

Chapter 2

Influencing Public Opinion: The Foundation of PR Then and Now

CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

Chapter 2 examines public opinion, propaganda, attitudes and beliefs, influencers, and the factors of persuasion. It also outlines the history of PR in the United States and Canada. The chapter ends with a discussion of the public's opinion on public relations and how that opinion was formed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THIS CHAPTER

1. Explain public opinion and why it is important to the practice of public relations.
2. Describe the various tactics that influence public opinion and explain how they are used.
3. Outline the contributions to the profession of key people in public relations history.
4. Explain why the public's perception of PR practitioners might be negative and what PR practitioners can do to counteract this view.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

1. Public Opinion: What it is and How it is Shaped – Page 39

Public opinion is defined as a prevailing opinion or a popularly held belief. It can be challenging to change public opinion at any given moment but it does adapt over time.

PR practitioners understand and appreciate what a powerful force public opinion is and how it is formed. They are employed by clients or organizations to influence it.

2. How PR Practitioners Work with Public Opinion – Page 42

PR practitioners work with public opinion in two different ways: they try and influence it or they use it to generate media coverage. A public relations plan outlines strategies and tactics in order to strengthen, influence, or change public opinion. In order to measure the campaign's impact on public opinion, surveys or polls are typically taken at the beginning, during, and at the end of the campaign to see if opinion has shifted.

In order to use public relations to garner media coverage, PR practitioners use interesting poll or survey results that can be tied to their organization or client and pitch them to the media. In this section, techniques for influencing public opinion are also examined.

3. The History of PR and the First Practitioners to Influence Public Opinion – Page 46

In this section, the history of PR in both the United States and Canada is explored. Reviewing this history helps us better understand the evolution of PR. Some components of the practice have changed and some are almost identical to the way PR was practised in the early days. This section also outlines the role women had on the profession's history.

4. The Public's Opinion of Public Relations – Page 57

Unfortunately, practices such as propaganda, spin, and astroturfing have tarnished the public's perception of public relations even though most practitioners act ethically and with integrity. These perceptions are compounded by the turbulent relationship the PR profession has with the media. It is up to all practitioners to help repair PR's reputation through professional and reputable practices.

Multiple Choice Questions

1. What is not a characteristic of public opinion?

- A) It is influenced by culture and religion
- B) It's difficult to change
- C) It changes over time
- D) Only governments care about public opinion

Answer: D (Page 39, Learning Objective #1)

2. What is an opinion leader

- A) Someone who others look to when forming an opinion
- B) Someone who is opinionated
- C) Someone who monitors the public's opinion
- D) Someone who is hired to influence the public's opinion

Answer: A (Page 40, Learning Objective #1)

3. What are the three arguments Aristotle proposed for influencing others

- A) Reason, education, repetition
- B) Reason, ethics, emotion
- C) Repetition, reason, education
- D) Persuasion, education, rationale

Answer: B (Page 43, Learning Objective #2)

4. In his book *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell identifies what types of influencers?

- A) Connectors, mavericks, and recommenders
- B) Connoisseurs, collectors, and soldiers
- C) Connectors, mavens, and salesmen
- D) Real estate agents, doctors, and lawyers

Answer: C (Page 44, Learning Objective #2)

5. Which founding father of public relations is credited with inventing the modern day press release?

- A) Edward Bernays
- B) Ivy Lee
- C) Arthur Page
- D) George Ham

Answer: B (Page 47, Learning Objective #3)

6. Which founding father of public relations was hired by President Woodrow Wilson to garner support for the First World War?

- A) Edward Bernays
- B) Ivy Lee
- C) Arthur Page
- D) George Ham

Answer: A (Page 49, Learning Objective #3)

7. Which early female PR practitioner was the founder of the first industry newsletter, *Public Relations News*?

- A) Doris Fleischman
- B) Eleanor Roosevelt
- C) Anne Williams Wheaton
- D) Denora Griswold

Answer: D (Page 51, Learning Objective #3)

8. What were some of the first companies in Canada to conduct public relations:

- A) The Canadian Pacific Railway, Bell, the Royal Bank
- B) The Canadian Imperial Bank, Telus, Air Canada
- C) The Hudson's Bay Company, the Bank of Montreal
- D) The Bank of Nova Scotia, the Hudson's Bay Company, Telus

Answer: A (Page 53, Learning Objective #3)

9. Which war provided training for many of Canada's early PR practitioners?

- A) The First World War
- B) The Korean War
- C) The Second World War
- D) The War of 1812

Answer: C (Page 53, Learning Objective #3)

10. Which Canadian Prime Minister was a former journalist and skilled at media relations?

- A) Pierre Trudeau
- B) William Mackenzie King
- C) Sir John A. MacDonald
- D) John Diefenbaker

Answer: B (Page 53, Learning Objective #3)

11. Which early Canadian PR practitioner worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway and was an early supporter of female journalists?

- A) George Ham
- B) Jimmy Cowan
- C) Lou Cahill
- D) Ruth Hammond

Answer: A (Page 55, Learning Objective #3)

12. Which early female Canadian PR practitioner was named as one of *Marketing* magazine's top ten most influential marketers in Canadian history?

- A) Ruth Hammond
- B) Anne Wheaton
- C) Denora Griswold
- D) Hilda Wilson

Answer: D (Page 56, Learning Objective #3)

13. Messaging could be propaganda if it's meant to evoke strong emotions around certain subjects. What is not one of those subjects?

