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Letter from the Editor

Reflecting on the last three years of my editorship, we've seen the addition of a number of special issues addressing relevance in what we teach. The special issues related to leadership and diversity and activism, in particular, connect directly with key topics in the recently released Commission for Public Relations Education 2023 report, the subject of a special issue for 2024 where you'll find more in-depth analyses and topics related to the report. We also have enjoyed perspectives from international authors, which, I hope, continues to grow.

As editor, I have, naturally, paid close attention to each and every article and have found them especially helpful as I transitioned from department chair back to full-time faculty. This JPRE issue is no different in presenting a number of topics of relevance to classes you teach, including APA style in the class, social media, and ethics. Of contemporary concern are two GIFTS integrating AI into the class.

Outside of good ideas for the classroom, JPRE provides a leading role in research on topics of academic interest – whether macroscopic perspectives of programs or microscopic analyses of particular skills and their applications. I've been honored to play a supporting role for the journal, continuing the contributions of past editors Chuck Lubbers and Emily Kinsky. I look forward to the editorship of Adrienne Wallace, editor for 2024-26.

Pamela Bourland-Davis, Editor-in-Chief

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Dewey and Social Media: Using a Pragmatic Approach to Designing a Foundational Public Relations Social Media Communication Course

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Technology advances in society demand progressive course development from higher education institutions. This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of a new social media course based on PR pedagogy and Dewey's theory of experience to determine if it adds to the knowledge of communication and responds to the digitally converged public relations industry. The course utilized the pragmatic approach to increase student knowledge in the areas of self, authenticity, privacy, professional use, and relationships on social media. Pre- and post-course surveys tracked the development of learning outcomes. The findings show that critical pedagogy and Dewey's integration of experience are starting points for designing courses where students have extensive familiarity with the subject matter. This approach to course design moves social media out of the role of a tool to emphasize the full impact of social media and the digital PR industry on students' personal and professional lives and on relationship-building efforts between brands and their key publics.

Keywords: public relations curriculum, social media, integrated marketing communication, digital media, social media pedagogy

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Introduction

Social media is part of daily life and society and, as a result, has become an in-demand industry with economic impact, particularly in public relations, a strategic communication process where organizations strive to "build mutually beneficial relationships" with their key publics (Kelleher, 2017, p.4). As noted by leading researchers, "There is a growing need to provide dedicated academic instruction designed to prepare graduates for careers in which they will use social media strategically" (Freberg & Kim, 2018, p. 380). Communication and business departments have taken on the challenge of educating students on the demands of the integrated marketing communication industry (Rehman et al., 2022). This is particularly critical as two of the professional core competencies outlined by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) include teaching students to "1) present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies, 2) write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve" (ACEJMC, 2022). An online analysis of 75 university master's programs in public relations (PR), followed by surveys and in-depth interviews with working PR professionals, revealed that participants want a curriculum "that includes the newest digital tools and strategies for communication careers…" including storytelling, digital and social media strategy, and measuring communication effectiveness (O'Neil & Lambaise, 2016, p. 13).

However, while most universities have PR, advertising, and marketing courses, they may only incorporate social media as a module or a valuable tool. As noted by Luttrell et al. (2021), there is a need for more courses, trainings, and certificate programs that focus on digital and social media in the changing media environment. However, an exploratory literature search on teaching social media in PR revealed very little about training students for this new industry segment from a PR perspective (Hamadi et al., 2021). The desire to build an academically rigorous and industry-centered course drives this research and establishes the goal of testing a pedagogic model frequently used in communication departments to determine the effectiveness of a digital PR course focusing on foundational social media topics.

Department Needs

The new course need originated from a department with strong public relations and advertising programs. These programs are housed in a department of communication focused on PR, journalism, public speaking, and broadcasting. The course was requested to meet local employer needs and update the curriculum with industry-desired skill sets (ACEJMC, 2022; Freberg & Kim, 2018). This update in the curriculum also addresses the issues noted in the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) Spotlight Series on technology trends in PR, specifically, proficiency in new tools and platforms, data usage, and new uses for platforms (Kinsky, 2022). These areas were addressed in the course, emphasizing professional and business purposes modules and the privacy modules that discuss metadata usage.

Although the course needed to focus on training students in technology, it needed to do so but still advance the goals of the existing PR curriculum. The frame of the course was focused on achieving PR objectives like building relationships and maintaining a positive reputation instead of business or marketing goals, as covered by the curriculum in the marketing department.

Course Design

The new course design needed flexibility for essential topics to be discussed face-to-face in a weekly module structure. Each week focused on crucial communication, PR, and social psychology theories, like social comparison theory, diffusion of innovation, and parasocial interaction, that are exhibited on social media both professionally and personally to help students see the connection between theory and online human communication (Humphreys, 2015; Luttrell et al., 2021; Zhong, 2021). In addition to the assigned readings from strategic communication texts, student assignments included writing weekly online discussions based on prompts in the learning management system (LMS). The prompts asked for student opinions and experiences to leverage the critical pedagogy framework (Talib, 2018). As commonly seen in PR communication courses, writing assignments allow class discussions to synthesize student responses with their experiences or perceptions about the theories. Finally, modules on social media platform functionality were incorporated to underscore digital literacy and reputation management elements of social media and PR. These modules emphasized the form and function of how each of the major platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) could be used professionally.

The initial course conceptualization included essential theories, skill development, and basic functional know-how. A review of essential topics showed that a foundational social media course should touch on concepts similar to traditional public relations and interpersonal courses: a sense of self, relationships, conflict, culture, and professional/leadership communication. Utilizing those course structures, plus the key topics from digital PR courses together, created a framework for the new course. The established interpersonal communication and PR pedagogy allowed social media topics and platform functionality to be discussed along with aspects of relationships, reputation, and conflict while integrating the digital lives that Gen Z college students lead, connecting the basis of the course to Dewey's concept of pragmatism by using experience in the classroom (Bull et al., 2008; Dewey, 1938; Langmia et al., 2013; Talib, 2018).

The next step in the course design was reviewing what classes existed and the focus of those courses. Approximately 25 publicly available social media syllabi from 2017 to 2021 from state and regional universities were reviewed for approach, key topics, learning objectives, and course descriptions. Many of the courses used social media as a business tool or for digital journalism. As a result, there was still the question of how to design a social media course that provides academic rigor, ties in key concepts of PR, and provides a foundation for understanding the social media industry.

The new course was also intended to be the first in a series of courses in a certificate aimed at training students in PR and developing social media skills. Although this course addresses the needs of the developing social media industry, the course and certificate needed to be grounded in concepts essential to producing PR students equipped with the training to become more than technicians of the technology but to embrace professionalism and relationship-building qualities of PR in a digital space (Brunner, 2022).

Literature Review

Current Social Media Pedagogy

There are three distinct ways social media pedagogy has been discussed in higher education and PR programs. The first way was as a tool to help understand traditional communication concepts or as a learning management asset (Hamadi et al., 2021; Talib, 2018), such as interpersonal communication in digital spaces. The second was a media or digital literacy component in introductory speech courses emphasizing functionality or knowing how to use it for academic research (Reyna et al., 2018; Stewart, 2015). The third way was integrating a section about social media to help understand the relationship between human communication and technology in any given subject, like mass media (Reyna et al., 2018). Although beneficial teaching approaches, these structures did not address the course design needed for a foundational social media course in an integrated PR program that would serve as an entry point in the curriculum for earning a digital communication certificate. Due to the gap in current academic scholarship related to the design of a social media in PR course, the course for this study was developed and tested.

Course Design Challenges

The approach to building this course is different from the three approaches to social media pedagogy mentioned above because social media was addressed as more than functional know-how or a lens into the digital world, but as a course that specifically trained students to design and create messages that achieve purposeful digital PR goals. The variables found in current research connect to three main clusters of learning: 1) knowledge of self, 2) knowledge of the industry, and 3) knowledge of others (Perloff, 2014; Rewaria, 2021; Schlosser, 2020; Talib, 2018).

The new social media course integrated traditional communication and pedagogical theories like Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), Bloom's Taxonomy, and Dewey's concept of pragmatism, along with essential topics in social media communication and PR (Perloff, 2014; Rewaria, 2021; Schlosser, 2020; Talib, 2018). The initial process of designing a social media course posed a challenge based on the prevailing view of social media in higher education as an integrative tool instead of a developing industry and potential academic program (Hamadi et al., 2021; Stewart, 2015; Talib, 2018). Additionally, as public relations courses already existed, there needed to be a clear academic framework for the course learning objectives, such as Bloom's Taxonomy, which is a classification system developed to define and distinguish levels of human cognition (Bloom et al., 1956). The revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy includes, from highest to lowest: remembering, understanding, applying, evaluating, and creating. (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). As many schools have embraced Bloom's Taxonomy when writing student learning objectives, the concepts became foundational in creating the new course that could be a part of the PR specialization and a starting point for a new certificate. In addition to balancing industry needs and academic requirements, the new course's design needed to acknowledge that students were coming in with prior knowledge of the subject matter, as many have multiple social media accounts and have actively engaged on social media for several years across many platforms. Dewey's concept of pragmatism connects the concepts of learning and experience and, thus, was also the starting place for course design, as student experience needed to be woven into the course assignments.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) (Katz et al. 1973-1974) is a subtradition of media effects research (McQuail, 1994) and examines the needs, motivations, and gratifications of media users. In the most recent applications as a framework, UGT applies to computer-mediated communication (CMC) environments, including social media, where users are more empowered since switching between mediums that provide similar services or content is relatively easy. Four extracted gratification factors related to social media pedagogy in previous research include trust, profit, learning, and social, all of which have high validity and reliability, along with an expressed desire among learners for co-content creation in social media course design, which is consistent with UGT, "which considers users to be active decision-makers who seek, use, and apply media for their own purposes" (Wu & Song, 2019, p. 2). Therefore, in pedagogical research and teaching related to social media and digital media strategy, professors must understand the needs of learners so that they can use social media correctly and more effectively achieve their teaching goals (Wu & Song, 2019).

Generation Z (Gen Z), born between approximately 1997-2010, is considered the first truly digital native generation, as members of this cohort have always known a digital world with social media (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Mosca et al., 2019). Gen Z may be technology dependent and proficient, but these students still need instruction on solving problems and utilizing technology to create and implement effective PR strategies (Gaidhani et al., 2019; Mosca et al., 2019).

Social Media Usage

In relation to UGT, social media usage was addressed to determine whether requiring students to have a social media account and to communicate on a social media platform for course credit results in positive interactions. Previous research suggests that requiring any social media usage could backfire and result in a bad experience impacting future usage (Stewart, 2015). Additionally, many of the platforms used by instructors are not used heavily by students (Brubaker et al., 2021). Since this course was designed with the intent of being the first of three courses (followed by content creation and social media management), the class discussions integrated previously observed behaviors instead of creating forced, academically composed responses that are typically observed on required course discussion boards in an LMS (Booth, 2012; Liu, 2019; Suler, 2004). To avoid inauthentic social media participation, assignment prompts were created and housed in the LMS as journal entries instead of forcing students to communicate with each other via social media. Keeping the discussions on the LMS helped students think critically about their previous experiences before class, as the LMS would prompt them about the upcoming deadline while also preparing students to engage in class discussions face-to-face. For example, the prompt on the LMS on social capital was multifaceted and stated, "Explain social capital in your own words. How do you think social media influencers create or build their social capital? Provide an example of positive and negative use of social capital." The prompts would be integrated into class time to allow students to add their own experiences to the discussion. This understanding led to using (UGT) as a framework for applying critical pedagogy and the pragmatist approach. This is seen in many traditional public speaking or interpersonal communication courses where personal experience is leveraged in the classroom to achieve specific learning objectives.

Dewey and Experience

Dewey's (1938) theory of experience in education was used as a guide as social media is participatory, and students' experiences provide a basis of understanding that must be acknowledged before introducing new concepts. Students come in with varying levels of expertise since social media is so accessible. Dewey (1938) highlighted experiences as a starting point for education and saw education as a partner with experience (Berding, 1997; Hutchinson, 2015). The emphasis on experience or doing versus discussion or memorization is the heart of pragmatism in education. The concepts of pragmatism as a teaching approach can be summed up with "four critical John Dewey concepts: (1) democratic society, (2) progressive and authentic education, (3) reflection, and (4) freedom and guided discovery" (Milunic, 2013, p. 27). This course touches on all four elements with a focus on concepts two through four, as students leaving the course must know how to communicate effectively on social media and be willing to learn from past experiences.

Many pedagogical approaches are based on giving students new experiences to help them learn and shape their view of a subject. Dewey's

(1938) theory of experience was chosen as it involves the use of history as "a potent agent in appreciation of the living present" (Seaman, 2019, p. 23). This course needed to use past experiences as a springboard for social media analysis. The reshaping of critical topics through the discussion of experiences is what could make a PR social media course the most effective. Experiences on various platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube) are also a point of emphasis as social media are continually changing, and the trends are constantly shifting. Through exploration and experience, students can see the trends that make specific posts popular and understand, holistically, social media's effects on industry and society beyond the technical aspects of how to craft an engaging TikTok (or current trend).

