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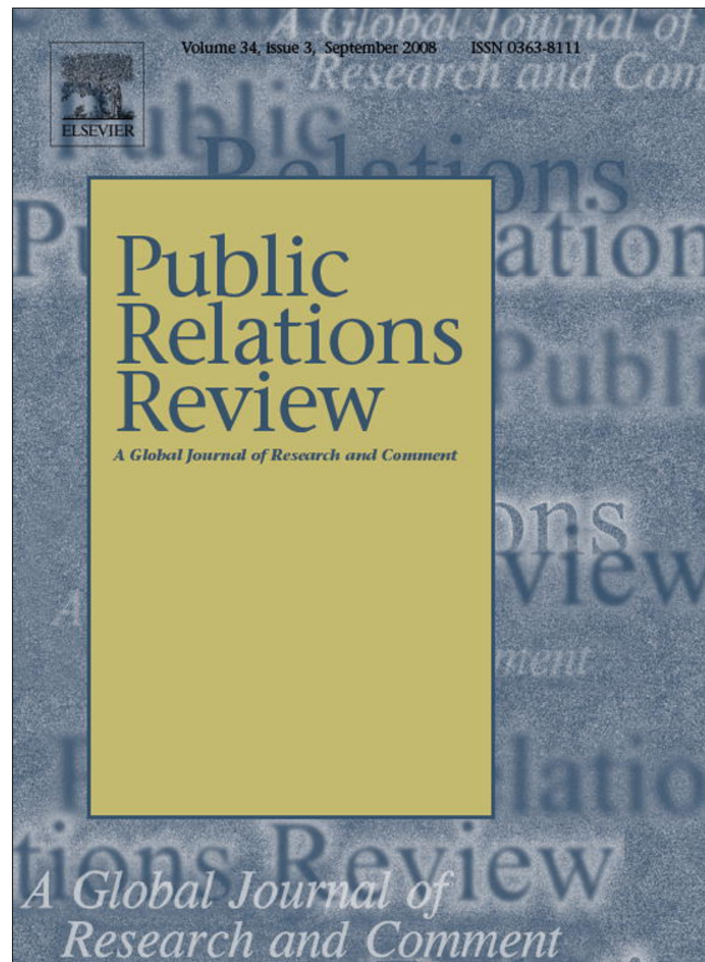

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Does the European Union (EU) need a propaganda watchdog like the US Institute of Propaganda Analysis to strengthen its democratic civil society and free markets?

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ABSTRACT

This article[1] addresses a paradox in the public communications of liberal democracies and suggests an easement of the social tensions created by it. Communication by public relations (PR) is an unavoidable consequence of such democracies, yet PR produces communicative inequalities, which offend the egalitarian and libertarian ethos of their civil societies and freely accessed markets. PR in this way renders itself into weak propaganda: historically and currently more available to principals rather than to subalterns. This is a conclusion most PR academics and practitioners reject. The former also distance themselves from persuasion and in their attachment to communicative symmetry they have ironically weakened the role of ethics in PR production. We seek to restore propaganda, persuasion and ethics to the centre of PR thinking. Our restoration begins with the establishment of propaganda detectors and regulators in the EU. We call them institutes for propaganda analysis after the example of the American Institute for Propaganda Analysis 1937–1942. These whistle-blowers will measure the flows of PR propaganda amongst organisations and groups in the political economy and civil society; and counter-intuitively, will provide PR resource subsidies for those wanting to be heard in public via a PR 'voice' but who lack the capacity to produce it. In this way, a minimal communicative equality of PR production capacity will be created and European citizens and consumers given a more level playing field of information sources. PR propaganda is constitutive of liberal democracy, their civil societies and of capitalist markets but it needs reformation in the interests of equality of communication resources. This is a worthy and legitimate public policy goal to work towards.

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1. The need

Citizens and consumers in Europe, as in the four other continents, have to take public relations (PR) seriously because many live in a promotional culture (Wernick, 1991), immersing us underneath a great Niagara of persuasive messaging—all the consequence of living in pluralist, market-orientated, and prosperous liberal democracies (Moloney, 2006). We are drowning in PR promotion and it is a submersion which wants our agreement, our money, our support in ways which are always persuasive, one-sided, and sometimes emotionally charged. It is weak propaganda.

