

Publishing Issues in Public Relations and Communication Management: Risks and Opportunities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this report is to summarise the findings and recommendations from a two-phase study which investigated the publishing experiences of academics in the field of public relations and communications management at different career stages across Europe. The methods, key findings and recommendations for research and practice from the study are provided in this report.

Background: Public relations (PR) and communications management is a relatively young academic discipline. Like all scholars, academics in this field are evaluated by their institutions and by national government/representative bodies. This involves being judged on the quality and impact of their research outputs. However, as an emerging field, the number of high impact journals is limited. This reduces opportunities for publication. Although the discipline is global, the key journals that are ranked most highly are in English. This can add an additional publication challenge for scholars who do not have English as their first language. Moreover, unlike older disciplines, the field lacks a list of quality journals. This makes it difficult for early career researchers (ECRs) to navigate the publication landscape and makes it hard to assess output quality in institutional evaluations.

Method: A two-phase study, employing the Delphi method and a wider online survey, was undertaken to answer two research questions:

1. How do public relations and communications management academics across different career stages in Europe decide where to publish their research?
2. What factors affect publication decisions made by public relations and communication management academics across different career stages in Europe?

The first phase: The Delphi method was used to facilitate a discussion between experts in the field of PR and communication management. Three rounds of discussion and reflection, which included open questions about perceptions about journals and experiences of publishing in the field, were circulated. Anonymous responses were aggregated and shared with the group after each round to achieve consensus.

The second phase: The results of the Delphi were used to develop an online survey which was shared with the wider academic community via online networks. The survey aimed to gather insights from scholars at different career stages across Europe.

Key findings

Publishing decisions: In the Delphi phase, the decision about where to publish was most frequently related to the suitability of the journal and the status of the journal in the field, including impact factor. Language of the journal was also mentioned. In the *wider survey*, most academics regardless of career stage, reported that they decide for themselves where to publish their outputs, but that supervisors and collaborators also influence publishing decisions.

Journal outlets: In the Delphi phase, *Public Relations Review* was ranked most highly. Although not included in the list, panellists mentioned that non-English journals are also important in their context. Panellists also reported struggling with a dilemma of wanting to

support the field but needing high impact publications, most panellists stated that they also publish outside of the field but did face challenges to doing so. *Public Relations Review* was likewise the most preferred outlet for publication amongst survey respondents. Most respondents also publish outside of the field. Over half of respondents prioritised publishing in PR or strategic communication journals in order to support the field, grow their reputations and because it is well suited to their outputs.

Language challenges: Most Delphi panellists and respondents to the wider survey did not have English as a first language but publish in English journals frequently. Despite this, most survey respondents reported that their institution did not offer any services to help with publishing in English, and instead they were expected to pay for translation or editing services.

Institutional expectations: Delphi panellists agreed that they are evaluated frequently by their institution, with journal articles being the main unit of assessment. It was highlighted that 'quantity above quality is what matters at university level'. In the wider survey, less than half of respondents stated that their institution uses a system for evaluating academic outputs, but that evaluations of outputs can impact funding opportunities and/or career progression. ECRs are not expected to publish as frequently as more senior academics but all felt under pressure to publish.

Conclusion: PR and communications management is an emerging academic discipline without an accepted list of high quality or impactful journals. Findings of the study indicate that academics across the career spectrum face a dilemma when making decisions about where to publish; they need to publish in high impact journals for institutional evaluations but want to support the field by publishing in lower ranked PR and communications journals. Academics also indicate that whilst English language journals are prioritized, they face language challenges and are not always supported to overcome these by their institution. All academics, regardless of career stage, feel under pressure to publish.

Limitations of the research: Although the wider survey enabled insights to be gathered from academics across the career spectrum, the survey was completed by a small sample of academics. This limits the generalisability of the results gathered so the conclusions are tentative. Nevertheless, similar concerns emerged from both methods of data gathering, suggesting a clear agenda for discussion and further research.