- A) War
- B) Religion
- C) Corporate Social Responsibility
- D) Politics

Answer: C (Page 59, Learning Objective #4)

14. Creating a fake community organization in order to push an agenda in the media is called:

- A) Spin
- B) Astroturfing
- C) Propaganda
- D) Hying

Answer: B (Page 60, Learning Objective #4)

15. What is not an example of what PR practitioners should do in order to build the public's trust?

- A) Follow the codes of conduct of PR professional associations
- B) Act ethically and with integrity
- C) Join an association
- D) Help the public have more visibility into the good works PR practitioners do

Answer: C (Page 61, Learning Objective #4)

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Explain why professional ethics is important in public relations.

Answer: The reputation of PR is based on the ethical behaviour of its practitioners. This is why it is the responsibility of all practitioners to practice ethical behaviour and follow the codes of conduct set out by professional associations, such as CPRS and IABC. By acting ethically, PR practitioners will earn the trust of both the public and the media.

2. Outline why it's important to learn about the founders of public relations and about the profession's history.

Answer: Public relations' founders have had a large influence on public relations and how it is practiced today. Some of the ways PR's early PR practitioners have influenced the profession includes creating the press release, introducing corporate social responsibility to organizations, and influencing modern media relations and crisis communications. It's important to learn the history of public relations and about its founders because it helps inform how practitioners practice the profession today and provides case studies modern practitioners can learn from.

CHAPTER SOLUTIONS

Public Opinion: What it is and How it is Shaped: Thinking Like a PR Practitioner (page 42)

- 1. Give an example of a recent media event that was the result of a change in public opinion. Describe what contributed to the shift in thinking.**

Answer: This question is designed to promote classroom discussion on how the public's opinions change over time. Some examples of media events that students might give as an example include gay marriage legislation in Canada, the United States, or other nations where it has recently become legal, the overthrowing of a government, a shift in popularity between political parties, and new laws that have gained popular support. Reasons for shifts in public opinion may be a landmark event, education, awareness, new information, changing values, and so on.

- 2. Explain why public opinion is just as important to organizations as it is to governments.**

Answer: Just as governments are vulnerable to the changing attitudes of the public, so are organizations. While changes in public opinion are often not as pronounced in organizations as in governments, where an election may concretely demonstrate citizens' discontent, organizations depend on the public for their licence to operate, through purchases, donations, or support. Shifts in public opinion could also result in new regulations or laws that could make it more difficult for an organization to conduct business.

How PR Practitioners Work with Public Opinion: Thinking Like a PR Practitioner (page 45)

- 1. Describe the ways PR practitioners work with public opinion and give an example of when you would use each one.**

Answer: PR practitioners work with public opinion by using public opinion polls to create media angles and to measure a campaign's effectiveness. Students can give almost any example to illustrate when they would use each technique, but they must explain that one is used as a story angle and one is used to see if public opinion is changing because of their work.

2. Outline Aristotle’s three ways to persuade and give examples of when you might deploy each.

Answer: Aristotle’s three ways to persuade are:

1. Reason: the use of logic in an argument. This might be used in an opinion editorial or in a speech to a rational or professional audience.
2. Ethics: the appeal to the audience to do what is right. This might be used in a speech or in a YouTube video for a social movement.
3. Emotion: the use of an emotional appeal. This might be used on a nonprofit’s website or in its social media campaign.

The History of PR and the First Practitioners to Influence Public Opinion: Thinking Like a PR Practitioner (page 56)

1. Think of an example of a recent media event and describe how it might have been influenced by one of the founders of public relations.

Answer: This question is designed to get students thinking about the legacy of the profession’s founders. Some ways that recent news articles might have been influenced by the founders’ contributions include a news article that resulted from a news release, a news article that resulted from issues management tactics, a news article that resulted from a photo opportunity, a PR stunt, or a trained spokesperson who was used in the article as an example of corporate social responsibility.

2. Identify three positive contributions and two negative contributions to PR made by the founders of public relations.

Answer: Some positive contributions that students might identify include getting corporations to engage in dialogue with the media and the public, giving the media access to company leaders, and allowing companies to have representation in the media, and helping organizations see the value of corporate social responsibility.

The negative contributions might include helping to create a negative perception of PR through lying or manipulation.

The Public’s Opinion of Public Relations: Thinking Like a PR Practitioner (page 61)

1. How valid do you think the negative perceptions of PR are? How would you defend the profession to a critic?

Answer: There are no right or wrong answers to this question. It's designed to prompt students to articulate why there might be a negative perception of PR and to defend their chosen profession by expressing its many positive aspects.

2. What is your definition of *spin*? Do you believe it is a fair term to be used in describing public relations?

Answer: There are no right or wrong answers to this question. It's designed to prompt students to articulate what spin means to them and to give their opinion on the term when applied to public relations.

Case Study: Garnering Public Opinion to Help with Negotiations: The NLMA (page 62)

1. Explain why the NLMA decided to sway public opinion in its favour.

Answer: At its core, public relations is dedicated to influencing public opinion. That is the overall objective of almost everything we do. We want the public to either think in a certain way or take a certain course of action. In this case, the NLMA wanted public opinion on its side in order to force the government back to salary negotiations. Publicly opposing the government was not a strategic direction given the premier's high popularity. The NLMA had to take a different tactic and avoid being seen as directly opposing the premier.

2. Discuss the issue the campaign focused on in order to influence public opinion.

Answer: The NLMA decided to focus on the shortage of doctors. Research indicated that this issue—the shortage of doctors and subsequent patient wait times—was important to the public. By focusing the campaign on an issue that people of the province cared about, they hoped to get public opinion on their side.