular culture from Douglas Fairbanks to Madonna to rap and The Wire, all disseminated through increasingly global communication tools.

Balanced against these issues are the way language, cultural sensitivities, demography, religion, culture and social practices impact on public relations practice. For the purposes of this paper we will specifically illustrate, through case studies, how public relations practice changes nationally and regionally rather than converging globally as a result of cultural sensitivities and differences, language, political context and national development and corporate structural issues.

Cultural sensitivities

Perhaps one of the most ubiquitous symbols of US global cultural impact is McDonald's. Yet even McDonald's' global marketing and public relations strategies are adapted to the cultural sensitivities of other cultures. In Kyoto, Japan, the company changed its red McDonald's symbol to brown in the face of local, and priestly, opposition to the use of red – a sacred colour – in what might be considered Japan's cultural capital. In Canada the company includes the maple leaf symbol on the golden arches logo while retaining the red colour.

The 'McLibel' court case, in which McDonald's took action for defamation against two environmental activists for distributing a leaflet attacking McDonald's' environmental record, workplace conditions and the nutritional value of its food, became a case study in the negative perceptions such situations can generate (Seymour & Moore, 2000). This subsequently led to differing reactions in differing countries to McDonald's' issue and crisis management strategies. McDonald's' reaction to the documentary *Supersize Me* in Australia and the US is an example of these differing approaches. In the US McDonalds took 'a minimalist approach, using their Director of World Nutrition as the prime media contact', while in Australia the company took an aggressive approach involving advertising in cinemas and positive promotion to internal and external stakeholders (Sheehan, 2005). The reasons for this differing approach might be varied. Australia certainly has a strong public health lobby, which has significant impact on policy, and the smaller market makes it more cost-effective to address the issues through advertising; plus, Australian society is perhaps less litigious than US society. The difference in approach may also be a result of different management imperatives in the two countries. Whatever the reason, the fact is that the approaches are different and that standard globalised practice is not employed for even the best-known and most iconic global US brands.

The concept of place is also an important ingredient of cultural differences. In 2007, Starbucks experienced the public relations ramifications of cultural sensitivities about place. Starbucks entered China in 1999 and in 2000 opened an outlet in Beijing's Forbidden City, in the Palace Museum. Public pressure forced it to close in 2007. Han and Zhang (2009) analyse this closure within the circuit of culture model originating from cultural studies (Curtin & Gaither, 2007), which 'stresses situational particularities in constructing the existing meaning of a certain product'. Starbucks was positioned in China as a 'coffee experience' but its marketing and public relations did seek to localise the brand. Han and Zhang cite Bolt (2005) and Harris (2007) in terms of how stores were adapted and how events such as traditional Chinese holidays were used for

promotions. But, as Han and Zhang remark, while to some Starbucks represents Westernisation or modernization, the Forbidden City has a range of symbolic, historic and national implications for China and the Chinese. To protect 'national dignity', Chinese citizens engaged in an internet-based campaign originated by a blogger, Chenggang Rui, a news anchor on China Central TV. The campaign drew heavily on references to foreign interventions in China and the killing and looting which accompanied them. Han and Zhang draw a number of implications about public relations practice from the case ranging across issues scanning and the role of social media but the key issues were cultural. They might also be linguistic as well, as Starbucks' headquarters issued a statement, after Forbidden City officials asked them to close the store, that 'we fully respect the decision of the Forbidden City to transit a new mode of concessions service to its museum visitors', although such 'Newspeak' might be construed as closely culturally and linguistically aligned with an official Chinese announcement.

Cultural sensitivities: place and history

Another example of the significance of place, particularly when combined with local cultural sensitivities and local historical legends, is provided by a Hong Kong–based public relations practitioner whose firm operated across the region and in China. The company (Bentley, 2012) had had a property development client who had several sites in Beijing. One commercial complex was to the west of Tiananmen, and traffic arrangements in the late 1990s were not good as this was an older district with many dilapidated palaces. The second building was an office block to the east of Tiananmen, and the third a residential project to the north side of the city.