Recommendations

1. EUPRERA could work with universities and university colleges to develop resources and/or mentorship programmes to support scholars manage the pressure they face to publish.
2. A) The annotated journal list (see appendix 1) should be distributed widely to help members decide where to publish by offering data on the standing of different journals in the field (but see also point 4); B) A panel of journal editors in the PR field should be convened to discuss how to improve submission and review processes, including offering clearer advice to authors.
3. EUPRERA members should encourage members to publish in the core journals for the field

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4. EUPRERA should publish a summary of members' publications at regular intervals to demonstrate the breadth of scholarship by the membership
5. EUPRERA could either provide directly or compile a directory of translation, proof-reading and editing services to assist those wishing to publish in English.
6. EUPRERA could develop a scholarly network across members to facilitate collaboration across the career spectrum and across the continent.

PUBLISHING ISSUES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

AIMS

1. To identify the pressures facing public relations and communication management academics at all career stages
2. To consider means of supporting such academics in their publication goals

OBJECTIVES

- To produce annotated journal data for PR and communication management scholars in Europe
- To offer advice on publication strategies for early career researchers (ECRs) in the field
- To produce a summary report of constraints on publishing in PR and communications management journals
- To write an article on publishing in emerging disciplines with PR and communications management as an exemplar.

THE RESEARCH TEAM AND PROPOSED OUTPUTS

EUPRERA agreed in 2019 to fund a small research team: Professor Ralph Tench, Dr Johanna Fawkes and PhD candidate, Gemma Bridge, based at Leeds Beckett University, to research the issues outlined above and report to the EUPRERA Board and membership in 2020. It was felt this research would be of value both to ECRs seeking advice on publications strategies and to developing the maturity of the field.

BACKGROUND

Context of public relations

Whilst public relations (PR) as a practice can be traced back to ancient times, its professionalisation in the formation of professional associations and university-level education started to appear after the second World War, when the education of PR practitioners was considered vital in the building of the skill base and defining it as a professional activity (Tench and Yeomans, 2013; L'Etang, 2004). PR and communication management has been taught widely as an academic discipline in Universities and University Colleges since the 1960s in the USA and Australia and since the late 1980s/early 1990s in the UK and other parts of Europe.

Today, degree-level entry is standard in the field. For instance, a recent census report revealed that 80% of PR and communications management professionals have an undergraduate degree (PRCA, 2019, pp. 12). Delivery of PR and communication courses is usually from either a Business School or a media and communication department (Tench & Fawkes, 2005). PR is taught across Europe; however, the availability of courses varies by

country (van Ruler & Vercič, 2008). For example, recent research (Fawkes et al., 2018) identified a lack of PR education in Spain, which senior communicators felt contributed to the lack of understanding of the discipline in Spanish organisations.

In the first decades of PR education, academic staff were by necessity themselves lacking degrees in the subject. Instead they brought practitioner experience to the classroom and developed appropriate pedagogical strategies to educate students. During the 1990s, the model shifted from purely vocational 'training' to higher education, incorporating theoretical debates, in order to meet degree requirements and to develop higher order reflective skills. At the same time academic staff came under increased pressure to be research active and to publish in respected journals. In many institutions, periods of time were allocated contractually for research activities. This was part of a movement for greater accountability from universities to the taxpayer and to other research funding bodies.

During the 1990s a series of measures and evaluation systems were introduced to quantify the value of Universities and university colleges. While these vary across Europe and are yet to be introduced in some countries, they commonly comprise evaluation of academic research taking place in universities and University Colleges through submission of selective work demonstrating standards of research in given fields, assessed and graded through a system of peer-reviewing panels.

In some European countries, such as the UK, the evaluation systems include requirement to demonstrate breadth of research activity across faculty and impact of research on wider society. One of the key elements in this process is the publication record of faculty, with in many places, a sliding scale of expectations, depending on the academic's position in the career trajectory. There is a strong premium in publishing in highly regarded journals, particularly those which feature in existing lists of recommended or ranked publications.