Combining a critical theory and a pragmatist approach with Bloom's Taxonomy creates a course that challenges students to go beyond their current views of social media and begin to see its impact on society, identity, culture, and communication (Talib, 2018).

Assessment and Assignments

In choosing course assignments to achieve the learning objectives, written assignments in the LMS were paired with in-class discussions to provide opportunities that allow for higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy to be mastered. Bloom's Taxonomy starts with the foundational remember and understand objectives in the classroom and moves to more challenging levels of applying concepts and evaluating quality (Bloom et al., 1956). The final levels of the Taxonomy are evaluate and create, which utilize the foundational levels to achieve complex learning outcomes ((Bloom et al., 1956; Krathwohl & Anderson, 2009). Although the course had the digital topic of social media, written assignments were not abandoned as a pedagogical tool. Bean (2011) focuses on incorporating writing into any course, regardless of the discipline. Integrating PR and social media observations into written assignments provides a clear opportunity to assess and ensure students achieve the learning objectives (Bean, 2011; Li & Guo, 2015). "Good writing assignments evoke a high level of critical thinking, help students wrestle productively with a course's big questions, and teach disciplinary ways of seeing, knowing, and doing" (Bean, 2011, p. 2). The emphasis on writing helps establish the link between the assignment and learning objectives for the course and prompts critical thinking that sparks the reshaping of experience and understanding of the communication that occurs on social media.

Additionally, cognitive learning is observed through assignment grades; the knowledge of self was harder to assess, so this study utilized a pre- and post-course survey as seen in other pedagogical research to track the development of specific learning outcomes (Broeckelman-Post et al., 2021; Hufford, 2010; Kirkwood et al., 2011). This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of the new social media course based on PR pedagogy and Dewey's theory of experience to determine if it adds to the knowledge of communication and responds to the digitally converged communication industry.

PR/Social Media Industry

The digital PR and social media industry is more complicated than it initially appears, making teaching digital PR and social media challenging as it requires knowledge of a digitally converged industry (Luttrell et al., 2021; Sutherland & Ho, 2017). Developing a topic-specific series of courses that emphasizes human behavior, relationship management, content creation, and account management can address the gap in current higher education training and career emphasis. The burden lies on departments and faculty to be up-to-date on industry expectations and needs (Freberg & Kim, 2018; Luttrell et al., 2021). "As social media becomes an essential part of work and life in general, some argue that social media should be considered a core twenty-first-century skill" (Sutherland & Ho, 2017, p. 262). An intimate knowledge of the industry and theory is needed to create effective courses. Social media should not just be taught as a tool but with a holistic approach to address the new professional and personal communication implications. One guiding principle of social media is that it is ever-changing; thus, emphasizing digital or social media literacy can be limiting as new platforms, trends, and communication styles are developed.

Foundational Knowledge

Digital literacy, communication, and creating effective marketing content tend to be the most apparent skills for social media courses. The psychology behind human behavior and PR tactics are also foundational to social media effectiveness. The relevant psychology topics significant for social media, include identity/self, authenticity, and in PR, relationships, and reputation management. For Gen Z, these topics are essential, as they seek out truth and authenticity in dialogue and emphasize being yourself in interpersonal communication situations (Abreu, 2019; Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Witt & Baird, 2018). Body image, catfishing, finstas (fake Instagram accounts), misinformation, and relationship problems are commonly cited issues with social media (Jones, 2013; Perloff, 2014; Williams & Ricciardelli, 2014). Understanding these issues and concepts is essential in the industry to avoid writing content that can be seen as tone-deaf or lacking in effectiveness. The viral nature of positive and negative content adds new challenges as the factors that create a crisis situation also include social media crises. Connecting with key audiences becomes a primary focus that requires understanding social media's pros and cons. This discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Students' understanding of self and social media will increase after taking this course.

H2: Students' understanding of the authenticity of communication (in relationships) on social media will increase after taking this course.

Additionally, privacy is a major topic on social media and impacts how people use the platforms. Data breaches and scandals like Cambridge Analytica impact users' platform choices (Kennedy, 2018; Lawler et al., 2018). Privacy issues are a concern, as seen with the focus on TikTok and WeChat, China-owned companies, and their use of metadata (Vigdor, 2020). Privacy and data usage should become a foundational social media concept to be taught to all students, especially those planning to enter the industry (Talib, 2018). This analysis leads to the third hypothesis:

H3: Students' understanding of privacy issues on social media will increase after taking this course.

The final important area to highlight is the differences between personal and professional usage. This concept includes using PR to brand a company and communicate based on that brand voice. As seen in Dewey's pragmatist approach, there should be an emphasis on experience, but

experience, in this case, can be utilized to establish the quality of messages posted on social media. The industry sets its trends and standards for what is acceptable. Personal experiences on social media provide a framework for students but also challenge students to consider the business situations that motivate professional social media usage (Schroth, 2019). For instance, in a study exploring the impacts of social media content posted by Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) on Twitter, Yue et al. (2019) found that high *personal* disclosure by CEOs did not increase the perceived likability or competence of the CEO, but CEOs' *professional* disclosures effectively achieved high levels of perceived relationship investment from publics. Therefore, understanding the differences in personal and professional platform usage and how to use social media platforms to communicate most effectively in a business setting and to build relationships between organizations and their key publics is a skill that needs to be developed, especially as students come in with knowledge of how to produce personal content on social media (Fratti, 2013; Schroth, 2019). This discussion leads to the final hypothesis:
H4: Students' view that social media is useful for professional and business purposes will increase after taking the course.

Methodology

Procedures

IRB approval was obtained for this study and covered the administration of pre-and post-class surveys hosted on Qualtrics. Participants for this study were students enrolled in the sections of a special topic course, fundamentals of social media, at a university in the Southeastern United States during the spring, summer, and fall semesters of 2019. Although the lead researcher/instructor of record recruited students from the courses and encouraged participation, students were not required to complete these tasks and were not penalized if they chose not to participate. To reduce the variance of this study, all three selected sections met in a face-to-face format that integrated substantial LMS components. The class met twice per week and was taught by the same instructor. In all sections, students completed written social media communication assignments based on the same prompts that were uniquely written by the instructor but based on topics found in Humphrey's (2015) text on social media theory. For example, the module on identity asked, "How does social media impact the way we see ourselves and others? How can we prevent FOMO (fear of missing out) or the negative impacts on our self-esteem?" The module on digital media laws asked, "What suggestions do you have for helping our laws catch up to our social media use?" During the semesters, all students willingly completed pre-and post-course surveys to measure the variables of self, authenticity, privacy, professional use, and relationships (Perloff, 2014; Rewaria, 2021; Schlosser, 2020; Talib, 2018; Xu et al., 2012).

Participants

A total of 75 participants were included in this study. Of the participants who responded to the pre-and post-course survey, 69.3% ($N = 52$) were female, 29.4% ($N = 22$) were male, and 1.3% ($N = 1$) identified as other. For ethnicity, 64% ($N = 48$) identified themselves as white or Caucasian, 16% ($N = 12$) as Black or African American, 5% ($N = 4$) as Hispanic or Latino, 4% ($N = 3$) Asian and 11% ($N = 8$) indicated other. When it came to age demographics, 92% (*N* = 69) of respondents were between 19-24 years old, 5% (*N* = 4) were 25-34 years old, 1.3% (*N* = 1) were between 45-53 years old, and 1.3% (*N* = 1) preferred not to respond. The participants were predominantly communication majors (97%, *N* = 73) since the course is an upper-level communication course with specific prerequisites like basic communication and introduction to PR.

Measures

The lead researcher/instructor of record asked students to take a 30-question online Qualtrics survey within the first week of the semester and then asked them to retake the same survey before finals week. The surveys were open for seven days at the beginning and end of the semester. The survey took students around 30 minutes to complete. The survey content focused on social media habits, usage, favorite platforms, and PR concepts, including stakeholder identification (Rawlins, 2006), branding (Mikáčováa & Gavlakov, 2014), professional message usage (Doyle, 2008), and users' overall comfort level on social media. Some of the questions included assessments like "I am confident posting and commenting on social media" and "I know how to use social media for business purposes," with a five-point Likert scale ranging from definitely disagree to agree completely. No open-ended questions were used for this study. As mentioned above, the survey was designed to glean insight into the following five variables: self, authenticity, relationships, privacy, and professional use.

Each of the five variables was addressed in two different questions to help verify student understanding and opinions and were operationalized as follows, using a 5-point Likert agreement scale in each case:

Self – is the perception of one's qualities and characteristics. This variable was measured with questions such as, "Who I am on social media accurately reflects who I am."

Social media understanding – is digital literacy regarding the features and functions of each social media platform. This variable was investigated with questions like "I am confident posting and commenting on social media."

Authenticity – the truthful representation of a person's identity and personality. This was also an attention-check variable with questions on the authenticity of *Relationships* and self. One question asked, "Which social media platform do you believe is best for building relationships?"

Privacy – from the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2021), "freedom from unauthorized intrusion" on social media. This variable was measured with do you agree with questions with statements like "Social media platforms protect my privacy and data."

Professional and business purpose- considers that the motivation for communication is based on a business situation and seeks to meet an organization's goal or PR message. This variable included an attention check by asking two questions regarding professional and business communication by changing up the terminology to determine if the Likert response had remained consistent. Additional questions asked which platforms were best for specific business functions and also asked about the confidence level of communicating a business purpose on certain social media platforms.

Results

A within-subjects MANOVA was conducted to determine whether students in class improved their understanding of key social media topics. A MANOVA was chosen based on the number of dependent variables and the ability to simultaneously conduct multiple analyses on the dependent variables. Additionally, a MANOVA limits the possibility of a null hypothesis by reducing a joint error rate with multiple dependent variables. To reduce familywise inflation of alpha, a MANOVA with three independent variables (course, gender, age) and five dependent variables (self, authenticity, relationships, privacy, and professional use) was conducted. Box's M test for the equality of covariance matrices was not significant at the .001 level [F (36, 4130.64) = 1.07, p >.001], so Wilk's Lambda values were used. Multivariate tests showed significant main effects for time [F (4, 68) = 1.25, p = .00, η_p^2 = .07, power = 1.00], which indicates an increase in the dependent variables from the beginning to the end of the semester. The test also showed significant results of time by gender [F (4, 68) = 4.78, p = .03, η_p^2 = .07, power = .6], and time by age [F (4, 68) = 1.11, p = .001, η_p^2 = .06, power = .3]. No other main effects or interaction effects were significant.

Tests of between-subjects effects further confirmed that there were significant differences for privacy, *[F* (4, 68) = 3.69, p = .05, η_p^2 = .05] and relationship, [F (4, 68) = 3.72, p = .05, η_p^2 = .07] and professional use [F (1, 71) = 1.20, p = .007, η_p^2 = .08]. Indicating an increase in students' understanding of knowledge of industry and knowledge of others, supporting hypotheses 3 and 4.

However, there were no significant main effects for self [F (1, 71) = 264.78, p = .09, η_p^2 = 1.15, power = .1] and authenticity [F (1, 3) = 1.87, p = .23, η_p^2 = .097, power = .4] which does not support hypotheses 1 and 2. Pairwise comparisons indicate that students did not change the way they view their identity of self and how they communicate on social media from the beginning (M= 1.88) to the end (M= 1.91) of the semester. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations

	M	*SD*	.
Self and social media confidence	1.91	.29	
Authenticity	3.65	.76	
Relationships	3.39	.93	
Privacy	2.19	.93	
Professional and business purpose	6.24	1.35	

Discussion

This research builds knowledge of how to teach an industry-appropriate PR social media course in a higher education setting. This project approached the topic uniquely as it combined traditional communication pedagogy concepts with industry needs and societal concerns. Creating a course to set the foundation for additional classes was challenging as multiple pedagogical techniques could be utilized, especially considering the digital options. This research used a longitudinal approach to gauge the learning objectives and level of knowledge increase in students who took this foundational course.

In the first hypothesis, *H1: Students' confidence in using social media will increase after taking this course;* the concept of confidence and self while using social media was not supported. These variables explored how identity and image discussions affect how students feel about themselves while communicating in digital spaces. The lack of a significant finding indicates a needed shift in how a sense of self is discussed and further insight into the relationship between identity and self in online spaces. Additionally, the characteristics of Gen Z must be factored in as the students are digital natives and have grown up knowing who they are in digital spaces and do not think about themselves in fragmented identities of real and online/digital self (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Due to growing up as digital natives, comfortable with social media, the students had high skill levels coming into class and were already comfortable navigating social media platforms and posting their own content. Future research may further explore concepts like fear of missing out (FOMO) and how social media content can influence mental health and individuals' sense of identity, self, and ultimately their behaviors both on and offline.