The agency principal, Annie Bentley, informed the authors that the commercial complex suffered from a lack of shopper traffic and leasing was slow when we the agency was first retained.

> The client was initially inclined to lower rents to potential tenants … [however] ... after looking into the more obvious but prosaic technical and structural advantages of these sites and buildings, we realised historically (based on popular sayings in Chinese verse and rhyme) in the Manchu Dynasty from 1600s to 1900s, to the west of the Forbidden City was where the enclaves for top Mandarins and courtiers were, and the east was where the wealthy merchants and purveyors built their homes one or two centuries late.
>
> We then advised the client to raise their rental bar to the very highest possible for the western mall and introduced and

promoted all international top brands for the complex, which was somewhat risky in the 1990s as these brands were then as yet relatively unknown. It worked.

The office to the east was aligned with stories of outstanding wealthy merchants in the 1800s and 1900s and we targeted financial services corporations seeking to enter the Chinese market as potential tenants. It likewise leased well.

As to the residential development to the north of the city near the Great Wall, we used the fact that the Thirteen Ming Emperors Tombs (a World Heritage site) would be solid proof that the land possessed the best possible *Feng Shui* and the *chi* of the emperors and imperial families would rub off on the residents. The houses sold very successfully. (Bentley, 2012)

While *Feng Shui* is probably common in some parts of California it is not generally regarded as standard operating procedure in general US public relations practice.

Language

There are many examples (some perhaps apocryphal but many attested) of problems created by language and translations when campaigns and products are transferred from one country to another. Coca Cola printed signs in China bearing the words 'ke-kou-ke-la', which was believed to be a translation of the brand name but actually meant 'Bite the wax tadpole' (Little, 2007). *Marketing* (1998) listed a series of such problems. For example, the Pepsi slogan 'Come alive with Pepsi' became 'Pepsi will bring your ancestors back from the dead'. Ford marketed its Pinto brand in Brazil before realising that 'Pinto' meant 'tiny male genitals' there. The name was subsequently changed to 'Corcel' (a horse). Coors' slogan 'Turn it loose' was translated into Spanish as 'Suffer from diarrhoea'. Parker Pen ran a campaign in Mexico that confused the word 'embarrass' for the Spanish word for 'pregnant'.

Even among Tallents' former Empire citizens, language can cause difficulties. 'So where the bloody hell are you?' was a A$180 million advertising campaign launched in 2006 by Tourism Australia, created by the Sydney office of the London advertising agency M&C Saatchi**.**

The campaign slogan caused controversy in March 2007 when it was banned by the Broadcast Advertising Clearance Centre in the UK, which would not allow the word 'bloody' in television versions of the commercial. Following lobbying by Tourism Australia, including a visit to the UK by

Australia's tourism minister Fran Bailey and Lara Bingle (the star of the campaign), the ban was lifted, although a 9pm 'watershed' was imposed on television commercials in May.

In March 2007, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in the UK ordered the removal of roadside billboards bearing the slogan. The ASA stated that it had received 32 complaints and warned Tourism Australia to refrain from using profanity in future billboards. The advertisement has also been banned by regulators in Canada, owing to the implication of 'unbranded alcohol consumption' by the opening line, 'We've poured you a beer'. There was also concern in Canada at the word 'hell' being used as an expletive. The campaign has been allowed to run with no adverse action in countries such as the US and New Zealand. In Singapore, the advertisement campaign was presented as 'So Where Are You?', with the words 'bloody hell' removed (Sheehan, 2012)

In Japan, the slogan required reworking. According to Cameron (2006) 'The catchiest punchline in years has proved impossible to translate into Japanese', leaving Tourism Australia having to translate the slogan to 'So? Why don't you come?'