Research evaluation methods in European countries

Most European countries have performance-based research funding systems (PRFS) for their universities. These national systems of research output evaluation are used to distribute research funding to universities and academics (Hicks, 2012). However, not all focus on bibliometrics. There are four key types of PRFS utilised in Europe:

1. Assessment is conducted at intervals of several years, employing peer review with bibliometrics to inform panel decisions. The system enables funding allocation and research evaluation. Examples of countries employing this system: UK, Italy and Portugal;
2. Funding allocation is based on indicators including bibliometrics. Assessment is conducted annually and used directly in the funding formula. Examples include Croatia, Poland and Sweden.
3. Similar, to 1, but the indicators, of which bibliometrics are included, are representative of a range of activities, not only research. Examples include Denmark, Finland and Norway.
4. Similar to the previous, but bibliometrics are not used. Used in Austria, where the Austrian Science Fund recognises a range of research outcomes including awards, science communication and software (FWF, 2019), and in the Netherlands where

evaluation conducted alongside quality assessment, 80% of evaluations consider the societal impact (Meulen & Rip, 2000).

Publishing in public relations and strategic communication

By the turn of the century, PR scholars were expected to publish in journals and their activity was measured against colleagues from other more established disciplines. The first established journal in the field was *Public Relations Review* in 1975. Since then, at least 11 other peer-reviewed, English language journals in PR have emerged. Three of which (*Journal of Communication Management*, *International Journal of Strategic Communication and Corporate Communication: An International Journal*) are international. Across all journals, citations for journal articles have increased over the past twenty years, with *Public Relations Review* having the most citations across all PR journals (Eyun-Jung, Pasadesos & Ertem-Eray, 2019). Non-English language journals have also emerged since the first PR journal was published.

The problem

Although PR and communications management scholarship has grown and advanced over the last twenty years, as the limited number of journals in the field demonstrate, academics in this field have a limited amount of publication opportunities, especially in international journals in English. The combined published articles from the journals listed above in any given year ranges from 20 to 50. Yet these are the main outlet for a worldwide community of PR academics and academic practitioners.

A further obstacle is that English language publications are the only journals with recognition in the systems commonly used to rank journals – and even there they do not score highly. For example, even *Public Relations Review*, which at present, is the highest-ranking journal in the field of PR, ranked as an ‘A’ journal in the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) Marketing Journals List, but with a JIF of 1.616 and a CiteScore of 2.34 (Mutum, 2019). This is compared to marketing specific journals such as *Industrial Marketing Management* which has a JIF of 4.695 and a CiteScore of 9.1 (Elsevier, 2020).

Therefore, any academic in the field will be aware that their best prospect for publication carries less weight in evaluation systems than their colleagues in many more mature disciplines. This is a problem for emerging fields of study (see discussion from the tourism field, in the literature review below).

LITERATURE REVIEW

To identify research, Google Scholar and university online libraries were used, with terms such as ‘journal ranking’, ‘public relations academic performance’, ‘pressure to publish’ and ‘research evaluation’. The resulting papers were scanned by the research team for salience and selected papers shared for discussion. This review is organised thematically as follows:

- University research performance indicators
- Journal ranking systems and the pressure to publish

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- Role, history of journal ranking schemes for quality assurance (QA) in higher education across Europe
- Limitations of ranking systems e.g. Tension between interdisciplinarity/emerging fields and reliance on high ranking (established) journals for QA
- Public relations and emerging fields of research
- Theoretical approach – the Performance University

University research performance indicators

From the 1980s, due to growing pressures for evaluation and auditing of public spending in the UK, assessments of academic research were conducted to ensure it met the 'three e's: economy, efficiency and effectiveness' (Rhodes, 1994). Indicators to measure scientific output and scientific impact were developed to assess the research (Burke et al., 1983). Such assessments were also used by institutions to manage and develop research strategies, assess research quality for inter-university competition for staff, students and resources. In the 1990s assessments were expanded to include the wider impacts of research. However, despite the rise of such alternative metrics, otherwise called third stream activities (Salter et al., 2002), public values (Bozeman & Sarewitz, 2011) and societal relevance (Holbrook & Frodeman, 2010), which could support the transition to a more open, accountable and outward-facing research system, journal impact factors (JIFs) remain the most widely used bibliometric indicator of the citation impact of a journal.

