

### ***Book Review***

#### **Strategic Communications for PR, Social Media and Marketing (8th ed.)**

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### **Structure and Content**

Led by Brigham Young University emeritus professor Laurie Wilson's "Strategic Communications Matrix," the Strategic Communications for PR, Social Media and Marketing textbook guides readers through the chronological process of strategic campaign development. The eight-step matrix is the foundation used throughout the book to explain strategic planning. The matrix demonstrates a complete process of researching, planning, implementing and evaluating a campaign in an easy-to-follow format that is comprehensible for beginning strategists while also relatable to experienced practitioners. The matrix is an adaptation of RACE (research, action, communication, evaluation)/RPIE (research, planning, implementation, evaluation) campaign planning acronyms which can be hard for students to dissect when moving from tactical to strategic thinking.

Each chapter is subdivided by topic to form the building blocks of strategic communication planning, and chapter introductions include "learning imperatives" that highlight the main points discussed, queuing readers. Case studies and "tips from the pros" segments help highlight main points. "Application cases" are also used so readers can see concepts come to life right away with real examples. The textbook takes a public relations-centric approach to strategic planning, wherein key publics are at the heart of strategic planning before central campaign themes are identified. Chapter 6, "Key Publics and Primary Messages," has a thorough guide to help readers understand how to identify key publics and the personal motivations that strategic communications can assist with. Self-interests behind communication messages, opinion leaders, and likely channels to use to reach key publics are explained in smart detail so that determining effective strategies makes sense.

Media, persuasion and behavioral theory is introduced to give readers a "why" behind proactive message strategy followed by two

chapters about research, including the importance of research before creating messages and the types of research commonly conducted by strategic communication professionals. Environmental scanning and secondary research are given thorough explanations, and primary research concepts are mentioned and expanded upon; writing surveys, conducting focus groups and message testing is discussed both in case study format and within the chapters.

The “big idea,” a concept familiar to advertising and marketing but less so public relations, is incorporated well and in fun ways – exercises are included to generate creative thinking. Brainstorming and outlook-testing are included along with observation and other interactive ideas to view a communication need innovatively. Knowing when a concept blooms into a big idea is also discussed, such as visual representation, slogan, and hashtag. Other more familiar-to-marketing concepts included in the book are the SWOT (strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, threats to organizations) and creative concepting. These are crucial and also practical incorporations with the converged environments modern PR practitioners work within and complement the core public relations concepts educators will recognize.

Channel planning (media to use in message dissemination) is cleverly explained with the “personalization and interactivity grid” that helps readers think through how individualized media fulfill certain strategic aims. The PESO (paid, earned, shared, owned) media model, a necessity in discussing PR media strategy, is incorporated here and subdivided into controlled and uncontrolled media. The gatekeeper concept is explained along with helpful graphs to subdivide tactics into the proper media channel and interactivity level. The interactivity and personalization options listed in the “shared media” explanation of social media use are helpful – students learn how different social media posts

achieve different strategic aims. The illustrated figures of media channel tactic ideas are easy to incorporate into a lecture and create class examples from. It would also be easy to use the illustrations in real time in class, having students look up social media accounts or owned media of different brands and explain what the strategic purpose was (or might have been) in the content.

Up-to-date discussions of the latest strategies in social media and digital media abound. Examples include livestreaming, artificial intelligence, social media influencers and multi-platform social media use. Other timely topics such as TikTok as news source, newsjacking, native advertising and social media's value as part of a media relations strategy are included. The book is thorough in explaining the ways media help define the strategic plan and when sponsored posts or influencer marketing are most beneficial.

The easy-to-understand strategic communications matrix is embedded into each applicable area of the textbook but especially comes to life in the calendar and budgeting chapter (Chapter 10). Tactics are systematically aligned under key publics and strategies with a chronological implementation method using Gantt charts that make visualizing a campaign process seamless. Also included is a suggested budget add-on to each tactic so tabulating tactic cost is easy. While marketing often prioritizes budgeting within strategic plans, public relations often treats it as a secondary concern and less important than earned media strategies; the reality the book well explains is that sometimes careful advertising expenses enhance strategies in impactful ways.

Using the Barcelona Principles, the authors argue for public relations professionals to be proactive with campaign measurement and evaluation. A four-prong system of measurement including outputs (e.g. social media posts, news stories), outtakes (e.g. online engagement,

downloads), outcomes (e.g. trust, advocacy), and impact (achievement of communication goals) was explained in a “mini case” from Global Development Bank in the evaluation chapter. A common (and valid) complaint is that public relations strategic efforts are not always immediate – the relationship-building work of PR evolves over time, sometimes months and years. The bank’s mini case stood out as a helpful option for measuring sometimes nebulous public opinion formation outcomes to at least set a foundation for more long-term desired outcomes like stakeholders becoming advocates for a brand.

Finally, an under-developed area of strategic communication textbooks is in-depth discussion of presentations. The differences among pitch decks, research presentations, persuasive presentation and “TED Talk” style presentations are discussed in Chapter 13 along with helpful tips for preparing for each. Public speaking best practices and troubleshooting for technology concerns like projector nuances are even included, which demonstrates how practical the textbook is for helping students through every aspect of the strategic campaign process.

### **Contribution to Public Relations Education**

Strategic planning is often tricky to teach to PR students in an accessible way as the process involves complex variables and several parts of varying prioritization and importance. Wilson’s Strategic Communication Matrix is a useful method to break the campaign process into manageable segments that students would be able to identify with and build upon. The textbook also honors the converged integrated marketing communications landscape that most professionals work within. Job titles and strategic aims overlap in modern marketing and public relations, so the integrated approach taught here is beneficial. At the same time, the authors also signal when strategies align more acutely with what a public relations professional would need to pay close attention to, making sure to note that marketing and public relations serve different purposes within an organization.

### **Inclusions or Omissions**

This textbook can serve as a one-stop-shop explanation of the strategic communication planning process in all main aspects. The critiques noted here are ancillary to the main contributions of the textbook but noted as options for augmenting coursework or course structure as needed.

Issues management and crisis management were both introduced but would benefit from further explanation of the differences between the two and examples of how organizations manage issues to avoid crises. Risk communication along with issues management is an increasing area of importance in modern public relations careers which help augment crisis plans.

The book's final chapter, Chapter 14, addresses ethics, professionalism and diversity. Parameters of ethical behavior in the workplace are discussed, including pointers for acknowledging and appreciating diversity. The end of this chapter includes action items like watching a PRSA diversity video but does not offer a case study about diversity, one of the few concepts without a case study or external professional's tip. Some examples in other parts of the text mention diversity, so tying them to this area would be an easy add. The chapter also could be moved toward the earlier part of the book so considering ethics, professionalism and diversity is a more prominent pre-cursor to campaign development.

### **Reader Expertise or Knowledge Required**

Upper-level undergraduate students and graduate students would benefit most from this text. The text quickly moves from reasons that strategic communication helps drive trust and business culture into theory and research. Persuasive writing and creative design are discussed but not given extensive attention – a reader would need to already have coursework in basic media writing, knowledge of creative principles and

familiarity with common PR tactics. Marketing students without basic media courses would need to backfill knowledge of public relations and media creation fundamentals but would find the planning process, especially in the Matrix format, applicable and useful.

### **Conclusion**

The book is an accessible and useful option for public relations or integrated marketing communications strategy courses. It could serve as a single-semester textbook or be kept as a useful reference for capstone campaign projects. The timely examples and extra attention given to explaining the most recent aspects of social media and digital media keep this 8th edition fresh and relevant for current students.