

**ADVANCED PUBLIC RELATIONS: ENHANCING A
REFLEXIVE AND EDUCATIONAL APPROACH**
**RELAÇÕES PÚBLICAS AVANÇADAS: FORTALECER UMA
ABORDAGEM REFLEXIVA E EDUCACIONAL**

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This special volume of the *Comunicação e Sociedade* journal explores an approach to the advanced public relations studies. In order to help the reader to follow this vision on public relations (PR) – following Fombrun and Shanley’s advice in the article “What’s in a name? Reputation building and corporate strategy” (1990) –, these introductory remarks explain the meaning given to the concept and go back to PR essentials. To that end, Hutton’s 1999 text was taken as the reference paper to the definition of public relations as “managing strategic relationships” between organizations and stakeholders. Although it is a classic definition (Grunig & Todd, 1984), its holistic vision accommodates the most recent debates.

Following Hutton’s (1999) statement, then, this edition was designed to present a collection of articles on the studies of advanced public relations that seek a better understanding of the theory and practice of contemporary public relations, making possible some conclusions about PR research and profession in the early 21st century. The purpose was to promote the debate on “the core of advanced public relations capabilities”, which, according to Verčič, Van Ruler, Bütschi e Flodin (2001, p. 380), are its *reflective* and *educational roles* (as pointed out in a study on PR in Europe). Thus, succeeding Verčič et al. (2001) proposal, this special volume discusses the ability of public relations to concur for the construction of socially relevant standards and values and for the communicative education of internal publics in contemporary organizations, as citizens within our communities. The aim of this publication was, than, to highlight, amongst traditional PR functions of management and communication planning, a stronger social dimension, which was entitled as “advanced”. To this purpose, another one was added: to explore linguistic and cultural idiosyncrasies, which resulted from the participation in this edition of researchers from different countries of the Ibero-American universe.

Advanced public relations then define the framework that was used to examine the role of PR in current organizations, exploring the available range of communication

techniques and tools, revisiting the strategic communication planning models in use to meet the public needs, or discovering the usefulness of the web channels as the core of new PR modalities, simultaneously personalized and global. In time of fast changes and amplified communication, it is important that the academy and public relations professionals continuously assess their activities and its consequences in organizations and societies. Looking at the contemporary communication environment, we undertake a reflective path that can help companies to achieve business goals, institutions to align with their public service functions, governments to develop participative decisions or audiences to create more critical thinking.

This line of thought was encouraged in the XIV edition of the AIRP Congress – the Association of Researchers in Public Relations of Spain –, held in April 2019 in Ponta Delgada at the University of the Azores, Portugal. The Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS) at the University of Minho was a partner in this initiative and this special volume of the *Comunicação e Sociedade* journal results from a selection of texts presented to the congress.

The AIRP meeting included participants from Spain, Portugal and Latin America, who exchanged ideas and experiences about the field in their countries, seeking to follow up the association's foundational objectives: to defend the scientific status of Public Relations, to promote the research in the field, to encourage the continuous training of professionals and to spread the knowledge produced in the area. These are purposes that can also be detected in the global mission of CECS, revealed in the concept that expresses its guiding mission: “producing knowledge; building communities”.

Of the papers presented at the congress, a set of articles was selected for its affinity with the concept of “advanced public relations”. These studies analyze the current use of classic public relations techniques, expressing the social and educational concerns of the field that drive organizational and community changes. The articles cover a wide range of topics, from strategic communication management to the exploration of relevant and current issues, such as corporate citizenship, forest fires, road prevention and drug use, lobbying in the European Union, promotion of the arts, or social networks.

The paper “The importance of personal branding as an element of public relations: an international experience”, written by Julinda Morales Cardoso, Carmen López de Aguilera and Beatriz Legerén Lago, opens the journal. This investigation examined the degree of knowledge of young people about personal branding and the importance of its management in the context of public relations. Although impressions' management, in particular image management, is an organizational concern that dates back to the 1950s, its application to personal branding is a much more recent phenomenon that seems to affect life in society (if not remember the growing phenomena of influencers or youtubers). This study reveals that young people are increasingly concerned with the topic, but differences were found between Portuguese and Spanish students.

Afterwards, the article “Comparative analysis of corporate communication management between companies and institutions: the Galician case” is presented. This study,

by Carmen Costa-Sánchez, José-Miguel Tüñez-López and María-Isabel Míguez-González, makes a comparison between the communication departments of public and private organizations in the Autonomous Community of Galicia, a geographic area far from the socio-economic and political centers in Spain. Considering that the analysis of organizations of smaller size and resources, or outside the main media flows, should not be excluded from the research agenda, the study finds that institutional communication has a more developed strategic dimension than that carried out by corporate communication departments. These data, which contradict other international studies, are most likely the result of a lack of perception of the limits between political and institutional communication within the organizations studied.

Following is the text “Communication and crisis management in Galician companies: study of its evolution in the last two years”, by Ana Belén Fernández-Souto, Montse Vázquez-Gestal and Iván Puentes-Rivera. The article explores the communication approach used by Galician companies classified as “highly polluting” in crisis situations. The objective of the investigation was to perform an x-ray of the use of crisis management techniques by these business organizations, to assess activity in this sector, as well as its evolution in recent years (2014-2016). The data show that communication and crisis management are still not a concern for these companies, whose stance remains reactive and not strategic.