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the latest assessment system employed in the UK to enable the British government to audit and monitor the research output of UK universities (CareersAdvice, 2011; REF, 2020). It considers factors beyond JIF and is employed '*to support the desire of modern research policy for promoting problem-solving research*'. The REF has been cited as being one of the most thorough impact assessments in the world. Despite conceptual and methodological problems, discussed below, it still emphasises publishing in journals of international repute, which means it is important for academics to know how journals are ranked in their field. Many other PRFS, that employ similar methods to the UK REF, have been implemented across Europe to evaluate academic outputs.

Despite the widespread use of PRFS, they have been widely criticised since none has been developed to fully capture the diversity of academic impact. For instance, the use of PRFS in research assessment is '*dominating minds, distorting behaviour and determining careers*' (Lawrence, 2007), placing unnecessary stress and pressure on academics and leading to the abandonment of particular types of work (e.g. teaching, outreach) (Wouters et al., 2015).

Journal ranking systems and the pressure to publish

As suggested above, JIFs are frequently used as the primary parameter with which to compare the scientific output of individuals and institutions. However, JIFs were originally created as a tool to help librarians identify journals to purchase, not as a measure of the scientific quality of research, and thus they have limitations which include: highly skewed citation distributions within journals (Adler et al., 2009; Seglen, 1997); field-specific and calculated across multiple, highly diverse article types, including primary research papers and reviews (Vanclay, 2012); can be manipulated by editorial policy (PLoS Medical Editors, 2006); and the data used to

calculate the JIFs are not transparent or openly available to the public (Rossner et al., 2007; Vanclay, 2012).

Due to the challenges of JIFs, it has been argued that new policies and practices should be developed to change the research assessment process to improve equity. For instance, a group of organisations and individuals have signed a Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), which calls for the *'use of new tools and processes in research assessment and the responsible use of metrics that align with core academic values and promote consistency and transparency in decision-making'* (DORA, 2019). Despite these calls for change, research assessment continues, for the most part, across universities and university colleges in Europe. These assessments place pressure on scholars and institutions. As Honig et al. (2014) stated, writing about management scholarship, business schools worldwide are under pressure to value only research published in top ranked journals, which in turn pressurises scholars to adopt an *"entrepreneurial perspective, driving them to consider the risk/return profile of the work they may wish to undertake"* (pp. 124). This involves calculating how to maximise high value publication output to secure tenure or promotion, rather than deepening understanding of their subject.

The 'performance' of academic excellence is explored in Oravec (2017) who gives examples of manipulation, such as mutual citations, to increase rating in individual academic indices like Google Scholar; and coercive citations, where pressure from editors causes citation inflation in the JIF. She calls this 'gaming the system' (p 424) and argues it has higher impact on fields which are unable to meet performative metrics due to limited publication opportunities or journal rankings. The field of PR falls into this category and is explored in the next section.

Public relations and emerging fields of research

Public relations scholarship is usually assessed either as a management discipline or as an aspect of communication and media, reflecting issues with field definition that can be said either to have limited its development or to have encouraged transdisciplinary research (Edwards 2012; Fawkes, 2018). There have been various attempts at mapping public relations scholarship including Trujillo and Toth (1987) who organise research into functionalist, interpretivist and critical paradigms and Edwards (2012) who suggests that rather than create more, antagonistic, boxes we should treat the research approaches and their objects of study as constituting a spectrum. A clear overview is also offered by Moloney and McGrath (2020).