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We do not take the view that public relations are about communicative symmetry between organisations and their publics and stakeholders as does the Grunigian paradigm (Moloney, 2000, 2006). Instead we place power at the centre of our account of PR in pluralist, liberal democracies with competitive markets and vigorous civil societies. Grunig's paradigm privileges the qualities of communicative relationships between entities as its first order evaluator. Are message senders honest; are they listening; are they wanting symmetrical outcomes? We argue that other qualities are expressions of a more fundamental relationship between social entities: the relationships of dominants and subordinates, of principals and subalterns. For us, power relations amongst social groupings are the major determinants of communicative relations mediated through PR.

We also recognise that while the Grunigian paradigm dominates US and much of UK public relations syllabi (Fawkes & Tench, 2004), European concepts of the term 'public relations' take a much broader view (Vercic, van Ruler, Butzchi, & Flodin, 2001) and are strongly influenced by Habermas's (1989) work on communicative equality and the public sphere. Because of the Niagara of PR messages pouring over Europe; because of our definition of PR as weak propaganda, we are drawn to the USA of 1937 and the foundation of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA).

We note that it was in an atmosphere of political concern about government and corporate PR that the American Institute was founded by social scientists and journalists to educate the US public about the widespread use of propaganda. It is worth emphasising that its intention was to educate the public rather than control any media output, an intention we applaud. It closed in 1942 after Pearl Harbour, having published a series of books, including *Propaganda Analysis* (Filene, 1938). A website (www.propagandacritic.com) is still maintained, mainly as an archive (Delwiche, 2002).

Authors such as Mattelart and Mattelart (1998), Pratkanis and Aronson (2001) and Pimlott (1951) have examined the behavior of FDR Roosevelt's administration in the 1930s with regard to Federal government PR. But state and political party activity is not our focus here. Although we do see political PR and its intense form called 'spin' as modes of propaganda, we judge that the media and political oppositions provide whistle-blowing roles of minimal adequacy in much of the EU. There is no such adequacy in business/group intermediations, competition amongst voluntary groups, and in emerging markets. Those areas get our attention and we propose a European-wide IPA for their monitoring.

2. The PR and propaganda connection

The fields of persuasion, propaganda, and public relations have all been extensively researched and studied—but usually without reference to each other. The bulk of persuasion studies (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1994; Perloff, 2003; Simons, 2001; O'Keefe, 2001, for example) come from social psychology schools in the USA, which have been concerned with the *process* of persuasion since the 1950s (when the Cold War and fears of brainwashing stimulated extensive empirical research). Propaganda scholars from the social psychology perspective emphasise the links between manipulation and emotional messages. Pratkanis and Aronson (2001) locate propaganda in the shift of persuasive communication from rational argument to emotional triggers which 'persuade not through the give-and-take of argument and debate, but through the manipulation of symbols and of our most basic human emotions. For better or worse, ours is an age of propaganda' (p. 7). We – without enthusiasm – agree.

Other scholars of persuasion and propaganda (Taylor, 2001, 2003; Jaksa & Pritchard, 1994) propose that the content of the message should be separated from its intent and that propaganda is inherently neutral, being a form of communication which may be successful or unsuccessful in its effects. They point out that much of the debate on propaganda and persuasion has become loaded with value judgements. Critical European theories of mass persuasion have traditionally emerged from Marxist concepts of economic power and media influence, such as the Frankfurt School, rather than from empirical research, especially during the post war and Cold War periods. These have tended to ignore or marginalise the role of public relations organisations and departments in constructing and disseminating propaganda messages. They have also concentrated on wartime propaganda rather than peacetime or corporate communications. An exception is Miller and Dinan (2008), whose recent book, *A century of Spin: how public relations became the cutting edge of corporate power* outlines the historical and contemporary involvement of public relations companies in both wartime and corporate messages and activities which they describe as propaganda.

These debates are largely absent from the core texts that have influenced public relations teaching and practice in Europe, most of which originate in the USA (Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2003); Grunig, 2001; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995). These tend to make bold claims for public relations' contribution to democracy, pluralism and 'social harmony'. The European author Vercic (2005) takes a similar line and there is a widespread preference for adopting the 'best practice' approach pioneered by the Grunig et al. (1992) rather than critiquing contemporary practice. The absence of an active school of rhetoric in public relations teaching, certainly in the UK (Fawkes & Tench, 2004) increases the dominance of this paradigm.

