

#FuturePR

By Tony 'Lorenzo' Sunner

The PR as Edward Bernays had envisaged at the beginning of the 20th century is little more than a distant memory. Although, that's certainly how many contemporary PR practitioners would prefer it – a model which is faded into the obscurity of history. However, this model is frequently resurrected by PR's critics and used as an edifice to bear witness to the illegitimacy of PR as a viable professional.

PR like any other profession has been subject to the social norms of its day. These norms and trends are no more apparent than what is occurring today with regards to how social media has radically altered the media landscape. Both communication and PR has readily embraced the powers of social media far more quickly than its counter professions such as politics and law. Incidentally, the whole fiasco surrounding super injunctions has soundly demonstrated how limited both political and legal frameworks are in their failure to grasp the sheer diversity of social media.

Social media has only hastened Grunig's notion of the symmetrical two way communication. Initially Grunig proposed a model which outlined four definitive methods of how an establishment communicates with its publics. On one hand we were provided with propaganda which was entirely one-way and very manipulative which is juxtaposed besides a balanced symmetrical communication which essentially is a balanced dialogue between an organisation and its publics. One suggestion for two-way symmetrical communication is the extreme rapid nature of social media ability to broadcast breaking news across the globe. However, this doesn't necessarily have to be news it can be a movement between groups of people with common interests. The internet has ennobled individuals with voices (notably the rebels of the Arab spring) and mobilised action through social media such as twitter, scribd, flickr, facebook, Tumblr, youtube, 4square and socialscope are able to command action. It is through previous demonstrations of consumer action organisations have been strongly advised to facilitate two-symmetrical communication in order to diffuse any disenchantment and alienation their publics may feel. The threat from cyberspace is so real that David Cameron has recently pledged one billion pounds worth of funding to intelligence agencies to help combat cyber crime in opposition to cuts made towards local police forces.

So where does this leave PR?

PR as it remains will assume a more ambiguous position in relation to the borders which define the profession. Certainly, the skeletons of propaganda still haunt the profession and it was only as recently as the conquest of Iraq were the gross use of propaganda as used by the Sir Alastair Campbell and the JIT (Joint Intelligence Committee) continue to be conjured up in the PR/Profession debate from time to time. My understanding is PR will become more diluted and incorporate more diverse avenues and methods of communication and management. The methods people use to communicate continue to take on a diverse and adaptable form. Equally, the degeneration of traditional news agencies at the hands of independent news sources on the internet is yet another symbol of 'power to the people'. The analogy of war in Iraq provides no end of a lesson into how social media can alter public opinion and attitudes. The outcry and public anger towards the illegitimacy of the war can be identified as a direct response to the alternative news sources and narratives available online. These sources helped form the bedrock of the peoples hymn sheet of disunion towards the coalition and government forces. I envisage PR to continue to its steady

growth for it provides major corporate companies and conglomerates with guidance and understanding in how to implement CSR and utilise government lobby groups. I feel PR shall continue to diversify and adapt water like state, consistently subject to change and never fixed or rigid. It is this very nature of PR which I understand it in becoming the bedrock of an organisations communication programme.