

The Untold Power: Underrepresented Groups in Public Relations

Reviewer: Yeonsoo Kim, The University of Texas at Austin

The Untold Power: Underrepresented Groups in Public Relations

Author: Melody T. Fisher

Business Expert Press, 2022

ISBN: 9781637422403

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 activism 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 book 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.