Pfau and Wan (2006) argue that 'controversy over optimal approach has stunted public relations scholarship' (p. 102), a view shared by other authors (Martinson & McKie, 2001; Holtzhausen, 2000, for example) who have commented on the normative, prescriptive weight of the excellence theory. It may be that this paradigm for public relations research has become monolithic, stifling other ideas.

Some contemporary authors (L'Etang, 1998, 2004; L'Etang & Pieczka, 2006; Moloney, 2000, 2006) have challenged the refusal to engage with propaganda, as did the earlier UK author Pimlott (1951) on the grounds that some American writers have tended to downplay or marginalise the relationship between public relations and propaganda. For example, Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, and Agee(2003) devote two pages out of over 650 to the subject of propaganda; Seitel (1992) has no references in the index. Moloney (2000, p. 85) notes that 'favourable litera-

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Table 1
Comparison of definitions

Propaganda	Persuasion	Public relations
The deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist Jowett and O'Donnell (1992), p. 4	A successful intentional effort at influencing another's mental state through communication in a circumstance in which the persuade has some measure of freedom O'Keefe (2001), p. 5	The planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its publics. UK Institute of Public Relations (IPR) (1987)
A propaganda model. . .traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalise dissent and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public Herman and Chomsky (1988), p. 9	Persuasion is an activity or process in which a communicator attempts to induce a change in the belief, attitude, or behavior of another person or group of persons through the transmission of a message in a context in which the persuadee has some degree of free choice Perloff (2003), p. 8	The art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation's and the public interest. Mexican statement Wilcox (1992), p. 6
Public relations serves a propaganda function in the press agent/publicity model. Practitioners spread the faith of the organisation involved, often through incomplete, distorted or half-true information Grunig and Hunt (1984), p. 21	Ethos (the credibility or charisma of the speaker) + logos (the nature of the message) + pathos (the response of the audience)	. . .the planned persuasion to change adverse public opinion or reinforce public opinion and the evaluation of results for future use Peake (1980), cited in Grunig and Hunt (1984), p. 7
A practical process of persuasion. . . it is an inherently neutral concept.. . . We should discard any notions of propaganda being 'good' or 'bad', and use those terms merely to describe effective or ineffective propaganda Taylor (2003), p. 5	Because both persuader and persuadee stand to have their needs fulfilled, persuasion is regarded as more mutually satisfying than propaganda Jowett and O'Donnell (1992), p. 21	The discipline concerned with the reputation of organisations (or products, services or individuals) with the aim of earning understanding and support. CIPR
	Situations where attempts are made to modify [attitudes and/or] behavior by symbolic transactions (messages) that are sometimes, but not always, linked with coercive force (indirectly coercive) and that appeal to the reason and emotions of the intended persuadee(s) Miller (1989), p. 48	. . .the process of attempting to exert symbolic control over the evaluative predispositions ('attitudes', 'images' etc.) and subsequent behaviors of relevant publics or clienteles Miller (1989), p. 47

Source: Fawkes (2006).

ture (by academics and authors who have worked in PR) adopts various approaches to the propaganda link: ignore it and/or define PR in a way which dissolves or reduces the linkage'. Other writers have explored the blurred boundaries between these fields and found the distinctions are more often asserted than established: the comparative table of definitions offered in Fawkes (2006) (Table 1) illustrates the problem of drawing clear boundaries between the terms, propaganda, persuasion and public relations, echoing the findings of Weaver, Motion, and Reaper (2006).

The most vocal critics of public relations as the modern form of propaganda are the US-based campaigners against corporate propaganda (Chomsky, 1988, 2002; Ewen, 1996; Stauber & Rampton, 2004), who expose its practice through websites, bulletins and books. Their nearest equivalent in the UK is David Miller (for example, Miller & Dinan, 2008) who also contributes to a website (www.spinwatch.org) which monitors public relations activity in the UK. These last five authors take the view that public relations practitioners are mostly propagandists by another name and that in this way they contribute to the legitimacy of social and political inequalities. Miller and Dinan (2008) examine the working of the public relations industry closely, though they focus on the work of agencies involved with political and corporate PR, which they find responsible for abuses of democracy, with little mention of public sector or other kinds of in-house PR. A more PR-favourable response to criticism in the UK emerged in 2003/2004 with the creation of anti-spin (www.anti-spin.com) founded by Professor Anne Gregory and Julia Hobsbawm, among others, which aimed to improve the ethics underpinning relations between public relations practitioners and journalists.