This outcome and hypothesis related to hypothesis two, *H2: Students' understanding of the authenticity of communication (in relationships) on social media will increase after taking this course* was partially supported with a significant result in relationships and an insignificant result in authenticity, which was surprising. Self and authenticity in digital spaces are important aspects of Gen Z as this generation is comfortable with technology and cannot remember a time without cell phones (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Gen Z can easily communicate via technology and values individuality but despises labels, which is a motivating factor for communication. The emphasis on authenticity and knowing the self are defining characteristics of the generation (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). After further review of existing literature, this is a trend and supports that there would be no significant effect noted. For instance, the BeReal app was the 5th most popular social media app in February 2022, three years after the course in the current study concluded (Sklencar, 2022, Oct). This app, which is based on the premise of authenticity and the fact that users are asked to post a real photo of themselves, with no filters, one time per day at random, has gained exponential popularity in a short time– jumping from 7.67 million downloads in April 2022 to 53 million worldwide downloads in October 2022, or 315%, according to Apptopia (Davis, 2022). The popularity of such apps like BeReal among Gen Z is notable, and platforms that emphasize authenticity should continue to be explored in courses such as this as students learn to professionally leverage unfiltered, authentic content strategically, on a holistic level, from a PR standpoint. Integrating the topics that discuss self and authenticity is still valuable to include in critical pedagogy and a holistic approach to the subject, especially as the emphasis on digital relationships from a PR perspective adds additional complexity.

The next area that this research examined was privacy. *H3: Students' understanding of the privacy issues on social media will increase after taking this course*. This topic's significant results show that including discussions on metadata, terms of the agreement, and analyzing previous data breach scandals show students that a click is not just a click and that it means something in the digital world. Integrating readings, discussions, and written prompts allows students to engage with a topic they have observed but do not know much about. Using critical pedagogy and Dewey's pragmatism is especially poignant in discussing privacy, as students can see the impact but do not understand the full implication. As noted by other authors, "Students have told me that they have noticed ads specifically tailored to them based on their previous page views, searches, clicks, purchases, and chats; however, most students underestimate the scale and detail of behavioral tracking, misunderstand its basic processes (particularly the role of third-party trackers), and lack an appreciation for its social consequences (ideological or otherwise)" (Corrigan, 2015, p. 49). Emphasizing restraint and transparency in the discussions can help students enter the workforce in a big data era.

Finally, the last hypothesis, *H4: Students' view that social media is useful for professional and business purposes will increase after taking the course*, had significant results indicating the need to train students with professional communication skill sets in digital spaces. The increase in knowledge will help students take their experiences as consumers and use them to become the producers of information and connect with appropriate influencers. Students are familiar with the platforms from the consumer side but need additional courses on being a producer and receiver of professionally oriented social media information. Integrated marketing communication proficiency includes being familiar with and adeptly employing content designed to generate engagement and a two-way dialogue related to personal and organizational branding, building mutually beneficial relationships with key publics in PR, promoting products and services in advertising, creating effective customer service and hospitality practices, and applying marketing concepts (Yue et al., 2021). Learning such skills will benefit students as they shift their view of social media platforms from leisure, entertainment, and escape to places where they can generate strategically designed business messages to consumers. UGT is particularly salient here and an area for future research in social media scholarship and pedagogy. As noted above, there are four extracted gratification factors related to social media pedagogy, and trust and profit connect to PR concepts of creating mutually beneficial relationships, especially those that benefit an organization (Wu & Song, 2019). Using UGT as a framework for future research on PR conducted on social media allows for emphasis on how practitioners use social media and how users/publics use it to connect to organizations.

Course Design Outcomes

Considering the findings of this study, the course was altered following the study to allow for additional time in the syllabus to discuss professional communication needs and how the inclusion of brand identity and personality is essential for connecting with key publics and users. As a foundational course, opportunities to build clear professional communication expectations can be carried forward into the following PR and digital courses. Another key aspect of this concept is tailoring the message to the platform and the publics found in each space. As noted above, students are not on every platform and, as a result, will need to be shown and instructed on how to communicate with publics varying in demographics and psychographics.

Another change is based on the privacy finding that necessitates additional time and assignment opportunities to allow for data security concerns, as seen with social media data collection, to be discussed. Dewey's theory of experience and UGT come into discussions regarding data privacy as students have stories from their own usage. For example, an additional assignment tests priming from social media ads with an experiment to test a common fear that phones are listening to us. As marketing and advertisers use tailored ads to create relevant ad experiences, it is beneficial to students personally and professionally to be aware of current privacy and data collection methods.

Finally, as some topics need more time, others have less time allotted on the syllabus. Using the findings, platform demos were reduced and combined. It was also found that assigning students to prepare a demo of the platforms focused the demo on the usage aspects they did not already know instead. This shift increased the value of the demos and took less time, freeing up class time for other significant topics.

Limitations and Future Research

This research's limitations include the sample size and population, as this research was conducted at a regional comprehensive public university in the southeastern United States. A larger sample from a more urban setting should be conducted to assess this course design's effectiveness in increasing student knowledge about social media. Although the five variables in this study were insightful, studying additional areas relevant to social media, like cyberbullying, extortion, and advertising/influencer messaging, would provide more insight into how students learn and react to communicating and building relationships online. A limitation of this study was the way the variable of relationships was presented from a personal frame in connection to authenticity, and an additional study should focus on the singular variable of the professional PR relationships. Additional research should also be conducted on additional social media courses like content development and social media management to determine if students are gaining the correct digital PR skill sets from academic institutions.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the pedagogical implications of a constantly changing digital industry. As PR continues to utilize digital tools and the industry becomes more converged, higher education courses need to be responsive to the changes in technology and how those changes impact PR tools, conversations, and skill sets. The findings show that critical pedagogy and Dewey's integration of experience through pragmatism are starting points for designing courses where students have extensive familiarity with the subject matter. Coursework should integrate Dewey’s theory of experience and the high levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy of analyzing, evaluating, and creating to account for the knowledge students have of social media while providing industry insight while achieving the course's learning objectives (Bloom et al., 1956).

The approach to a foundational course found in this study is not a singular solution but can be a starting place for departments looking to create additional courses and programs that combine theory from multiple areas while also emphasizing the significance of social media communication in PR (Hamadi et al., 2021). This research is novel in that it grounds social media coursework in theory instead of emphasizing social media's marketing or business purposes. Additionally, it moves social media out of the role of a tool to aid learning experiences and emphasizes the full impact of social media as an industry on students' personal and professional lives (Freberg & Kim, 2018).

Integrating experiences through a pragmatic approach is successful and acknowledges Gen Z students' existing social media and technology experience (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Mosca et al., 2019). Although this generation is comfortable with technology personally, comfort does not always mean knowledge and proficiency professionally. Social media courses that provide theoretical foundations should be created to help students reshape their current understanding of human behavior and communication as they enter the digitally converged PR and social media industry (Luttrell et al., 2021; Rehman et al., 2022).

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Incorporating Virtue Ethics in Public Relations Ethics Education: Lessons from a Standalone Public Relations Ethics Course

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Abstract

This teaching brief describes lessons learned from a standalone public relations ethics course. It discusses how virtue ethics can be incorporated into public relations ethics courses through pedagogical approaches, and student responses to those approaches. Overall, results indicate the effectiveness of student-led discussions and moral exemplar engagements in teaching virtue ethics and ethics in general. Findings also suggest areas of improvement for future public relations ethics courses.

Key Words: virtue ethics, public relations ethics education, pedagogical approaches

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Over the years, an increasing importance has been placed on public relations ethics education (Bortree, 2019; Rosso et al., 2020). The 2017 Commission on Public Relations Education Report has recommended a required ethics course to all public relations curriculum (Commission, 2018). Standalone public relations ethics courses are also favored by most public relations educators (Neil, 2017). However, ethics and ethical awareness among new public relations graduates continued to be identified as a deficient area for public relations education among supervisors and professionals (Todd, 2014; Neill, 2021).

In particular, public relations professionals identified personal ethics and value systems as the most essential and courage, confidence, and speaking up to be the most lacking for a successful public relations career (Neill, 2021). Educators have also articulated the importance of an ethics education to focus on the students' analytical abilities, critical thinking, and moral reasoning skills (Gale & Bunton, 2005; Woon & Pang, 2020).

These recommendations pose a sharp contrast with the current state of public relations ethics education, which largely relied on deontological frameworks such as prescribed code of ethics (Neil, 2017). Yet this focus yields potential concerns. First, the reliance of deontological ethics on external sanctioning mechanisms may undermine student agency over the ethical values themselves (Schwartz, 2001). A secondary concern may be that this lack of a sense of ownership over personal ethics may undermine willingness for students or early-practitioners to assertively defend their personal ethics when challenged (Neill, 2021).

These issues reflect a need to incorporate virtue ethics in public relations ethics education to complement traditional deontological approaches. Virtue ethics emphasize on the "cultivation of individual character to become models of virtue, rather than the rightness or wrongness of specific actions" (Plaisance, 2014, p. 24). Although virtue ethics requires time, hindsight, and experience to cultivate, once successfully practiced, it is powerful and intrinsic and can encourage long-term development of character extending beyond classroom education (Bowen, 2016; Craig & Yousuf, 2018). College education is a great time for students to form the habit of practicing virtuous behaviors and characters that will last a lifetime. The incorporation of virtue ethics into public relations education may increase students' sense of ownership and agency, addressing issues occurring in traditional deontological approaches (Neill, 2021; Schwartz, 2001). Challenges with virtue ethics education may be overcome by appropriate pedagogical approaches (Baker, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this teaching brief is to discuss relevant pedagogical approaches designed to cultivate virtue ethics vis-à-vis analysis of the design, implementation, and student responses to a standalone public relations ethics class.

Literature Review

Virtue and Virtue Ethics

Rooted in the Aristotelian tradition, virtue has been defined as entrenched and deep-seated dispositions of character, habit or human quality (Schnitker et al., 2019). Virtue can be acquired, cultivated, and practiced (Craig & Yousuf, 2018; MacIntyre, 2007) through various approaches such as personal experience reflection (Lamb et al., 2021), engagement with virtuous exemplars (Baker, 2008), transcendent motivation (Schnitker et al., 2019), and reason-based approaches (Rawls, 2001).

Following MacIntyre's (2007) notion that virtue ethics is a form of social practice where individuals pursue standards of excellence, journalism scholars have applied this concept of practice to achieve not only individual flourishing, but also health and excellence in journalism practices (Borden, 2007; Craig, 2011). Similarly, public relations scholars have also advocated for the use of virtue ethics to achieve professionalism and values in public relations through various approaches such as the understanding of virtues and vices (Baker, 2008; Neill, 2021). For example, humility, honesty, integrity, moral courage, caring, empathy, and candor have been identified as virtues while arrogance, deception, moral relativism, fear, uncaring, unsympathetic, secrecy have been categorized as vices for public relations practitioners (Neill, 2021).

Pedagogical Approaches to Virtue Ethics

Reflections on personal experiences. Under an Aristotelian framework, reflections on one's own experiences vis-à-vis discussions of one's understanding of individual virtues is one of the ways to develop "practical wisdoms" or an ability to "discern morally salient features of situations and deliberate about how best to act" (Lamb et al., 2021, pp. 14-15). The use of personal reflections to develop virtue or practical wisdom has been supported by educators (Cooke & Carr, 2014; Glück & Bluck, 2013). For example, students may be asked to reflect on personal experiences where they have exercised or failed to exercise a specific virtue. Personal reflections allow students to draw on their own experiences in understanding abstract concepts such as virtues (Lamb et al., 2021), and in the process deepen understanding of their own personal identities and dispositions.

Engagement and dialogues with moral exemplars. Moral exemplars are ideal representations or embodiments of virtues. Watching, intimating, and engaging with moral exemplars as role models is another way to cultivate virtue ethics (Baker, 2008; Lamb et al., 2021). According to Lamb et al. (2021), having dialogues or one-on-one discussions with moral exemplars have several pedagogical benefits as they help contextualize abstract virtues, increase salience of certain virtues, and can serve as "'counterfactual models' that prompt us to imagine how an exemplary person would act in a similar situation, which can help us discern how we should act" (p. 17). The use of moral exemplars such as guest speakers, professional interviews, and industry professional mentorships have been suggested in both journalism (Craig & Yousuf, 2018) and public relations ethics cultivation (Baker, 2008; Neill, 2021).

Student-Led Case Discussions. Case studies and case study discussions have been recognized as a valuable approach to teaching not only virtue ethics but ethics in general in public relations curriculum (Del Rosso et al., 2020; Neill, 2017). Encouraging dialogues about how particular virtues can be practiced in concrete cases is one of the strategies to increase virtue literacy or the "capacity to know and understand the necessary language and virtue concepts required to evaluate morally salient situations" (Arthur et al., 2017, p. 94). Through discovering, discussing and analyzing concrete real-world ethical dilemmas and cases in class and in groups, students can work together and develop needed critical thinking and analytical skills (Del Rosso et al., 2020; Kim, 2020; Rozelle, 2020; Ward et al., 2020).

