# Editorial:

# Public Relations and New Media

# —Advocacy, Alliances, and Assessments

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The refereed papers offered in this fall issue of the *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition* may at first appear to be a disparate collection but, upon closer examination, they reveal three themes frequently used to describe both the promise and the challenge of communication media constantly emerging as "new", whether in the era of World War II or modern-day China. These themes are advocacy, alliances, and assessments.

Advocacy has been a long-standing theme in public relations literature and, in fact, is a point of distinction between the work of the public relations practitioner and the journalist (Broom, 2009). Alliances, whether political, commercial, social, or charitable, spring forth from relationships formed on behalf of mutual interests and are essential if advocacy is to move beyond the sole purview of the practitioner and effectively engage publics external to an organization. Effectiveness is (or at least should be) an ongoing concern of public relations managers who, as members of a staff function (Ibid), are frequently challenged to demonstrate the bottom-line, strategic value of building relationships with publics, whether online or offline. Assessments are the ways in which we seek to somehow quantify, evaluate, or otherwise demonstrate how public relations activities help to advance an organization's objectives, regardless if the organization is a start-up, an NGO, a *Global 100* firm, or a nation at war. Assessing the worth of social media interactions is a trending topic in both scholarly and practitioner publications and is increasingly recognized as needing to surpass the mere counting of numbers, likes, or followers if an organization seeks to better understand the status and mutual value of its public relationships (e.g., Duhé, 2012; Paine, 2011).

Caryn Coatney begins this journal issue with a historical piece of how two prime ministers utilized the tactics of the public relations model of press agentry (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) to garner citizens' support for their nations to enter World War II. At the time, radio was a relatively "new" medium that ushered political speeches from town halls to the air waves. Although King and Curtin initiated two-way discussions with journalists, their primary objective, via filmed newsreel talks with rehearsed gestures and rhetoric, was to stir emotion and national pride. Drawing on Habermas and Castells, readability statistics, and a dramaturgy perspective,

Coatney explains how their political alliance not only enhanced their own power, but also resulted in nearly two million of their citizens serving in the war. Though "new media" are infrequently analyzed in historical terms as far back as Coatney brings us, she makes the compelling suggestion that current world leaders could likewise use new media to visibly and effectively demonstrate trustworthiness and transparency to their constituents. Recent research (e.g., Eid & Antoine, 2012) indicated that Canadian Members of Parliament are using Facebook to advance electoral goals more so than the democratic ideals of access and debate, implying there is work (and future research) to be done in this area.

Using Aaker and Smith's (2010) Dragonfly Effect model, Pinar Özdemir examines Greenpeace's advocacy efforts to promote food products free of genetic engineering in Turkey. In doing so, the NGO was forced to rely on social media platforms for outreach, as its usual agency partners were unwilling to get involved and risk their established business relationships with food brands targeted in the Greenpeace campaign. As part of her research, Özdemir was able to interview a Greenpeace manager directly involved with the campaign. She subsequently notes that although Greenpeace was successful in its aims to reduce the presence of genetically engineered foods in Turkey, the NGO was still primarily one-way in its online communication tactics and benefitted from the highly personal and pervasive nature of the issue involved: everyday food intake. Issues related to higher levels of public apathy, she aptly argues, require more two-way interaction offered by social media than was observed in this case. The Dragonfly Effect model offers an interesting framework for future research, leaving room for more specific metrics assessing "success" in social media advocacy campaigns to be developed.

Amy Reitz uses a system perspective to propose that scholars elevate Wright's (1960) functional approach—most commonly examined through a uses and gratifications perspective at the individual level—to the organization-public level via an examination of how social media complement and enhance an open-system approach to public relations, which, in turn, contributes to organizational viability and survival. She cleverly refers to social media as providing "a beneficial disruption" in stakeholder relationships that, when appropriately leveraged for two-way communication and organizational learning, can provide resiliency at the system level. Reitz provides a kick-start to this line of research by suggesting social media serve beneficial, system-level functions related to organizational identity, relationship building, issues management, and corporate social responsibility.

Finally, Yi Luo and Hua Jiang focus on the assessment theme by examining how social media campaigns are measured across a variety of firm types in China. In-depth interviews with 18 middle- to top-ranking managers indicated that although "buzz" is readily assessed by counting posts and comments, the measure is a superficial one when analysts seek (and need) to gauge a more sophisticated reading of engagement, relationship quality, awareness, and supportive behaviors among publics. Luo and Jiang report that, at least among these practitioners, there is a growing interest in and recognition of the value of research in social media campaigns. They additionally describe challenges to social media assessment in China, including a lack of clear objectives, a troublesome and unavoidable network "navy", highly fragmented audiences, and the frequent need to deal with rumors. Luo and Jiang call for more theory development related to social media, which aligns with my finding that across three decades of published new media research in public relations journals, only 11% of articles had theory-building as their primary intention (Duhé, 2012).

The book reviews section of this journal issue starts with a review article, "Social Media: Uses and Opportunities in Public Relations", by Marcia W. DiStaso and Tina McCorkindale. This article reviews the three books: *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies* (2011), *Measure What Matters: Outline Tools for Understanding Customers, Social Media, Engagement, and Key Relationships* (2011), and *Engage! The Complete Guide for Brands and Businesses to Build, Cultivate, and Measure Success in the New Web* (2011). Then, Isaac Nahon-Serfaty reviews *Conjuguer avec les médias: Les défis inédits du relationniste* (2012) and finally Martin David-Blais and François Miville-Deschênes review *Les relations publiques autrement* (2010).

My thanks go to Mahmoud Eid for offering me the opportunity to serve as Guest Editor of this 2012 Fall Issue of the *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition*, to the respected reviewers who provided detailed and helpful feedback, and the gracious contributors who patiently withstood the referee and editing processes. My hope is that readers will enjoy the contents herein and be inspired to continue the research these able authors have shared with us.

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**About the Editor**

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