The pattern of publishing in public relations is explored by Eyun-Jung, Pasadeos & Ertem-Eray (2019) who repeat earlier bibliometric analyses of articles in leading PR journals (Ferguson, 1984; Sallot et al, 2003). They expand the number of journals covered to comprise the following: *Journal of Public Relations Research, Public Relations Review, Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, International Journal of Strategic Communication, Journal of Communication Management, and Corporate Communication: An International Journal*. They find that several key areas have emerged from the aggregated research field over time (namely crisis communication, relationship management, new technologies, and dialogic communication, in addition to the continuing influence of excellence theory). They also note that the pattern of research is indicative of a mature discipline, with most citations referring to recent works and decreasing reliance on textbook sources. They also note the (undocumented) rise of publishing in related fields' journals.

While there seems to be little academic research into the publishing experience in public relations, the profile of the academic in tourism offered by Tung and McKercher (2017) will be very familiar to public relations educators. They outline the progression from practitioners starting professional courses in the 1970s and 80s, through the expansion of the discipline through the 90s and early 2000s. In the second phase, practitioners acquired doctorates as they moved into education. Newer entrants, they say, have a *'much tougher environment with diminishing job opportunities [which] mean that many candidates must hold a doctoral qualification and have an extensive publication record just to qualify for an interview'* (p322).

Moreover, their research finds new and emerging scholars (NES) face pressure to publish in international journals, a challenge for non-native English speakers. The paper concludes with advice for researchers at different levels, including use of mentors, co-authorship and even cross-institutional collaboration. Tung and McKercher also note the effects of these strategies on the development of a field, as scholarship tends to fragment and dissipate for academics to 'perform' to target.

Theoretical approach – The Performative University

The increasing metrification of academic research, outlined above, is sometimes seen as an indicator of its performative nature (Wernick, 1991). For example, Cronin (2016) describes the culture of metrics and audit in HE as constituting a 'PR university' (p.400). She describes this as follows:

...the PR University captures and pushes forward an idea of the university as a market actor and folds PR thinking and PR practices into core university decision-making. I have shown how this dynamic operates in one area – PR relating to research, research audit and metrics. These metrics gain institutional and general societal traction because they offer a means of assessing reputational capital as competitive advantage as it is staged in the media' (p406)

In such contexts, functions are performed against indices to build up 'reputational capital'. This capital is a currency in the neoliberal development of HE, she argues, citing the 'the management of visibilities' (Hansen, Christensen & Flyverbom, 2015, pp. 125). Moreover, the pressure to perform is passed from institution to individual academic reinforcing a culture of performance. The terms performance and performativity are widely used and widely interpreted across a range of academic disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, linguistics and theatre studies (Albu and Flyverbom, 2019). Both terms are used to mean a) the execution of a task or b) role where performance involves presentation of material to an audience (Velten, 2012). The concept of performativity has been extended by Butler (1990; 2015) to describe gender as a kind of speech act or utterance, designed to reflect or challenge social norms. As Edwards (2018) suggests, her work is useful in understanding how professions can be 'performed' and is relevant to the performances required of academics (Oravec, 2017).

The literature reviewed above suggests that:

- a) The introduction of performance, audit and research assessment is widespread in European universities
- b) The ranking of journals is often used as an indicator of merit, despite problems with the ranking mechanisms
- c) Academics are under increasing pressure to publish in high ranking journals, creating challenges for new and emerging scholars and non-native English speakers; and
- d) Academic fields may become fragmented as scholars follow publishing strategies rather than deepen understanding of the discipline.

The introduction of a performance approach allows all the above factors to be considered as an effort to build what Cronin calls reputational capital at individual and institutional level.

METHODS

Research questions

1. How do public relations and strategic communication academics across different career stages in Europe decide where to publish their research?
2. What factors affect publication decisions in public relations and strategic communication academics across different career stages in Europe?