Public Relations Ethics Course

About the Course

Public Relations and Society was developed as a stand-alone required public relations ethics course in the core undergraduate public relations curriculum at the author's university in response to the 2017 Commission on Public Relations Education Report. The course was developed in partnership with the university's Institute for the Study of Human Flourishing (ISHF), an on-campus institution dedicated to bolstering ethics education across campus. The instructor of the course received a grant from ISHF to incorporate intellectual virtue ethics as a part of the course, though the course covers a range of ethical principles and theories. The course was offered for the first time in Fall 2021 and second time in Fall 2022 as electives.

Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes

The course addressed a variety of ethical principles and virtues integral to public relations professionals (i.e., truth, integrity, accuracy, etc.), but also important intellectual virtues that enable a virtuous life and career, including open-mindedness, love of learning, intellectual humility, curiosity, honesty, self-regulation, civility, and compassion. Although only two of the intellectual virtues were explicitly stated in the course objectives, the course content covered all the above virtues. See Table 1.

Classroom Activities and Course Assignments

The course incorporates a range of pedagogical approaches, including lecture, in-class case discussions, in-class activities (e.g., debates, code of ethics critiques, etc.), guest speakers, as well as a range of course assignments, such as the personal and career goal reflection papers, a practitioner interview, case study discussion leaderships, and a case study project.

Guest speakers. For example, the course invited four public relations practitioners in various industries to share with the students their personal stories about how ethics inform their careers and day-to-day work lives. The class sessions with the practitioners were kept informal to encourage student engagement and interactions with the practitioners. Questions such as "what motivates you ethically?" and "how has ethics or virtues guided your work/life?" were used to prompt discussions.

Personal and career goal reflection papers. Students were asked to select three virtues and reflect on the relevance of the virtues to their own goals and the public relations profession. The reflection papers, one during and one at the end of class, aim to help students construct their own narratives based on their own social and cultural identities and encourage students to think about how these virtues are intrinsically linked with their own goals.

The rubric for assessing the reflection papers is based on two criteria for each of the virtues reflected: 1) demonstrate personal understanding of the meaning of this virtue beyond what was discussed in class and 2) demonstrate personal understanding of this virtue's relevance to public relations, and personal/career goals (D. Craig, personal communication, July 13, 2021).

Practitioner interview. Students were asked to interview public relations professionals to explore their ethical values and how they deal with ethical challenges and to present the stories in class with their own analysis relating to the virtues discussed in class. Engaging with exemplars and creating and presenting the ethics narratives through practitioners' real experiences fully engages the students and helps students contextualize virtues, understanding what a virtuous life/career looks like rather than understanding virtues as abstract concepts (Craig, 2021; Eschenfelder, 2011). This in turn intends to help them think about virtues in their own life and career. Students were expected to share and present the interview results in class.

The criteria for assessing this assignment include: 1) brief introduction of a practitioner; 2) the practitioner's perceptions on ethics and virtue ethics (what motivates them ethically? How do they address specific ethical challenges in work/life? What are the virtues implied or stated?); and 3) What are the implications for your professional work/life? (D. Craig, personal communication, July 13, 2021)

In-class activities and class discussions. The course is discussion heavy. Several components of the class center on class or group discussion. For example, the beginning of every class was dedicated to a dilemma- of- the- day discussion (Craig, 2021), where the class discussed and analyzed most recent ethical dilemmas in the news with course principles. Other in-class activities involved group-based discussions/engagements such as debates, code of ethics critiques, and decision-making model case discussions. To encourage active participation, participation in class discussions was counted as a part of the course grade.

Case study discussion leadership and case study project. Students were tasked with leading two class discussions on public relations ethics cases: the first on an assigned textbook case and the second on a case developed by themselves for the case study project. In both discussion leaderships, students were asked to briefly present the case, and to come up with their own questions about the case to simulate class discussion. In the case study project, students had full autonomy in selecting, analyzing, and presenting a recent public relations ethics case.

The discussion leadership assignments were assessed based on two criteria, mastery of the case and flow of discussions. Mastery of the case was assessed by 1) students showcasing thorough understanding of the case through in-depth analyses of news/social coverage of the case; 2) students expanding on the case by discussing how relevant virtue ethics or other ethical principles can be applied. Flow of discussion was assessed by 1) prepare at least three questions in advance; and 2) discussion facilitation: adapt the questions depending on directions of the discussion and encourage all participants to discuss. The case study final paper was assessed through criteria including 1) case identification and introduction, 2) case analysis (a. in-depth analysis of news/social coverage, b. analyzes the case with course principles, c. manifests critical thinking and analysis of the case based on research and theory), 3) implications (a. impact of the case, b. case evaluations supported by ethical principles), and 4) quality of research and objectivity.

Course Assessment and Student Responses

ISHF conducted pre- and post-course surveys to assess student learning outcomes on the two virtue ethics learning objectives (i.e., open-mindedness and love of learning) in the Fall 2021 class. All 11 enrolled students participated. Results of the surveys showed an increase in both virtue ethics learning objectives. However, as the surveys were not IRB approved, the detailed results of the surveys will not be disclosed here.

The instructor conducted IRB-approved (IRB#14115) assessment surveys to the Fall 2021 and Fall 2022 class. For both classes, the surveys were distributed to the students by another instructor to avoid coercion. A total of *n*=11 students (*n*=6 in the Fall 2021 class and *n*=5 students in the Fall 2022 class) participated in the survey. Students were asked to provide their self-assessment of course objective learning outcomes as well as their evaluation of each of the course components.

Overall students perceived that they acquired the learning objectives as self-assessment on the course objectives were high, ranging from *M*=4.64 (*SD*=.51) to *M*=5.00, (*SD*=.00) (see Table 1). While the students acknowledged that all components of the class were useful to understand abstract ethical concepts (see Table 2), they found the case study discussion leader (*n*=9, 81.8%) as the most helpful, followed by in-class activities (*n*=7, 63.6%), guest speakers (*n*=6, 54.5%), dilemma of the day discussion (*n*=6, 54.5%), readings/cases (*n*=6, 54.5%), practitioner interview (*n*=5, 45.5%), case study final paper (*n*=3, 27.3%), and reflection paper (*n*=2, 18.2%) (see Figure 1).

The qualitative responses reflected similar themes. Overall students found that discussions in class, whether it's the discussion leader, discussions/interactions with guest speakers or other in-class discussions such as the debate, to be the most beneficial in understanding abstract ethical concepts. For example, one student expressed that "The case studies we look at are both entertaining and educational, providing a practical real-world example of what we are learning about. T he focus on discussion is fantastic. I loved all the guest lecturers." Others also shared similar sentiments toward discussions: "The discussion aspect was strong. It took me out [of] my comfort zone speaking up in class about ethical principles and real-world issues"; "The way it helped me apply critical thinking to ethical issues regarding public relations"; "Helped me think more critically about ethical dilemmas in PR"; "I really enjoyed the debate in this class. It brought creative thinking out of everyone!"

Students' qualitative responses to least helpful assignments also echoed that of the quantitative results. Overall students found the reflection papers to be the least helpful. Students have also pointed out issues with the assignments and have provided potential solutions. For example, one student noted that while engagement with moral exemplars helped with understanding abstract ethics practically, it was disconnected from some of the other ethical principles and ethical decision-making models learned in class:

The practitioner interviews and guest speakers were great for getting a practical understanding of how PR ethics actually play out, but don't really tend to have anything to do with the models and philosophies we learn in class. I absolutely loved the focus on discussion and see it as the most effective way of teaching a lot of this material.

Others expressed concerns over an emphasis on speaking in front of the class: "I think it's hard for some students to feel comfortable enough to stand in front of the class so much to present." And some suggested a smaller class size for future public relations ethics classes: "I loved the debates and wish we could have done one or two more. I think having a smaller size class is great because it allows everyone to feel comfortable with sharing their opinions and thoughts."

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, the students have showcased an understanding and ability to apply virtue ethics and other ethical principles in cases and scenarios as manifested in course discussions and the case study project. The course has also received positive feedback from the students. As a standalone public relations ethics course offered to students for the first time, the course provides a few key lessons for pedagogical approaches to teaching public relations ethics in general and for incorporating virtue ethics into public relations ethics education.

First, high levels of student discussions help students conceptualize, understand, and apply abstract ethical concepts, including virtue ethics. Student-led class discussions help provide students the ownership over discussed ethical issues and real-world cases, thus in turn increases students' intrinsic motivations for learning. However, as some students have mentioned, the free flow of discussion is contingent on a smaller class size and a welcoming and open discussion environment.

Second, engagements with media exemplars, especially guest speakers, have proven to be an effective way to teach virtue ethics. For instance, students have commented in the course evaluation what struck them most was how the personal experiences of one of the guest speakers have taught them about moral courage and integrity, that it is important to speak up when observing unethical behaviors even when it might mean losing one's job. The practitioner interview assignment, in turn, reflects issues as students expressed difficulties in finding good exemplars to interview. Future public relations ethics courses could consider partnering up with local PRSA chapters to explore practitioner interview options for students or ask students to write reflections over conversations with guest speakers.

Third, there needs to be a balance within the course content and assignments between virtue ethics and other philosophical frameworks such as deontology and decision-making models. Students in general feel that there's an over emphasis on virtue ethics: while guest speakers and practitioner interviews focus on virtue ethics, there's a disconnect between how moral exemplars can help them understand other ethical principles learned in class. However, virtue ethics pedagogical approaches such as discussions and dialogues, and moral exemplars are shown to be effective methods to teach not just virtue ethics, but ethics in general. Future ethics courses could use moral exemplars as means to explore other philosophical approaches in addition to virtue ethics.

Finally, more guidance may be needed in turning the reflection paper into more effective teaching tools. More prompts may be needed to help students reflect more deeply on the virtues or ethical principles. Reflection paper as a tool could also be more effectively used for students to reflect on a class discussion or an interaction with guest speakers in class.

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Table 1. Students' Self-assessment on Course Objectives

	Course Objectives I am able to …	Self-assessment (n=11) (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree)
1	identify basic moral reasoning and philosophical approaches	M=4.64, SD=.51
2	identify and discuss professional business and public relations ethical principles	M=4.82, SD=.41
3	apply ethical principles to ethical decision-making process and to address ethical challenges in public relations	M=4.91, SD=.30
4	analyze public relations situations with various	M=4.91, SD=.30

	ethical principles and decision-making approaches	
5	understand legal issues and their implications for public relations practice	*M*=4.64, *SD*=51
6	demonstrate a willingness to think critically, creatively and independently and actively seek novel solutions to public relations situations (love of learning)	*M*=5.00, *SD*=.00
7	articulate one's own perspective and the perspectives of diverse publics in evaluating public relations situations and challenges (open-mindedness)	*M*=4.82, *SD*=.41

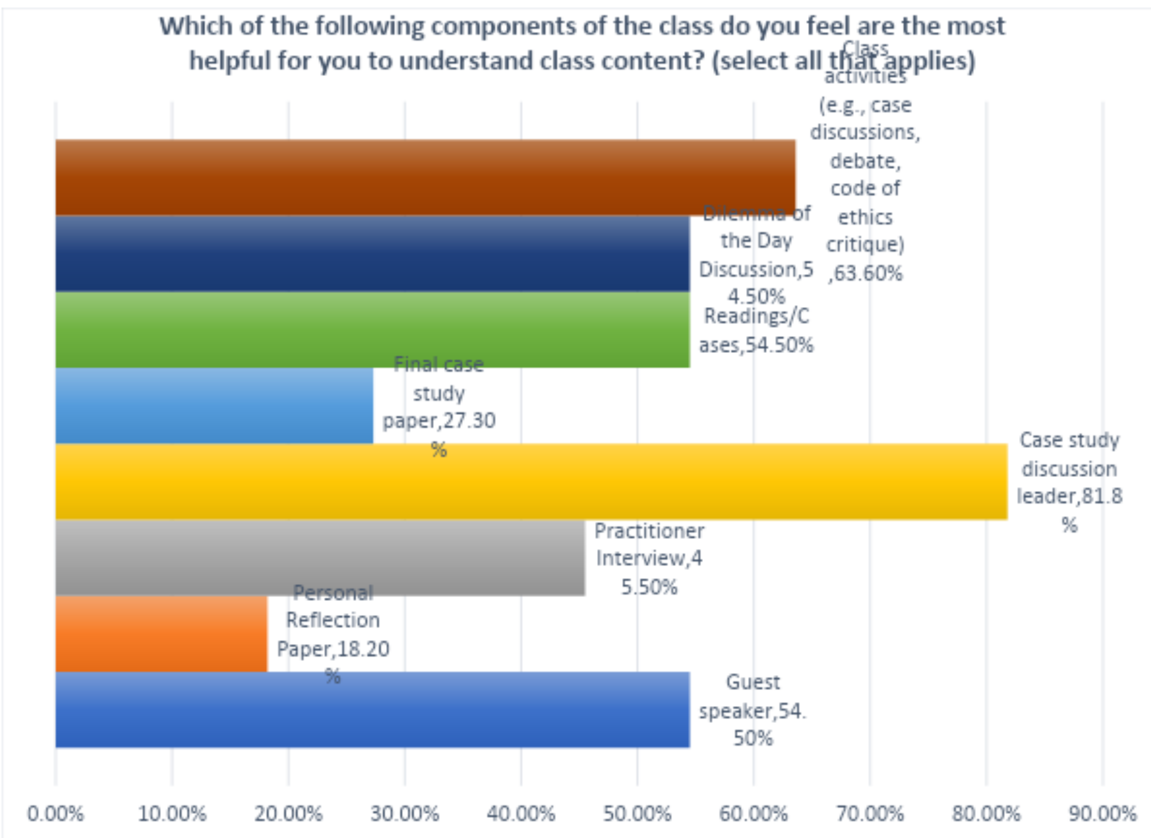
Table 2. Student assessment of course material/assignments