Our position on the PR-propaganda connection is that public relations is weak propaganda; that it is persuasion in the interests of the message sender, based on selected facts and emotions; that it is consistent with attenuated and existing forms of market-orientated, liberal democracies with their social base of intense and accelerating pluralism (Moloney, 2000, 2006; Fawkes, 2006); that actual, experienced PR propaganda by dominant groups hinders progress to more social equality and liberty, and that PR favours market trends towards oligopoly and monopoly. We note that the current popular reaction to excessive 'spin' in UK public and political relations is one of cynicism and disbelief (Gregory, 2004), an attitude that can be as damaging as undue credulity. Such reactions prepare opinion for PR propaganda regulation.

To counter these structural and operational flaws, we advocate a reform programme for PR production and consumption with regard to business/stakeholder intermediation, competition amongst groups in civil society, and emerging markets in liberal democracies. This reform programme has the following features: PR awareness should be a component of civic education in schools and colleges; citizens and consumers should be wary of visible PR, and watchful for hidden PR; the

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principle of communicative equality for all organisations and groups wishing to speak out with a PR 'voice' should be implemented via a subsidy for a minimal PR capacity (Moloney, 2006).

Those who criticise public relations often do so from a sociological perspective, looking at the macro- rather than micro-implications. Because they do so from outside the field (on the whole) they are not interested in developing solutions to the problems they identify. We are inside the field of PR as teachers, critical researchers of the subject and as former PR professionals, and our disposition towards it as a taught subject, research field and as a practice is as follows. In the modern public sphere, we assert that the public optimise their opportunities to find truths when all views and information have been presented and subjected to scrutiny. Our counter-intuition is this: all opinions and information provided by PR producers are partial; it only when all partial statements are able to be heard that truths are the outcomes; some PR producers need subsidy to be heard. In adopting this position, we wish to distinguish it from the marketplace theory underpinning much of advocacy public relations (Fitzpatrick & Bronstein, 2006). This approach relies on market forces to ensure access for all and that the consumer will choose the messages they prefer from those on offer. On the contrary, we argue that the current communication climate does not resemble a market place, and that many points of view are never heard at all. It is these voices which we wish to amplify.

Since the second world war (1939–1945), the term 'propaganda' has been pejorative, though it was earlier used interchangeably with public relations (L'Etang, 2004). This association has led many leading scholars (e.g. Grunig, Cutlip) to distance public relations not only from propaganda but also from persuasion, for fear of contamination (Fawkes, 2006; Moloney, 2000; Pfau & Wan, 2006).

In particular the original four models of communication proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984) emphasise the inherently unethical nature of asymmetrical communication, compared to the ideal of two-way symmetry. The revised mixed-motives model (Grunig, 2001) modifies this position, but the perception remains in the field that persuasion is distasteful. In the UK, rhetorical approaches to public relations (such as Toth & Heath, 1992) are rarely taught, so the study of persuasion is at best marginalised, at worst omitted.

Thus, those who reject the idealised versions of public relations are flung into the arms of those who condemn it unreservedly. Unlike the latter group, there are those who wish to critique 'excellence' without condemning public relations; the dissenters have often worked in the field and taught generations of aspiring practitioners. We count ourselves in this dissenting school and thus see persuasion as a central component of public relations and do not believe that it is inherently unethical. As Pfau and Wan say, "the most serious issues in public relations today concern ends, not means. . .. which have practically nothing to do with whether the profession employs a two-way asymmetrical or symmetrical approach" (pp. 108–9).

The proposed European IPA would embrace the centrality of persuasion to public relations practice, as a key contributor to the 'persuasive sphere' (Moloney, 2000). This would encourage greater analysis of the means, motives and models of persuasion currently explored in social psychology (Perloff, 2003; Bettinghaus & Cody, 1994). Some writers (Edgett, 2002; Fawkes, 2006, 2007; Pfau & Wan, 2006) further argue that the reluctance to engage with persuasion has led to weak public relations ethics (see below).