Differences in practice can sometimes be quite subtle. For instance, Burson Marsteller (Adams, 2012) reports that in implementing educational campaigns (e.g. for the German Wine Board) or marketing programs (e.g. for Avon Cosmetics) in Japan, the techniques employed were not that different to what was being done in other markets for the same clients. Adams says:

> The main differences were language (that sounds an obvious
> one, but you'd be surprised how many foreign firms think they
> can get away with English or badly translated material). It is
> essential that the Japanese be perfect and that there be lots of
> it! Typically a Japanese media kit will be far weightier than an
> English equivalent – you need to provide far more background
> information than any U.S. or Australian journalist would
> require. (Adams, 2012)

Political context

Cultural differences also influence communication practice in political contexts, such as in extreme situations like 'terrorism', revolutionary situations and 'liberation struggles'. Since 2001 there has been some study of the public relations aspects of terrorism both in terms of public relations activities against terrorism and also public relations by terrorists. Some 'terrorist' public relations strategies (Somerville & Purcell, 2010) are now

more sophisticated than the simple propaganda of the deed practiced by anarchists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In exploring Irish Republican publicity between Bloody Sunday and the Good Friday Agreement, the authors reveal sophisticated publicity strategies directed towards building awareness and understanding as well as prosecuting a political agenda. Sinn Fein, for instance, appointed a Director of Publicity, Danny Morrison, to coordinate these activities.

In the Middle East, research on recent revolutions and election results is still emerging but it is striking to see contrasts between US (and Western) perceptions and predictions about events and outcomes. Even without detailed research it would be fair to conclude that the narrative around the recent events in Egypt focused on events in Tahrir Square, Cairo, and the role of social media in the protests. Indeed, commentators frequently referred to a 'social media revolution'. Yet subsequent election results suggest that more traditional forms of organisation by the Muslim Brotherhood and labour unions were more influential in winning widespread support among the Egyptian population. In essence this success was based on decades of community relations programs involving grassroots organisation, education and social welfare, which communicated Muslim Brotherhood policies and built support. The unexpected electoral victory by Hamas in 2006 was most probably based on similar community relations activity, which ensured their views and actions were widely understood in their communities. The electoral success of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, despite severe restrictions and repression of their activities, was based on similar tactics.

While some of the techniques used in all three cases would be recognisable to practitioners around the world, their application was also rooted in specific conditions in specific societies and cultures.

Cultural differences

The approach to apologies in crisis management is another illustration of cultural differences and how they affect practice. In standard crisis management responses, it is common to emphasise the need to not only tell the truth about a crisis as quickly as possible, but also to demonstrate adequate remorse or apology (consistent with legal issues) for any fault by the company which caused the crisis. This can be complicated in societies in which 'face' or 'apologies' have particular significance and role. These differences can be illustrated by comparisons of Japanese and Chinese responses to crisis situations, as dissimilar to each other as they are to practices in the US. The Sanlu infant milk crisis in China in 2008 resulted from contamination of infant milk powder traced to melamine contamination in infant milk fed to Chinese children, which was initially covered up. While

there are many features of the crisis, Custance, Walley and Jiang (2012) have noted, in describing and analysing the context of crisis band management, that while some senior company managers were prosecuted for the scandal and 'made to formally apologise as part of their sentence the companies themselves do not appear to have made an attempt to offer an apology'. At the risk of showing cultural insensitivity and reliance on crude cultural anthropology, it seems that whereas it is common in Chinese culture to preface statements with apologetic terms or tone, in contrast the question of formal apologies is complicated by the need to maintain 'face'.

Japanese society places great emphasis on the need to apologise for shortcomings and behaviour. Historically such an apology may have taken the form of ritual disembowelment, so the apology tradition has serious antecedents. Inoue (2010) suggests that while Japanese companies, as with the Chinese Sanlu case, may be initially reluctant to deal with crises, 'apologising plays a key role when Japanese companies respond to a crisis – an act that is often misunderstood by non-Japanese'. Inoue argues that a Japanese apology may not involve a claim of guilt or innocence but rather reflects a sense of obligation. When Bridgestone/Firestone CEO, Masatoshi Ono, began his testimony into a congressional hearing about Firestone tyres and fatal accidents with an apology, Inoue says 'I thought, "That is not something that is done in a public hearing in the United States" '. Similarly, recent problems at Japanese companies Olympus (accounting irregularities) and Nomura (insider trading allegations) have resulted in apologies. In the Olympus case (Soble, 2012) the CEO, Hiroyuki Sasa, said about fixing the company problems: 'We are hurrying but it will take more time. I'm extremely sorry' (Soble, 2012). Nomura issued a statement (McLannahan, 2102) saying the company 'regret(s) … that non-public information was received from Nomura employees in such cases'. The bank said it 'sincerely apologises for the trouble this has caused'.