	Course material/assignments	Assessment (*n*=11) (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree)
1	The ***guest speakers*** added to my understanding of course concepts such as virtue ethics	*M*=4.55, *SD*=.93
2	The ***guest speakers*** added to my understanding of how to deal with ethical challenges in real life	*M*=4.91, *SD*=.30
3	The ***personal/career goals reflection papers*** helped me think about how to cultivate virtues in relation to my goals	*M*=4.55, *SD*=1.21
4	The ***practitioner interview assignment*** aided my understanding of what a virtuous work/life is like	*M*=4.64, *SD*=.67

5	The ***practitioner interview assignment*** aided my understanding of how to deal with ethical challenges in real life	*M*=4.73, *SD*=.47
6	The ***case study discussion leader assignment*** helped me think critically about ethical issues in public relations practices	*M*=5.00, *SD*=.00
7	The ***case study discussion leader assignment*** helped me better understand concepts and principles (e.g., ethical principles, decision models, framing, business ethics, etc.)	*M*=5.00, *SD*=.00
8	The ***case study final project*** helped me think critically about ethical issues in public relations practices	*M*=5.00, *SD*=.00
9	The ***case study final project*** helped me better	*M*=4.64, *SD*=.51

	understand concepts and principles (e.g., ethical principles, decision models, framing, business ethics, etc.)

Figure 1. Student-rated most helpful class content



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Challenging AI in the PR Classroom

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Overview of the Assignment, Including the Rationale

The adoption of artificial intelligence has changed the public relations practice. AI is a technical development that has been praised in PR for its functionality and efficiency, such as by allowing professionals to automate and perform mundane tasks (e.g., Panda et al., 2019). Considering the projected growth in the employment of PR specialists, which is predicted to be 8% from 2021 to 2031, it is critical for PR educators to prepare students for the needs of the profession (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; 2023). Krishna et al.'s (2020) survey of PR professionals found that senior managers, who may have more insight into the profession, considered new technology like AI to be more important for incoming communicators to have skills or expertise in, relative to middle managers. More recently, AI systems, such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's BERT, and Microsoft's Bing Chat, have advanced ways that professionals develop content (Larkin, 2023), although with limitations (OpenAI, 2023a). In preparing students for the profession, this activity encourages the discussion of the benefits and limitations of AI in PR writing.

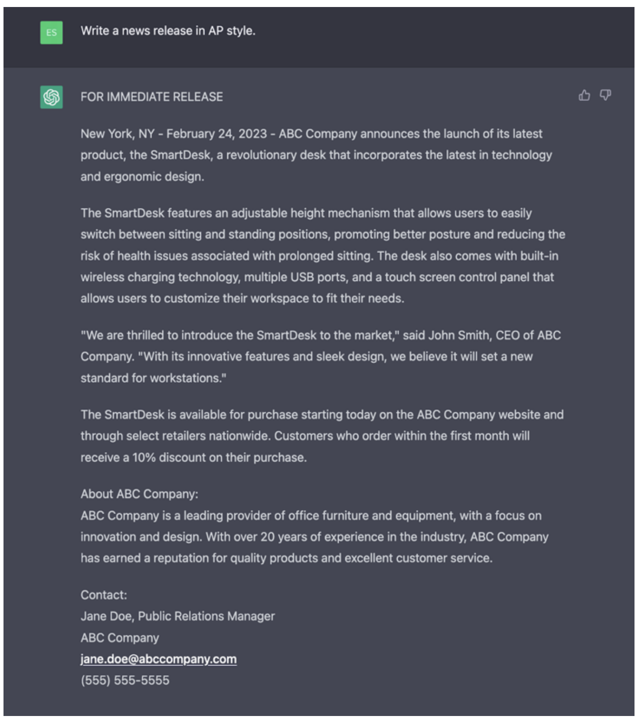
This article was originally submitted as an AEJMC Public Relations Division GIFTs paper, with a February 2023 deadline. Top papers were submitted to JPRE June 2023, and accepted for publication at that time. Published December 2023.

In this exercise, students are asked to discuss the utility of artificial intelligence in public relations and evaluate an AI-assisted news release. Begin with a demonstration of how AI follows instructions in a prompt by inputting the following prompt in an AI system, such as chat.openai.com: "Who are the most successful PR professionals in history?"

When providing this prompt in ChatGPT in February 2023, the following names were listed: Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee, Daniel J. Edelman, Betsy Plank, and Harold Burson (OpenAI, 2023b). Outputs vary each time the same question is asked. Share the results of the output with students and discuss who is represented and omitted on the list. If there are concerns regarding a lack of inclusive results, such as in the case where the output is dominated by a specific demographic group, there is an opportunity to discuss how the platforms reproduce bias while limiting the visibility and recognition of underrepresented communities.

After discussing representation, enter the following prompt: "Write a news release in AP style." Ask students to evaluate the AI-assisted news release based on the quality of the content and structure (Ashcroft, 1994), and AP style (AP Stylebook, 2022). Appendix A provides an evaluation tool that has been adapted to the context of this activity. When providing this prompt in ChatGPT in February 2023 (Figure 1), the output did not adhere to AP style and the content and structure of the news release did not meet Ashcroft's (1994) guidelines; however, outputs vary each time the prompt is entered. After students have an opportunity to evaluate the release, invite them to share observations, corrections, and recommendations. In addition to practicing copy editing, students develop a deeper understanding of how to incorporate AI tools in PR, question potentially problematic repeated bias, and consider the importance of PR professionals' intervention to address outputs from machine-based systems.

Figure 1. Example of an AI-assisted news release from ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2023c).



ES

Write a news release in AP style.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New York, NY - February 24, 2023 - ABC Company announces the launch of its latest product, the SmartDesk, a revolutionary desk that incorporates the latest in technology and ergonomic design.

The SmartDesk features an adjustable height mechanism that allows users to easily switch between sitting and standing positions, promoting better posture and reducing the risk of health issues associated with prolonged sitting. The desk also comes with built-in wireless charging technology, multiple USB ports, and a touch screen control panel that allows users to customize their workspace to fit their needs.

"We are thrilled to introduce the SmartDesk to the market," said John Smith, CEO of ABC Company. "With its innovative features and sleek design, we believe it will set a new standard for workstations."

The SmartDesk is available for purchase starting today on the ABC Company website and through select retailers nationwide. Customers who order within the first month will receive a 10% discount on their purchase.

About ABC Company:
ABC Company is a leading provider of office furniture and equipment, with a focus on innovation and design. With over 20 years of experience in the industry, ABC Company has earned a reputation for quality products and excellent customer service.

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Connection to Public Relations Practice and/or Theory

There are risks and benefits to public relations professionals embracing the diffusion of AI technologies. While the benefits include efficiency in automating tasks, the risks, such as concerns regarding privacy and inaccuracies, and long-term societal impacts of AI are less understood (Wilson & Van Der Velden, 2022). Within PR research, the ethical implications of AI's disruption in PR practices have been considered, such as transparency in AI-assisted communication (e.g., Bourne, 2019).

As tools are adopted into PR practices, there is value in exposing students to relevant tools and skill sets. This in-class exercise applied ChatGPT, but other AI systems may be utilized in this activity. Machine learning and AI platforms and services evolve with new technologies, access, and user preferences. Although the interface may vary, the foundational concepts are applicable across technologies and the understanding of functions is transferable.

Student Learning Goals

1. Understand the benefits and assumptions of AI-assisted communication.

2. Demonstrate knowledge of the principles of PR writing in AI-assisted communication.

Evidence of Learning Outcomes/Assessment

This in-class activity appeals to students in PR courses. Applying this technology in classrooms has been found to motivate and engage students, which is a driver of learning (Haggerty & Davis, 2019). Per feedback on this assignment, students were excited to gain experience with AI and appreciated the assessment of best practices of PR writing. Generally, the students shared that they were familiar with AI but had not questioned or evaluated AI responses to PR writing prompts prior to this assignment, which changed their perspective of its utility. When asked to share their observations and recommendations, students gained confidence in their writing and critical thinking skills. When students discussed deficiencies in the AI-assisted news release, they also recognized the importance of gaining PR expertise to navigate future technological developments.

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Appendix A

Evaluation tool

Evaluate AP style using the AP Stylebook (2023), and the content and structure of the news release using Ashcroft's (1994) adapted guidelines. The guideline for evaluating the news release is in the right column, and students may provide evaluations of the guideline to be discussed in the right column.

Guideline	**Student Evaluation**
Use of AP style	
Is the release clearly headed with "Press Release" or "News Release" in large, bold letters?	
Does the release display the name of the organization?	
Does the release display an address for the organization?	
Does the release display information to contact the organization?	
Does the release contain an embargo or date of release?	

Does the release contain a bolded headline that could catch the eye of an editor? Is it written in present tense, not too gimmicky or puzzling, and indicate the nature of the story in as interesting a way as possible?	
Does the opening paragraph include information on the what, the who, the where, the why and the when, in such a way as to make as much impact as possible?	
Does the release tell the facts and put them in descending order of importance?	
Does the release contain a quotation that provides additional interest and is it given by someone who has authority to speak on the matter?	
Does the release contain no more than three quotes?	
Does the release contain vigorous language to convey vitality?	
Is the end of the release recognized by the word “ENDS” or another indication (e.g., ###)?	

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AP Style: The Game

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Overview of the Assignment:

This assignment gamifies the often tedious and boring—for both teachers and learners—process of enforcing and practicing writing style standards. The instructions and examples in this document are for teaching APA style, though the game could be adapted for Associated Press style, MLA, Chicago, etc. This assignment can also be adapted for synchronous online classes.

Learning writing style standards is a necessary but tedious part of training students to write appropriately. By making practice fun and collaborative through gamification, students are more likely to engage with the material (Sailer & Homner, 2020) and retain knowledge beyond the exercise.

Student Learning Goals:

Students leave the activity having practiced and enforced elements and rules of a writing style, including 1) knowing how to find answers to style questions and 2) how to apply the rules to various audiences and situations.

This article was originally submitted as an AEJMC Public Relations Division GIFTs paper, with a February 2023 deadline. Top papers were submitted to JPRE June 2023, and accepted for publication at that time. Published December 2023.

Connections to Practice/Theory:

Using appropriate style for the audience and situation is a vital part of professionalism for writers. This exercise can be adapted to using Associated Press style, a vital tool for PR practitioners in getting their releases published, as well as for practicing APA or other writing styles necessary for students pursuing graduate school or research opportunities.

Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes:

- Students report, both anecdotally and in evaluations, that this is the best day of class.
- 2022 Assurance of Learning data for the course showed that over 2/3 of students met or exceeded expectations for using citations and other style elements appropriately at the end of this course.

Implementation/How to Play:

- Students are divided into teams of roughly 3-6 students (in my classroom, students work in project teams assigned earlier in the semester). Each team is given markers, and either assigned a section of the white board or given a poster-sized Post-It sheet on the wall. Teams are spread around the room to allow each team room to discuss and write independently.
- Students are encouraged to use style guides, class handouts, or online resources to find answers, but must do so within the time limit.
- Questions are divided into two groups, “Short Answer” (1 point) questions and “On the Board” (1-5 point) questions.

- The Short Answer questions are played via Kahoot! software. These questions involve quick multiple-choice answers, and the top 3 teams (or students, if played individually) at the end of the Kahoot! section receive bonus points at the end of the game. Depending on the size of the class, the Short Answer section can be played as teams or as individual students.
- For the On the Board section, questions related to the chosen style are projected via a PowerPoint presentation at the front of the classroom (see **Appendix**). Some of these questions include a bonus "short answer" component. For bonus questions, teams are allowed to raise hands or "buzz in" to respond. If the first team misses a short answer question, another team may answer and "steal" the point. For On the Board questions, all teams may receive points, including partial credit. Points are awarded based on number of mistakes—5 points for no mistakes, 4 points for a single mistake, etc. In order to maximize the number of questions possible in a class period, I usually allow 1-5 minutes per On the Board question, depending on the complexity of the answer.
- Scoring will depend on class and room size. For small classes, I usually circulate the room and discuss each team's responses and award points. For larger classes or rooms, I project the correct answer on the board and have students self-score--I have found that they are much harder on themselves than I am!
- At the end of the class period, each team keeps however many points they have earned as extra credit points for the class, and I award the top team(s) an additional prize (university branded swag, candy, fun pens, etc.).