Rather than explore the moral complexities of public relations ethics, many of the core texts promote reliance on codes of conduct. However, Parkinson (2001) agues that codes like that of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) are designed more to improve the reputation of the profession than to control its standards of behavior. Analysis of these codes (Harrison & Galloway, 2005) suggests that most practitioners absorb the message that they should do the best they can without jeopardising their careers. This view is reinforced by the Global Alliance on Public Relations Protocol (2002), which explicitly places the interests of clients, employers and the profession of public relations above that of society or other publics.

Interesting examinations of the ethics implied in particular models of public relations are provided by Bivins' (2004) exploration of ethics from a systems theory perspective and Fitzpatrick and Bronstein's (2006) book on advocacy ethics. The latter is founded in (US) First Amendment principles but assumes that global communication observes the checks and balances of the court room. We disagree with this view. Instead, we observe that ethical discussions tend to be located within particular conceptualisations of public relations, such as boundary spanner, advocate, narrative writer (Surma, 2005). Fawkes (2007) suggests that the main role models for public relations – *boundary spanner*, *advocate, relationship manager* and *propagandist* – each contain their own attitudes to persuasion and to the ethics of persuasion. Given the thrust of this paper, we concentrate here on the propagandist role.

The propaganda model developed by Herman and Chomsky (1988) and Chomsky (2002) suggests that 'free' press can be manipulated to serve governmental and business interests above others by a variety of means, such as controlling access and by framing debates to reflect the views of the dominant forces in society rather than dissenting minorities. The role of public relations in shaping political, military and corporate communications is seen as inherently propagandist and there is some analysis of the numbers of personnel employed by these organisations to promote their views. Traditionally scholars who study propaganda concentrate on its wartime application, including recent wars like the 2003 war in Iraq (Taylor, 2003). However, these critics increasingly argue not only that wartime propaganda techniques have been extended as responses first to the threat of communism and more recently as part of the 'war on terror' (Chomsky, 2002) but that advertising and public relations are involved in economic propaganda (Taylor, 2003). Miller and Dinan (2008) detail the role of public relations in shaping the global political climate, though direct propaganda campaigns, and behind-the-scenes think tanks, associations and pressure groups. They share the view of public relations as advocacy but only to malign effect. Like some of the other models outlined above, these critics (Stauber & Rampton, 2004, for example) assume persuasion is the same

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as propaganda and often fail to distinguish sources and contents of communication. Health campaigns, for example, are rarely attacked—unless they turn out to be disguising a commercial interest. PR activity is seen as inherently corrupt and organisations such as the US-based Centre for Media and Democracy (www.prwatch.org), reveal how "public relations wizards concoct and spin the news, organize phoney "grassroots" front groups, spy on citizens, and conspire with lobbyists and politicians to thwart democracy", according to its website. These critics are not really interested in developing an ethical framework for public relations: they want to expose and abolish rather than reform. However, one can reflect on their arguments as counterblasts of disbelief to the high ethical standards exhorted by public relations' associations and (many) academics. It is hard to believe in PR transparency when major public relations firms engage in front organisations, apparently without consequence. The absence of any effective regulatory body (either self- or state-regulated) speaks of the failure of public relations to address its own shortcomings. Finally the critics concentrate on the imbalances of power which 'excellent' public relations seeks to avoid but which keeps cropping up in the real world. An urgent task, therefore we argue, is to devise resource transfer mechanisms, which reduce this communicative inequality (Moloney, 2006). In engaging with the critics we would also wish to open up the neglected area in their work of what exactly constitutes *legitimate* public relations.

While rejecting the simplistic attacks of many critics, we would argue that a European IPA could be a centre for developing a more unified and reflective approach to public relations ethics, one which engages with the dimension of power in dialogue. This would doubtless be welcomed by those who call for greater reflection by public relations scholars on the question of power, such as Holtzhausen (2000) and Martinson and McKie (2001). It would also provide a forum for discussion of public relations ethics and social responsibility. As Miller and Dinan (2008) point out, "It is an incredible victory for great power that there is no institute for the study of propaganda. . . anywhere in the world" (p. 180).