What is clear, from even just these two examples, is that the cultural issues of 'face', 'apology', obligation and tradition have significant impact on how crises are managed in China and Japan in contrast with Western societies.

Crisis and issues management

Crisis and issues management practice vary between Western countries (as indicated by the McDonald's discussion above) but variations due to cultural differences can be seen when a crisis arises in one country from circumstances which would be commonplace in another. For example, two Australian Olympic swimmers training in the US (Jaques, 2012) visited a Californian shooting range and were photographed posing with guns. The pictures were posted on Facebook and caused significant controversy in

Australia, resulting in the Australian Olympic Committee ordering the swimmers to take down the post, cease using social media and return to Australia immediately after their events at the London Olympics. Jaques said in his newsletter: 'While the Internet and online technology is rapidly flattening out cultural differences (the incident) provides a reminder that what might be commonplace in one country can trigger a reputational crisis another.' In this case, while shooting is an Olympic sport, neither swimmer was a shooting Olympian: 'gun ownership is strictly controlled in Australia and there is low public tolerance of personal firearms' (Jaques, 2012).

All these case studies illustrate how one global, convergent approach to public relations practice is difficult to maintain and that one practice model is not necessarily appropriate in all circumstances.

Conclusion

An understanding of cultural, political climate and communication barriers is essential in public relations practiced internationally, as there is no substitute for knowing and understanding the overseas territory with the same thoroughness that a practitioner knows and understands the domestic scene. In a telling example, Fraser Seitel's (2007) popularly used *The Practice of Public Relations* (international edition) includes a chapter on 'international relations' (*sic)*, which seems to be a misnomer for PR practice around the world. The two-paragraph section on Australian and New Zealand contains the sentence, 'In fact one New Zealand non-profit, Queensland Health, was accused of being more interested in public relations than in health care' (p. 319). There is nothing more basic in knowing the territory than knowing the geography!

It is clear that PR academics are moving away from the US-centric model of public relations history and practice.

While it is commonplace to speak of globalisation and its implications for economies, business, politics and public relations practice, the realities are more complicated. Geography, culture, history and other factors still have significant impact on how public relations is practiced around the world, just as national and cultural differences impact on politics and business. However, further research is needed to explore more of the ramifications of a more diverse and multi-centred model of how public relations originated, is practiced and is developing.

Historians of public relations should now build on work to integrate the study of public relations history into broader historiographical theoretical models in general, and situate their researches within the specific context of research into communication, persuasion and image throughout history.

There have been exceptions to this over the years; the excellent work of Conyers Read (1961) on William Cecil and Elizabethan Public Relations is one that broke the mould on many points we have discussed in this paper. Such work is now less rare. Equally, it is clear that while insights from knowledge of public relations practice, media and communication is illuminating the work of many mainstream historians as much as their work can illuminate the study of public relations history, the opportunities for cooperation between the two disciplines need to be further developed.

This would be assisted by undertaking a more sustained and systematic approach to developing an epistemology of public relations, to add depth to our understanding of how public relations education differs from, or resembles, the study of other disciplines. At the least we should be exploring new interdisciplinary approaches to public relations education and training.

Greater emphasis on making case studies of practice within different cultures more accessible to students and practitioners is also growing in importance, although more research into the underlying reasons for why practice is different will also be instructive. Such further research should make public relations practice around the world more effective, if not necessarily more similar.

Acknowledgements

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