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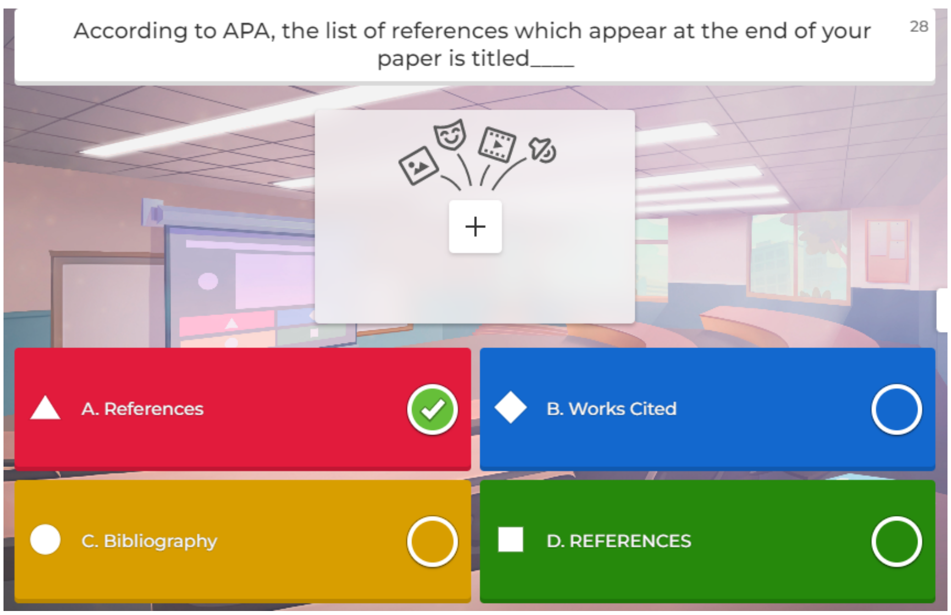
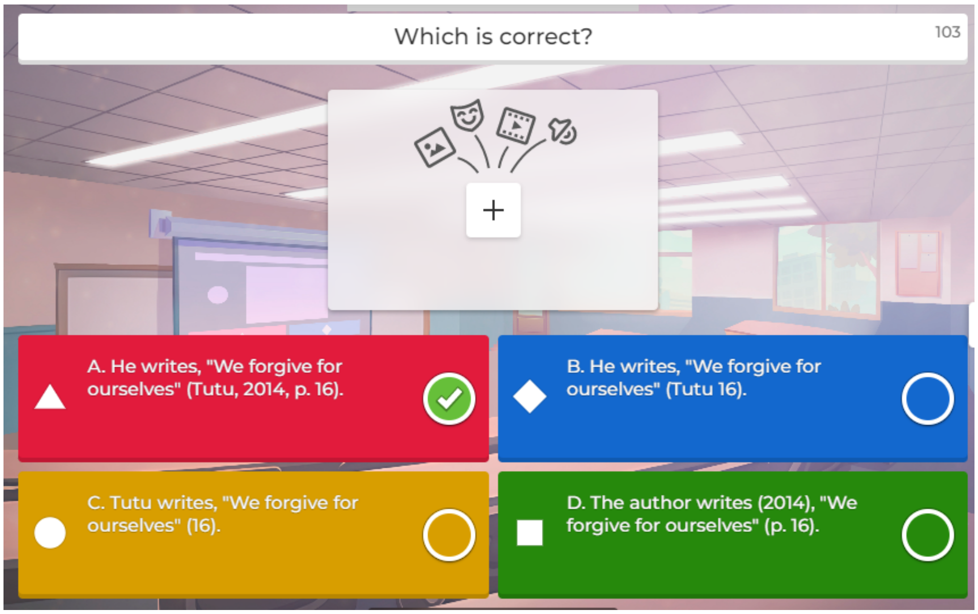
Appendix:

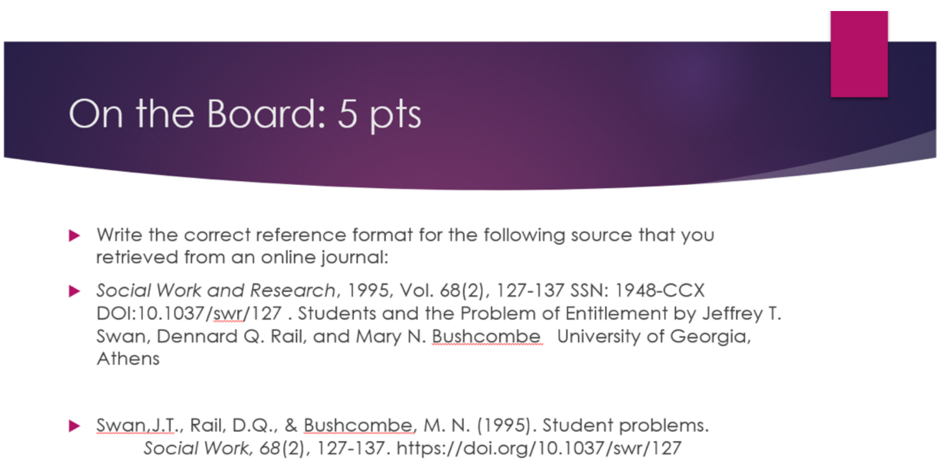
APA Style Kahoot! Short Answer Example:

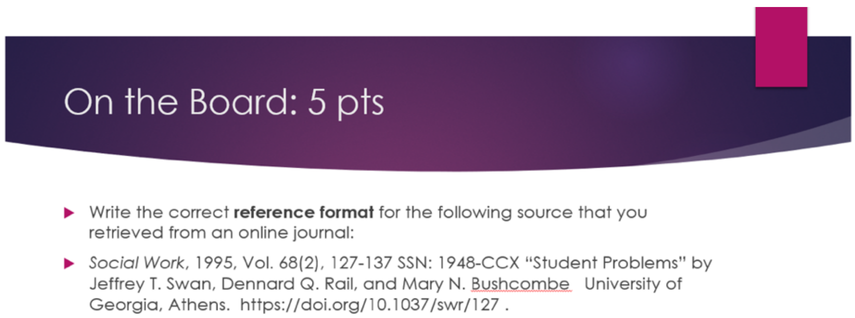




On the Board Long Answer

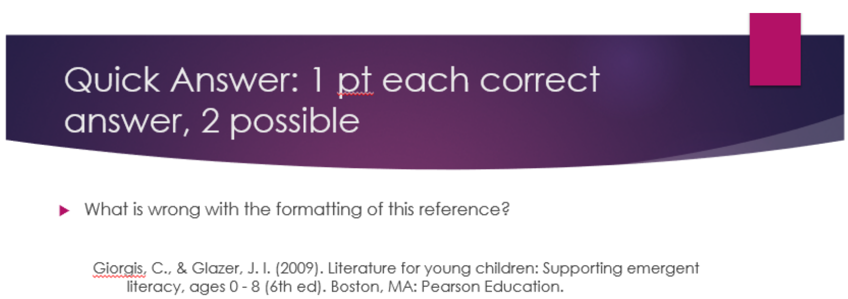
Examples:

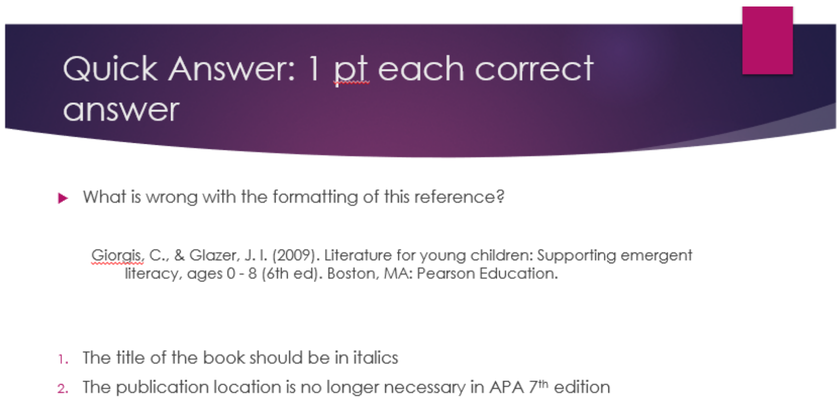




On the Board Bonus Point

Examples:




Quick Answer: 1 pt each correct answer
What is wrong with the formatting of this reference?
Giorgis, C., & Glazer, J. I. (2009). Literature for young children: Supporting emergent literacy, ages 0 - 8 (6th ed). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
1. The title of the book should be in italics
2. The publication location is no longer necessary in APA 7th edition

Journal of Public Relations Education
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ChatGPT in the Classroom: Using the Latest Technology to Explore Innovation and Ethics

Kelly Bruhn, Amy McCoy, Chris Snider, Ryan Stoldt and Jennifer Wilson
Drake University

Overview of the Assignment, Including the Rationale

Using ChatGPT, a chatbot developed by OpenAI and launched in November 2022, a group of faculty members facilitated an in-class exercise across six different courses that included administering a pre-test to assess students' confidence in evaluating and testing new technology tools and innovations, reviewing current news featuring the tool, previewing a creative execution using the tool, and evaluating the tool individually. The session ended with a post-test to reassess the same factors listed above, as well as a discussion of the ethical considerations communicators must make when evaluating new digital technologies and innovations. This exercise reinforced the important role communicators have in critically evaluating new tools—a practice they must master for long-term success.

Student Learning Goals and Connection to Public Relations Practice And/Or Theory

Aligning with the college's core values, this in-class exercise is designed to help students "apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communication professions in which they work," "demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity," "take ownership of their own academic experience," and "cope and thrive in the workplace." This exercise aligns with the Commission on Public Relations Education's call for embedding ethics within coursework

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while also improving communicators' abilities "to move, be nimble and adaptable" (Prsaweb, 2023 p. 11).

Evidence of Learning Outcomes/Assessment

Ninety-four students participated in this exercise across six courses. Some key findings:

- When comparing pre- and post-test responses, average scores improved slightly across each factor. Student averages were lowest when answering "I consider myself an innovator." (Pre-test: 6.3 avg; Post-Test 6.4 avg.). Every other question averaged between 7.1 and 7.8.
- Scores varied widely when students were asked if they keep up with tech trends, with responses ranging from 2 to 10.
- When asked to share their ethical considerations regarding digital technology, student responses on the post-tests were much more robust than their initial responses. Each class enjoyed a rich discussion of ethics to conclude the exercise, and topics ranged from copyright and attribution concerns to misinformation dissemination to worry about future job security.
- Using a scale of 1 (Completely Disagree) to 10 (Completely Agree), students responded with an average of 4 for their proposed use of ChatGPT or other AI tools ***at work*** vs. an average of 2.9 using those same tools ***at school***.

Two students' post-test responses summarized many students' feelings by saying, "AI can be used as a tool, but not as a replacement," and "I think AI will be a useful tool for many professions. Right now, AI can't replicate the complexity of the human mind, but it is a useful tool for idea generation."

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Appendix A

Overview of the In-Class Exercise

- Administer and Collect Pre-Tests *(Appendix B)*
- Show NBC Nightly News Report from 12/22/22 on artificial intelligence (*Appendix D*)
- Show ChatGPT in Action via the Ryan Reynolds Mint Mobile ad (*Appendix D*)
- Share highlights from NPR's story featuring a student who created a ChatGPT detector (*Appendix D*)
- Showcase the ChatGPT tool at https://openai.com/blog/chatgpt – *Important Note: Load it up early to avoid 'at capacity' messages.* Ask students to think about how they might use this tool in their careers. Here are two examples:
    - "Please write five headlines for an animal rescue organization."
    - "Write a one-page press release announcing a new event designed to raise money to help children with cancer."
- Give students 5-10 minutes to play with the tool. Again, ask them to think about how they might use this tool in their careers.
- Administer and Collect Post-Tests *(Appendix B)*

- Whole-Class Discussion About Ethics of the Tool
- You may also consider administering an additional two-question, anonymous survey asking if they plan to use the tool <u>*at work*</u> or <u>*at school.*</u> *(Appendix C)*

Appendix B

Pre- and Post-Test – Evaluating Technology Tools

Name: _________________________ Major(s): _____________________________________

I try to keep up with technology trends.

Completely Agree — Completely Disagree

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

I feel confident in my ability to develop content for online audiences.

Completely Agree — Completely Disagree

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

I enjoy testing new digital tools.

Completely Agree — Completely Disagree

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

I consider myself an innovator.

Completely Agree — Completely Disagree

10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

I am comfortable evaluating new digital tools or technologies.