3. What sort of propaganda regulator is wanted in Europe?

We can imagine two approaches to establishing a European IPA. There is the accumulative one of building on the current good practice of existing national propaganda detectors. We European detectors could borrow from the good practice of the US *PRWatch* (http://www.prwatch.org/spin) site and from the Propaganda (http://www.propagandacritic.com) site. In the UK, there is *SpinWatch* (http://www.spinwatch.org.uk). We have not yet found equivalents in other European countries but the first act of the EU-IPA would be to identify which bodies, if any, monitor domestic propaganda activities. These national detectors have a territorial focus but Internet links make export of their work easy, so encouraging the development of a wider good practice.

The other approach is the creation of a federal, EU-wide institution, a European IPA. The nearest existing body to what we envisage is the Alliance for Lobbying, Transparency and Ethics Regulation or ALTER-EU (www.alter-eu.org), a network of campaigning and monitoring organisations across Europe, dedicated to increasing transparency in EU lobbying and legislative processes. While we recognise that there are national, European (CERP) and global (Global Alliance) organisations representing public relations, it is clear that the primary purpose of these is self-promotional rather than self-critical. We argue that the scope of the proposed IPA extends beyond the sectoral boundaries of public relations.

We are neutral as to whether a national or federalist approach is more effective: we can see that there is a case for both. Retired politicians and civil servants; think tank experts; academics; and PR professionals will be the staff in both. In the UK's case, we imagine that propaganda academics such as the historian Philip Taylor, media critics like David Miller, as well as public relations writers such as L'Etang, Pieczka, and Weaver would participate. They would be joined by academics and practitioners like Gregory (2004, 2006), Hobsbawm (2006) and Granatt (2004) who have been raising the more general issue of ethics in public relations relationships with journalists. Journalists, as the publishers of propaganda (consciously or otherwise) and as its detectors (sometimes) would be on the staff as well. The UK's National Union of Journalists has run a campaign (*Journalism Matters*) to reclaim the social role of journalism and reporting standards. The International Federation of Journalists (Europe) and European media organisations could also contribute. There would also be a role for academic 'think tanks' such as the Institute for Communication Ethics, Media Wise, the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom and other like-minded bodies.

The PR whistle blowers above are voluntary and not publicly funded. They do not have a statutory basis and we do not propose it. We are arguing for the watchdog role to be strengthened, but critically we add a regulatory dimension, albeit voluntary. The central insight in our proposal, we believe, is that existing PR practice produces communicative inequality through the power differential of interests in European political economies, markets and civil societies. The weaker 'voices' do not have the minimal resources to produce effective PR 'voice'. A PR resource subsidy is needed to redress that inequality. Such a subsidy could be provided by PR agencies and media organisations on a *pro bono* basis. A UK example is the Media Trust providing PR training to charities (Moloney, 2006, p.81). It is through these voluntary training subsidies that we see PR competence levels being raised and thus regulated. At the statutory level, the Electoral Commission in Britain also provides public funding for public debate when it judges that a more level playing field is needed. For example, it gives public monies to ensure balanced debates in a referendum (p. 82).

4. Propaganda detection at work

The American IPA is best known for identifying the basic propaganda devices, updated in the 1990s by Delwiche (2002) as word games (name-calling, generalities and euphemisms), false connections (transfer or testimonial) and special appeals

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(termed 'plain folks', 'band wagon' and fear). They amount to a working methodology for the forensic propaganda detector. Current communication practice can be assessed against these benchmarks. An example is the 2006 pan-European campaign to ensure equal access to cancer treatment, which turned out to be wholly funded by a pharmaceutical company, and organised by its PR agency (Boseley, 2006). National PR bodies have tended to avoid tackling member abuses directly, largely because their sanctions carry little weight. An EU-wide body would have greater impact in this area because of its wider reach to a continental public opinion. Given the globalisation of communication, the possibility of adapting such a body for global monitoring should not be ruled out.

In addition to monitoring current PR output, we believe that the new European IPA should challenge some of the purely negative views of *PRWatch* and *SpinWatch*, which often conflate criticism of the organisation with criticism of the communication. After all, it is sometimes the case that counter-corporate organisations use fear to promote a campaign (e.g. anti-GM) and celebrities are ubiquitous on all sides. This raises the need to identify the nature of *legitimate* public relations, given the energy committed to condemning the illegitimate. Issues of definition, detection, jurisdiction and regulation are crucial to opening up this distinction.