Continuing on the theme of crisis management, the article “When the sender is the message: the communication of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa about 2017 fires” can be found. Bianca Persici Toniolo and Gisela Gonçalves examine the official crisis communication from the Presidency of the Portuguese Republic during the forest fires that took place in the months of June and October of 2017. The research concluded that the Portuguese Presidency chose the *meaning management strategy*, combined with the *adjustment and repair information*, thus producing appropriate responses to the circumstances. However, it was observed that the effectiveness of this crisis communication is also related to the personal characteristics of the sender, the President, and the context variables, which were more relevant to crisis communication than the content of the messages themselves.

The article “The role of public relations professionals in corporate social responsibility: some notes from the Portuguese reality”, by Mafalda Eiró-Gomes and Ana Raposo, proposes the review of a classic PR area, asking new questions to current practices: are public relations professionals involved in decision-making processes on corporate citizenship or are they just called on to disseminate the practices of organizations at this level? Are organizations committed to corporate social responsibility or corporate citizenship? Responding to these concerns, the authors conclude in their study that the social (philanthropic) area seems to be still the most relevant in the organizations interviewed, although under strong reformulations. On the other hand, the concept of corporate citizenship is not largely used and communication professionals do not seem to assume responsibilities at a strategic level.

Still reviewing the founding areas of PR, Ana Almansa-Martínez and Elizabet Castilero-Ostio wrote the text: “Spanish lobbies listed in the European transparency register”. They conclude that lobbyists are still, currently, the main political agents of influence in the decision-making of different institutions. The investigation analyzed the composition and functioning of the 745 Spanish interest groups that are, at the date of the study, listed in the European Union Transparency Register. In this way, they sought to show the relevance of the influence of these groups on those responsible for the political decisions at the European Parliament.

In a very different approach, Maria Pilar Paricio Esteban, María Puchalt López and Sandra Femenia Almerich, concerned with the fact that Spain is among the European countries with the highest road accidents due to drug use, wrote about their study: “Public relations and campaigns about road safety and drug use: evaluation of effectiveness in audiovisual media”. This research sought to measure the effectiveness of media relations when campaigning for road safety and drug free drive. The results showed that the low coverage of the theme and the lack of continuity have consequences on low agenda setting and low publicity, what does not seem to be in line with the objectives of the institutions.

In the next section, another text can be found about public relations in the cultural area: “Communication at the superior conservatories of music in Andalusia”. Written by Rosario Haro-Almansa and Guillermo van Zummeren-Moreno, the article focuses on the study of public relations activities carried out in the five Andalusian music conservatories, currently active (representing 16% of music teaching centers in the country). After analyzing the results, the authors concluded that, in the upper conservatories, there is an internal flow of communication equivalent to that of any educational institution, and that their actions in the external environment, and their commitment to the musical cultural heritage, make the communication developed by these centers in paradigms that generate and preserve culture and art.

From here, a set of articles were gathered on the use of communication and information technologies for the development of institutional and corporate communication strategies. The initial text was written by Emilia Smolak Lozano, Sara Balonas and Teresa Ruão – “Public relations strategies in social media: analysis of campaigns for social change in the education sector in Spain and Portugal” – and discusses the use of social networks in non-governmental organizations communication in the Iberian Peninsula. For this analysis, two case studies of social media campaigns were developed: #LeonorDejaLaEscuela from Fundación Secretariado Gitano, in Spain (2015), and #Amigo-Bagos-Douro da Associação Bagos de Ouro, in Portugal (2017). The first one was implemented on Twitter, while the second one used WhatsApp. The results demonstrate that social networks can play a fundamental role in non-profit communication, as they have enormous potential for lobbying, for creating partnerships, for raising funds, for mobilizing volunteers and for involving traditional media or the community.

The next article is entitled “The communication role: the use of social networking sites in primary health care” and is authored by Andreia Garcia and Mafalda Eiró-Gomes.

This is a study on the use of social networks in the health sector in Portugal, based on the analysis of the communicative behavior of local health units, which are public services of proximity integrated in the Portuguese national health service. The study looked to understand how the communication developed by these institutions, in particular the ones that use social networks, is contributing to the fulfillment of their missions. The conclusions show that these organizations do not truly recognize the value of communication, nor the potential of new channels as privileged means for communicating with their audiences. Social networks are still used as tools for disseminating information and not for interaction purposes.

In the following text, Verónica Altamirano-Benítez, Miguel Túnñez-López and María Fabiana Altamirano-Benítez studied “Tourism promotion on Twitter”, by the Ibero-American governments. According to the authors, even for economic reasons, the Ibero-American governments today are investing on communication to promote the country and to position themselves as tourist destinations through digital campaigns. In this context, the results of their analysis show that these states use Twitter as a platform for communication and tourism promotion, but still present unstructured guidelines for action and unclear messages, being therefore unable to strengthen their image and to positioning themselves as tourist destinations. From a tactical point of view, they recognize that the content update and relationship management are inconsistent, with periods of excessive presence in the networks and stages of abandonment, which has consequences for tourist participation rates and engagement achieved.

The last article is called “Public relations in growth hacking strategies in digital communication: the case studies of Wallapop, Westwing and Fotocasa”. Authored by Patricia Coll and Josep Lluís Micó this article analyzes the strategic planning of public relations of reference digital native brands in Barcelona, headquarters of the international technology fair “Mobile World Congress” and the fifth European center in number of startups. The results of the study show that the public relations actions of the analyzed brands integrate a broader marketing strategy, including the use of communication actions such as: advertising, content marketing and influence marketing. The study sought to develop knowledge about *growth hacking*, as a strategic focus of public relations, analyzing how this technique is prepared and implemented by native digital brands.

As can be seen by reading the articles mentioned, the “advanced capacity” of public relations, or its social mission, can be greatly enhanced by the combination of the study of communication practices with academic theorization, aiming to improve the comprehension of phenomena and to create a wide awareness of its effects in the public space.

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