Completely Agree									Completely Disagree
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Please indicate on the line below the <u>percentage</u> of time each day you estimate you will use each of the following in your future career. For example, you may answer 10% on one tool and 55% on another tool. If you don't anticipate using the tool, you may answer 0%. Please share additional technology/digital tools you anticipate using and the associated percentages in the "Other" option below.

_______ Social Media
_______ Search Engine Optimization
_______ Data Analysis Tools
_______ Mobile App Creation/Maintenance
_______ Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality
_______ Artificial Intelligence
_______ Other (please specify) ____

Please share your ethical considerations regarding digital technology.

Appendix C

Sample Anonymous Post-Module Survey

I plan to use ChatGPT or other AI tools to complete future assignments *at work*.

Completely Agree									Completely Disagree
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

I plan to use ChatGPT or other AI tools to complete future assignments *at school*.

Completely Agree									Completely Disagree
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Anything else to add?

Appendix D – Resource List for Instructor Background

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Mastering the Art of Brand Storytelling

Nicole O'Donnell, Washington State University

Overview of the Assignment

This assignment serves as an introduction to brand storytelling. Research suggests that storytelling is an essential tool for public relations professionals as stories can entertain, emotionally arouse, inform, and persuade audiences (Kent, 2015; McKee, & Gerace, 2018). However, students' experiences with storytelling are often personal rather than strategic. For this assignment, I ask students to interview the leader or founder of a local nonprofit organization, business, or school club and use the information they gather to develop a compelling story. Students are instructed that the story should be written in a concise and accessible format that could easily be added to the client's "about us" website or used in a backgrounder or other client communications.

This article was originally submitted as an AEJMC Public Relations Division GIFTs paper, with a February 2023 deadline. Top papers were submitted to JPRE June 2023, and accepted for publication at that time.
Published December 2023.

Rationale

Nonprofit, small, or local organizations often lack the budget for professional communication services. When teaching service-learning classes, my students frequently identify opportunities for our community partners to have an improved web presence and share organizational stories with the public in meaningful and engaging formats. In our media-saturated environment, it is important for a brand to authentically communicate its unique points of difference (Pereira, 2019). Storytelling allows a brand to communicate its mission, vision, and values in ways that resonate with target audiences.

Student Learning Goals:

- Develop an understanding of effective brand storytelling and its potential to persuade, inform, entertain, and engage audiences.
- Build confidence communicating with professionals in the field and practicing in-depth interview techniques.
- Practice summarizing information and writing strategically for a public audience.
- Demonstrate the ability to write a compelling brand story based on interview data.
- Create a professional work sample that highlights mastery of brand storytelling.

Connection to Public Relations Practice

The USC Annenberg Global Communication Report (2017) identified digital storytelling as one of the most important future skills for marketing and public relations professionals. Furthermore, research suggests that authentic narratives drive brand perceptions and stakeholder engagement (Li & Feng, 2021). As such, this project is a unique way for students to enhance their career readiness and hone essential skills.

This assignment is innovative because it provides students with the opportunity to establish their voices as strategic writers, develop their storytelling skills, and build their confidence speaking with business leaders. Additionally, the work that students produce for this assignment can be shared with the client and can also be added to the student's professional portfolio.

Assessment:

Students are assessed based on creativity, narrative structure, organization, convention and style, and mechanics. In addition to turning in a written assignment, I ask students to create a five-minute presentation for the class to share their stories. These presentations also include experiential-learning reflection prompts in which students discuss their interview experiences.

Appendix

Assignment Description

Every organization has a story to tell, and learning how to tell that story effectively is an essential skill for public relations professionals. In this assignment, you will interview the leader or founder of a local nonprofit organization, business, or school club and use the information you gather to develop a compelling story. By conducting this interview, you will gain a deeper understanding of the organization's culture, mission, and values, and learn how to translate that information to a broader public.

Please conduct this interview via phone, Zoom, or in person. The interview should last around 20 minutes. Please ask for the interviewee's permission to record the interview and use the attached email script and questionnaire as guides. Once you've conducted the interview, create a profile of the organization, as if you were writing an "about us" page for its website. Consider what answers stood out to you as interesting or unexpected, and how this story is unique or innovative. Your profile should be well-organized, grammatically correct, and visually engaging, with photos and quotes as appropriate to tell the organization's story.

Additional Logistics:

Before scheduling your interview, please inform your professor about the individual you intend to interview within a week's time. This step is crucial to ensure there are no duplicates and to respect the interviewee's time. If you are contacting a business that you do not have a personal connection with, please consider using a version of the attached email script.

Example Email:

Dear [Business Leader's Name],

My name is [Your Name], and I am a student at [X university]. I am currently working on a school project that aims to capture the unique stories of local organizations, exploring their history, culture, values, and visions for the future. Your organization has always stood out to me as one that embodies the spirit and innovation of our community.

Given your role in shaping [Organization's Name], I am interested in conducting a 20-minute phone or in-person interview with you for this assignment. I will use the attached questionnaire as a guide during our conversation. Following the interview, I will craft an "about us" page for a website based on your responses. Your organization can use this if you choose to share your story.

If you're willing to participate, please let me know a date and time that works best for you in the coming weeks. I will also be notifying my professor about the potential interview to ensure no duplicate efforts from my peers. Any resulting story I write will not be published or shared publicly without your explicit consent. Additionally, once the story is written, I will share a copy with you.

Thank you for considering this request. Your insights and experiences would be invaluable to my project and my understanding of the work [Organization's Name] is doing.

Interview Script:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I'm excited to learn more about your organization and its history. Before we begin, I just wanted to confirm, is it okay if I record our conversation so that I can refer back to it later? Thanks again for meeting with me. Could you please introduce yourself and tell me a bit about your role within the organization?

History

- Can you tell me about how you first became involved with the organization?
- Do you know where your organization's name came from? Is there a story there?
- What was the organization's first product or service?
- What inspired the founders to start the organization?
- What gaps or needs in the market did they seek to address?
- From your perspective, how has the organization changed over time, and what events have shaped its development?

Values

- Can you describe the organization's culture and working environment?
- What values or guiding principles have been important to the organization, and how have these been reflected in its actions and decisions?
- Are there any traditions or rituals that the organization holds dear?
- How does the organization view its relationship with its customers?

Challenges & Accomplishments

- What have been some of the biggest challenges the organization has faced, and how were they overcome?
- Were there any pivotal moments or turning points in the organization's history?
- What has been the organization's proudest achievement to date?
- How has the organization contributed to the broader community and industry?

Future Aspirations

- Where do you see the organization in the next 10 years?
- What are the organization's current goals, and how are these being pursued?
- What long-term impact does the organization hope to have on its industry or the world?
- What do you hope the future will hold for the organization?

Thank the interviewee for meeting with you and provide them with follow-up information.

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Design Crowdsourcing Social Media Campaigns for a Flood-Impacted City

Sumin Fang, University of the Fraser Valley

Crowdsourcing has now been widely used as an innovative way to engage publics by public relations practitioners (Park & Kang, 2020; Sommerfeldt et al., 2019). Crowdsourcing refers to the phenomenon that organizations openly seek solutions, feedback, or voting for its challenges and problems from a wide range of audience members on digital platforms, such as social media and organizational websites (Brabham, 2008; Ghezzi et al., 2018; Hossain & Kauranen, 2015; Howe, 2006).

This article was originally submitted as an AEJMC Public Relations Division GIFTs paper, with a February 2023 deadline. Top papers were submitted to JPRE June 2023, and accepted for publication at that time. Published December 2023.

Overview of the assignment

This assignment (see Appendix) was assigned when city A, where our university is located, experienced an unprecedented flood in November 2021. Thousands of people had to evacuate, and a total financial loss was over four million dollars. I asked students to design crowdsourcing social media campaigns for local communities and organizations. The goal was to attract traffic to these organizations' websites, raise public awareness of important social issues caused by this emergency, help with the sales of the products from impacted farms, solicit solutions to evacuate the farm animals, seek crisis preparation strategies, or elicit solutions to manage floods in the future. Students needed to provide campaign goals, messages and images, justify its launch channels, major stakeholders, and public engagement for the campaigns.

Student learning goals

1.Understand how and why crowdsourcing campaigns are different from other social media campaigns.

2. Draft crowdsourcing social media campaigns to help local communities attract public attention and aid.

3. Apply your understanding of audience analysis and the media environment to communications planning and deployment.

4. Describe the flow and distribution of information and communications during a local community's real-life scenario.

Rational and Connection to PR Theory and Practice

Crowdsourcing campaigns may be an announcement of a challenge to call for public proposals, a current policy or solution to seek public feedback, an invitation for publics to vote for their favorite option, an interesting contest on social media to engage publics, and a small task to be fulfilled by publics for societal good.

Public relations educators call for more up-to-date experiential social media training to prepare students for the dynamic digital world and job markets (e.g., Fraustino et al., 2015; Stansberry, 2016). Both research and real-life practices show crowdsourcing has been used for public good, such as stopping drug abuse, promoting health behaviors, and advocating organizational CSR (Ahmad, 2022; Braham, 2015; Conrad et al., 2020; Park & Kang, 2020). Little literature has reported how public relations educators guide students to develop crowdsourcing social media campaigns for local communities in a real-life emergency.

Evidence of student learning outcomes

Students appreciated this experiential learning opportunity to contribute to the local city creatively. Some students created a Twitter contest to invite new proposals on how the local government could manage future floods. Some invited audiences to participate in a naming contest for animals in the local shelter and newborn calves in the flood-impacted farms. Some social media campaigns called for new recipe ideas to use apples and berries from local organic farms. This assignment helped students to identify and design crowdsourcing campaigns. After this course, some students reported developing engage crowdsourcing campaigns in their internships, which received unprecedented traffic to the organizational accounts.

Takeaways

I recommend instructors first help students distinguish crowdsourcing and non-crowdsourcing campaigns. Before students design crowdsourcing campaigns, instructors could show a few mixed campaign messages from both types to the students and lead a class discussion. I suggest the following major differences between crowdsourcing and non-crowdsourcing campaigns.

1. Crowdsourcing campaigns invite people to comment or submit their feedback or solutions in the comment section, whereas ordinary campaigns often present themselves in one-way communication, such as announcements. For example, “What are your recipes to create a healthy breakfast with our farm’s organic blueberries? We cannot wait to hear from you.” It is a crowdsourcing campaign because the campaign message encourages the audience to share their recipes publicly on the comment section with everyone. In contrast, “Come to join us for a blueberry tasting festival on November 30” is a non-crowdsourcing campaign because the audience is not expected to take communicative actions immediately.
2. Because crowdsourcing campaigns aim to pick the mind of the public, they often appear in the form of questions. Ordinary campaigns usually end with a period. For example, it is a crowdsourcing campaign that uses “What name would you give to this calf born during the flood emergency two weeks ago?” The following campaign is not crowdsourcing because it just states an event without inviting people to initiate communicative behaviors on social media: “We look forward to seeing you at the flood donation event this Friday.”

3. Crowdsourcing campaigns usually give out incentives to the participants. Instructors should encourage students to describe the incentives clearly and concisely in the campaign message. Incentives may include social media acknowledgments of the best contributor(s), gift cards, product samples and swags, an on-site tour of the organization, trips for vacations, cash rewards, and so on. The class can discuss which incentives would best fit the campaigns.

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Appendix

Learning outcomes

1. Understand how and why crowdsourcing campaigns are different from other social media campaigns.
2. Draft a crowdsourcing social media campaign to help local communities attract public attention and aid.
3. Apply your understanding of audience analysis and media environment to communication planning and deployment.
4. Describe the flow and distribution of information and communication during a local community's real-life scenario.

Introduction to the assignment

Our city A has entered a state of emergency due to unprecedented floods. We want to apply our skills in public relations to help local businesses and organizations. Based on the lecture on crowdsourcing, please choose one of the following organizations and design a crowdsourcing campaign for them on their social media platforms.

Crowdsourcing social media campaigns may include the following formats : a. an announcement of a challenge to call for public proposals, b. a current policy or solution to seek public feedback, c. an invitation for publics to vote for their favorite option, d. a social media contest to engage publics, e. a small task to be fulfilled by publics for societal good (e.g., every participant walks 10,000 on the same day to fight against climate change).

Goal of the crowdsourcing campaign

As public relations professionals, you want to use such a campaign to help with these flood-impacted communities in the City A. These organizations can be a blueberry, dairy, apple, or ham farm in the city A, an Indigenous community, the Red Cross Society in this city, the Emergency Info, or the City Government of the City A.

The goal is to attract traffic to these organizations' websites, raise public awareness of important social issues caused by this emergency, help with the sales of the products from the impacted farms, solicit solutions to evacuate the farm animals, seek crisis preparation strategies, or elicit solutions to manage floods in the future.

Requirements of the assignment

In your submission, please include the following information.

1. Introduction to your organization.
2. The goal of your campaign.
3. Campaign message, image(s), and captions.
4. Which social media platform(s) would you use, and why? For example, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, and so on. Choose one or more and give your reasons.