To aid this, we would therefore seek to give greater prominence to some of the ideas emerging from the rhetorical school of public relations, which has developed a range of ethical ideas worthy of wider dissemination and exploration. For example, Baker (1999) suggests that public relations practitioners tend to use one of five 'justifications for persuasion': self-interest; entitlement; enlightened self-interest; social responsibility; kingdom of ends. This echoes Kohlberg (1981, 1984) typology of six stages of moral reasoning, but it should be noted that Martinson (1994) rejected the concept that enlightened self-interest could be considered as an ethical position, and by inference the three levels below this. Edgett (2002) proposes ten principles for ethical advocacy, some of which overlap with Baker and Martinson's (2002) five principles, which they call the TARES test, (1) covering, (2) truthfulness, (3) authenticity, (4) respect and (5) social responsibility. This approach addresses the personality of the communicator and asks them to reflect on their own motives and behaviors. The relationship between public relations ethical approaches and newer developments in moral philosophy such as virtue ethics and discourse ethics would encourage wider debate within the field than currently occurs.

Such discussion would also form the background to developing codes and frameworks for ethical thinking in public relations. It is for this reason that we believe public relations organisations across Europe will wish to be involved. Additionally, we believe that a central element of the new IPA should be, following its US prototype, the education of the general public and, in particular, young people, to help them distinguish between types of propaganda and improve their abilities to discriminate between messages in the persuasive sphere. There is scope for the provision of educational courses and/or materials to this effect. We believe that media 'decoding' skills should be an essential part of citizen education across Europe.

What will be the daily agenda of the propaganda detectors? We construct the following examples from the public affairs of Europe in spring/summer 2008. In markets, we see emerging new technologies, for example nanotechnology, as claimants for our proposed PR resource subsidy. New start-up companies spend their capital on research and development and have little or no revenue flows to fund PR messaging. They struggle for the attention of new sponsors and funding sources, and media and lobbying campaigns are effective ways to gain them. Another example is the encouragement of local food markets organised by farmers who want to attract customers away from supermarkets. The funds for farmers from the Common Agricultural Policy are declining and local markets are becoming more important. With regard to commercial applicants, the proposed PR resource subsidies are not for market research or product development but for creating marketing PR 'voice' which is often the most cost effective method of increasing market share. A third example is from European social relations and is the discrimination against Romany people. They are a poor group of citizens, often marginalised from policy making. Their representative groups would be considered for a PR resource subsidy. Not all applicants would be acceptable: for example, paedophiles wanting to legislate for their orientation. A pool of skilled practitioners in a variety of communication specialisms would be available to act as advisors to groups meeting IPA criteria. Our IPA would not award subsidies to whoever applied for them. There would be a screening process, staffed by field experts and ethicists.

5. Summary

A European IPA would work with a range of national and Europe-wide organisations to reduce the communicative inequality amongst organisations and groups created by PR propaganda. It would:

- Monitor PR communication across and within European nations and highlight instances of communicative inequality.
- Develop analytical tools for ethical frameworks vis-à-vis persuasive PR.
- Educate communicators about ethical persuasion in PR.
- Educate consumers and consumer organisations in decoding and recognising PR, with particular attention to supporting schools.
- Provide support – including skilled practitioners – for organisations lacking the resources to make their PR 'voice' heard in debates on key European issues.

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6. Conclusion

Many, if not most, PR people become defensive around arguments that PR is propaganda or is a diluted form of it. This sensitivity, we believe, is decreasing – and should decrease – with the ending of the propaganda 'wars' between the former Soviet Union and western democracies. It is time for a more relaxed and productive debate about the relationship between public relations, propaganda, persuasion and ethics.

It is time for some radical, new thinking about PR. Its most important relationships, we argue, are with democracy, civil society and markets. We posit that it is an axiom of politics and economics that these institutions degrade without exogenous intervention. In our field, a major degrader is communicative inequality caused by unequal access to effective PR 'voice'. Our paper proposes the intervention of a European IPA to stop that degradation in several ways. Such an intervention will eventually lead to a better understanding of the benefits and costs of public relations to Europe's democratic and market experiences. But that would be a very secondary consequence to the enhancement of civil society and of competitive markets through more European communicative equality.

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