5. Who will be the stakeholders of your campaign message? Please apply knowledge from the previous lecture on stakeholders to your analysis.
6. Why do you think your campaign is a crowdsourcing campaign? Why do you think your campaign will attract many people to participate? Please explain your campaign rationale.

Grading criteria

- You present a strong rationale for the crowdsourcing campaign and warrant public engagement to achieve the crowdsourcing goal.
- Your campaign generates persuasive and practical implications during the current flood emergency.
- Your campaign demonstrates a good fit with the organization.
- Each part in your submission is consistent with the other. For example, your campaign message reflects your rationale appropriately. Your analysis of stakeholders is consistent with your campaign message.

Cases in Public Relations: Translating Ethics into Action

Reviewer: Sarah Maben, Tarleton State University

Cases in Public Relations: Translating Ethics into Action
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In *Cases in Public Relations: Translating Ethics into Action*, Brunner and Hickerson collected 36 cases that highlight public relations scenarios from various industries and sectors. In the publisher's description, Oxford Press writes that the book "presents the complexities and challenges of public relations in today's ever-changing world" (Oxford University Press, n. d.). The 2019 book accomplishes this goal with cases that remain relevant to its readers even today despite a global pandemic and the advent of generative artificial intelligence.

Structure and Organization

This case study text is divided into four sections and 13 chapters. In the first section, the authors include chapters on the case study method, ethical frameworks, and professional ethics codes. The brief chapter (Ch. 1) on the case study method will help students, especially those who have had a professor who uses a facilitator instructional style, which is typical of case study discussions. In the chapter, the authors ask students to prepare, question, and look forward to participating in the classroom dialog. The chapter also provides guiding questions students may outline before each course meeting to dissect the cases and organize their thoughts.

The second and third sections of the book contain the bulk of the text and address public relations functions and contexts. Functions include crisis communication, social media, and corporate social responsibility. Contexts focus on consumer and community relations, sports communication, health, government, international, nonprofit, and education. A scant fourth section looks toward the future of public relations.

Each chapter begins with learning outcomes, definitions, and a three-to-four-page introduction to the main topic approached by the subsequent cases. For example, the chapter on corporate social responsibility (Ch. 5) leads with a refresher about CSR before launching into cases about Patagonia, Coca-Cola, Belk, and Harris Corporation. Each case is followed by a handful of discussion questions. Chapters employ three to four cases to help readers grapple with decision-making around a public relations context or function.

Contribution to Public Relations Education

The text provides educators with a curated set of cases reflective of today's public relations landscape. Cobbling together cases can be tedious, especially when trying to represent diverse voices, public relations scenarios, and both positive and negative outcomes. The collection of cases and their authors are diverse. The authors, a mix of academics, accredited practitioners, and even a former NFL player, reveal cases from primary research, personal connections, and current events.

The style of the book lends itself to both new and more experienced students. For first and second-year public relations students, it offers a survey of public relations in concrete cases. Upper-level students could use the cases as discussion starters, and launch into deeper conversations with instructor facilitation and additional readings and resources. Partnered with primary sources and seminal readings, graduate students could tie the more practical cases with theoretical underpinnings.

Strengths and Weaknesses

A strength of the book is the applicability of cases. While cases about current events tend to age quickly, the topics are broad enough for today's readers to make connections. The chapter (Ch. 10 – Government Relations) about Hurricane Sandy remains applicable as a study for more recent and future natural disasters. Cases also highlight positive examples where readers can see how a stronger decision is made. The examples may not have the "can't look away from a train wreck" appeal, but illustrate that organizations can and are making ethical decisions. Cases reflect brands readers will recognize and then a few more regional cases, where a reader will easily connect with a similar organization like a family-run grocery chain. Cases are brief at about six pages, making it easy for educators to arrange the curriculum in chunks.

Single cases can be licensed by the publisher. While the bulk of cases is strong, the number and variety give instructors room to curate the ones they value most within the text. For example, a sports communication professor may only want the chapter devoted to sports communication. For upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses, the text could be a companion to more theoretical and seminal works. Cases and campaigns courses would benefit from the cases in part or whole, or the text would serve well as a complementary text in a communication ethics course.

What looks to be an effort to create bite-size cases left some concepts needing additional resourcing and direction from an instructor. A handful of cases included appendices with valuable information. For other cases, readers may need to scour the web for key artifacts mentioned in the scenario. More space has been devoted to public relations concepts than ethical philosophies. Readers will require additional support for ethical frameworks. For example, virtue ethics receives two paragraphs, and communitarianism is largely overlooked. Some chapters have overt discussions of how the case connects to codes of ethics and ethical principles, and others require facilitation and scaffolding to lead novice public relations practitioners to major takeaways. This book represents the kind of text where student reactions in the first semester will drive how cases are incorporated in the next semester.

Cases in Public Relations: Translating Ethics into Action provides future PR practitioners with a sampling of the decisions they may face in their careers. The text is well-balanced on positive and negative cases, types of organizations, and PR functions and contexts, enabling ample options for students and educators to discuss ethics in action.

References

Oxford University Press. (n. d.) https://global.oup.com/academic/product/cases-in-public-relations-9780190631383?cc=us&lang=en&#

The Untold Power: Underrepresented Groups in Public Relations

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The Untold Power: Underrepresented Groups in Public Relations
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This book is a valuable resource for educators, students, and practitioners, providing information and insights into the contributions of members of underrepresented groups across public relations practices and academic discipline. The book explores how these individuals have contributed to the development of public relations and the challenges faced, under the broad framework of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I), through a chronological examination of the past, present, and future.

Structure and Organization

The book is organized into six chapters and provides an overview of public relations pioneers of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups of the past and present, social movements using public relations strategies and tactics (especially those related to DE&I), and the challenges faced by these groups in public relations. The purpose of the chapter is provided at the beginning of each chapter, with background information related to the chapter that is especially helpful for readers less familiar with public relations. Each chapter then presents well-categorized content with sub-headings and concludes with a summary.

Chapter 1 begins by raising the issue of disproportionate focus and covers the contributions of underrepresented groups to public relations in academia and industry. The chapter sets out "to showcase those unsung heroes who have been quietly observed as they dismantled obstacles and sought equity in the field and in society" (p. 2). The author further introduces three main themes: the contributions of members of underrepresented groups, the challenges they faced, and the resources available. This chapter also provides an overview of the topics covered in each chapter.

Although Chapter 2 is titled, "An Overview of Pioneers," it focuses more on past activism, social movements for social justice, and equity using public relations strategies and tactics, such as media relations, special events, and alliances. Social movements and activisms that were important and significant to Black, Asian, and Native Indian communities (i.e., The Civil Rights Movement, Modern Farm Worker Movement, and the American Indian Movement) were detailed from a public relations perspective, along with historical contextual information, public relations emphases, strategies and tactics, and evaluations. This chapter, as the chapter title suggests, also touches on pioneers in underrepresented racial and ethnic groups who have achieved milestones in communication.

Chapter 3 introduces the characteristics and achievements of pioneers who stood out in public relations as the first, and in some cases, the only person in their multicultural community. The professional pioneers featured include Mike Fernandez, David M. Garcia, Bill Imada, Lycia Maddocks, Debra A. Miller, Collin Price, Helen Shelton, and Patrice Tanaka, representing various career stages and public relations aspects in the industry.

Similarly, Chapter 4 features four representative public relations educators from underrepresented groups who have been highly regarded for their contributions to the academic discipline and public relations pedagogy. The educator pioneers include Dr. Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, Dr. Rochelle Ford, Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, and Dr. Bey-Ling Sha. As the author explained, Chapters 3 and 4 are not exhaustive lists of professional and educator pioneers. The author attempts to document the relatively unknown pioneers of underrepresented groups that has the potential for expansion in the future.

Chapter 5 takes a different approach by examining public relations campaigns cases conducted by underrepresented group of communicators targeting underrepresented racial and ethnic communities. This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the four-step model of public relations, helping readers to follow the presentation of the case. The author then introduces the DE&I-focused public relations campaign, "Identifying the Elephant in the Room: Critical Communications Strategies in the Face of Racism." Along with the campaign case study, this chapter presents the concerns and challenges facing DE&I research and the responsibilities of educators and professionals in its advancement. While the previous chapters focused on the past, this chapter focuses on the present and discusses current challenges and solutions that professionals and educators face in effectively communicating with underrepresented publics and conducting DE&I-related research.

Chapter 6 introduces professional organizations founded by, and for, underrepresented racial and ethnic persons and discusses the future of DE&I in public relations. In particular, the author emphasizes the role of education, industry efforts, and grassroots movements to advance DE&I. The chapter ends with a summary and review of the book.

Strengths and Weaknesses

This book tells the stories of pioneers who are relatively unknown and less celebrated in underrepresented groups and stays true to its purpose of filling the gap regarding their contributions in the history of public relations. In particular, the author's conscious efforts to introduce pioneers, social movements, and campaigns of more diverse racial and ethnic groups (e.g., Asians and Native Americans) is striking and is one of the book's great strengths. Since this book takes a chronological approach that looks at the past, present, and future, it takes a comprehensive look at the untold power of underrepresented groups in public relations. This book contains an important discourse on the contribution of these groups, which has been overlooked in existing textbooks; therefore, is an excellent supplement to an existing public relations curriculum.

While important, the books has a couple of weaknesses. The title of the book is, “The Untold Power: Underrepresented Groups in Public Relations” and readers will expect it to focus on the story of the contributions by underrepresented groups. However, some chapters seem to diverge, delving more into the historical and social context, such as social movements and activism advocating for DE&I. These contexts, although enlightening, are not inherently tied to the contributions of underrepresented groups to the field of public relations. The expansive discussions on broad historical contexts need to be explicitly connected to the contributions of underrepresented groups in advancing DE&I in the field of public relations. This connection is essential to prevent readers from losing the thread in chapters that extensively cover the social and historical atmosphere.

Another weakness pertains to the presentation of the contents in the Profiles of Pioneers section. While the profiles offer interesting narratives, they often focus more on listing individual achievements, such as academic achievements or awards, rather than insightful stories about the real impact they made or exemplary public relations practices. In this sense, Chapters 3 and 4 can be strengthened with a less intensive focus on individual achievement and instead include a description of the impact those pioneers had on public relations practices, scholarship and detailed best practices. Finally, readers will be curious about how the people introduced in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 were selected as pioneers and through what process. Although the author briefly mentioned the explanation related to pioneer selection at the beginning of the book, a more convincing and detailed explanation would help readers and will help efforts to expand the list of underrepresented pioneers in the future.

Appendix

Learning outcomes

1. Understand how and why crowdsourcing campaigns are different from other social media campaigns.
2. Draft a crowdsourcing social media campaign to help local communities attract public attention and aid.
3. Apply your understanding of audience analysis and media environment to communication planning and deployment.
4. Describe the flow and distribution of information and communication during a local community's real-life scenario.

Introduction to the assignment

Our city A has entered a state of emergency due to unprecedented floods. We want to apply our skills in public relations to help local businesses and organizations. Based on the lecture on crowdsourcing, please choose one of the following organizations and design a crowdsourcing campaign for them on their social media platforms.

Crowdsourcing social media campaigns may include the following formats: a. an announcement of a challenge to call for public proposals, b. a current policy or solution to seek public feedback, c. an invitation for publics to vote for their favorite option, d. a social media contest to engage publics, e. a small task to be fulfilled by publics for societal good (e.g., every participant walks 10,000 on the same day to fight against climate change).

Goal of the crowdsourcing campaign

As public relations professionals, you want to use such a campaign to help with these flood-impacted communities in the City A. These organizations can be a blueberry, dairy, apple, or ham farm in the city A, an Indigenous community, the Red Cross Society in this city, the Emergency Info, or the City Government of the City A.

The goal is to attract traffic to these organizations' websites, raise public awareness of important social issues caused by this emergency, help with the sales of the products from the impacted farms, solicit solutions to evacuate the farm animals, seek crisis preparation strategies, or elicit solutions to manage floods in the future.

Requirements of the assignment

In your submission, please include the following information.

1. Introduction to your organization.
2. The goal of your campaign.
3. Campaign message, image(s), and captions.

4. Which social media platform(s) would you use, and why? For example, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, and so on. Choose one or more and give your reasons.
5. Who will be the stakeholders of your campaign message? Please apply knowledge from the previous lecture on stakeholders to your analysis.
6. Why do you think your campaign is a crowdsourcing campaign? Why do you think your campaign will attract many people to participate? Please explain your campaign rationale.

Grading criteria

- You present a strong rationale for the crowdsourcing campaign and warrant public engagement to achieve the crowdsourcing goal.
- Your campaign generates persuasive and practical implications during the current flood emergency.
- Your campaign demonstrates a good fit with the organization.
- Each part in your submission is consistent with the other. For example, your campaign message reflects your rationale appropriately. Your analysis of stakeholders is consistent with your campaign message.