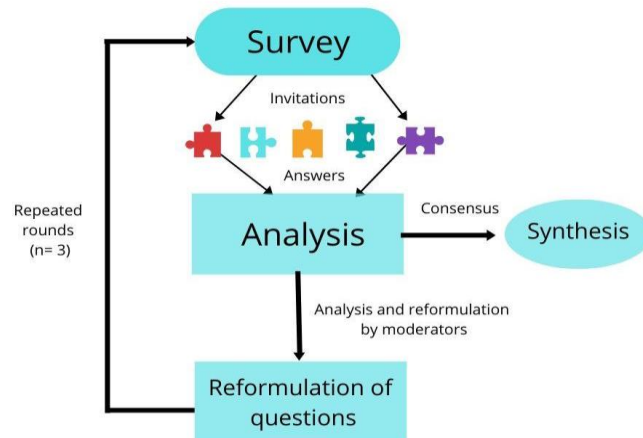
Delphi phase

The first phase of the study employed the Delphi method to enable an anonymised debate between senior PR and communication management academics. According to Wakefield and Watson (2014, pp.580), the Delphi study follows six stages: “(1) selection of the participants and solicitation of their involvement, (2) determination of the number of rounds needed for the study, (3) development of the various instruments, (4) responses and participation as the study progresses, (5) analysis of data from the various rounds and (6) preparation of a final report”.

A number of key characteristics pertain to Delphi studies that were regarded as important for this study: anonymity; no need for face to face meetings; freedom from dominant personalities and social pressure; ability to participate irrespective of geography; ability to participate irrespective of time constraints; iteration with controlled feedback leading to reflective responses; statistically measurable group findings (Sourani & Sohail, 2015; Cosic, Shanks & Maynard, 2015). This method has also been used in public relations to discover definitions of public relations in Europe (Vercič, et al, 2012); to establish an agenda for research (Wakefield and Watson, 2014; Watson, 2008), and to generate a global capability framework (Gregory and Fawkes, 2019) so is familiar to scholars and practitioners in the field.

Using the online survey platform, Qualtrics, the experts were asked open questions about their insights and opinions on relevant journals and ranking systems. Anonymous responses were aggregated and shared with the group after each round. The panellists were also asked to comment on suggestions made by other (anonymous) panellists. The assimilated results from previous rounds were reviewed until a degree of unanimity was achieved. The Delphi phase took place over 12 weeks and involved 3 rounds (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Delphi process



Wider survey

The second phase of research was a wider consultation using an online survey methodology. The outcomes of the Delphi phase informed the development of the wider online survey with the aim of understanding how ranking lists are used by scholars at different stages in the academic career path. A three-pronged sampling approach was employed. Convenience sampling via social media platforms (Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook) and newsletter networks was conducted to reach individuals who were easiest to recruit. Non-random purposive sampling was also applied to recruit respondents specifically from the public relations and strategic communication academic population across different career stages in Europe. Individuals, including members of the Delphi panel, were contacted and invited to take part via email by the research team. Snowball sampling was also conducted to reach a larger population. Once an individual had completed the survey, he or she was invited to recommend others in their network to be surveyed.

Pre-testing

A pre-test survey was run with members of the target population in the Delphi phase and in the wider survey phase. The pre-test was run to identify whether respondents would understand the questions and instructions, and whether the meaning of questions was clear. The pre-tests also ensured that the closed questions included enough response categories, and whether any questions might be systematically missed by respondents. Only minor changes were made, namely ensuring that questions needing multiple responses could be answered and that brief descriptions of key words were provided in the section headers.

DATA ANALYSIS

A combination of open (the respondent composes the reply) and closed (pre-coded response options given) questions were included in the Delphi phase and wider survey. Questions were numbered and clearly grouped by topic. Headings were included to make the questionnaire easier to follow. (The survey instruments are available to view in the appendices). The demographic data from both phases of the study were analysed to identify measures of central

tendency. In the wider survey, the demographic data was also used to assess if there were differences in terms of age, gender and career stage with publication experiences. Free text questions in both phases were analysed thematically.

ETHICS

Ethical approval was granted by the Leeds Beckett University ethics review board. The respondent's right to confidentiality was respected throughout data collection, analysis and reporting with each respondent given a unique identification number. No personally identifiable information was retained. To ensure informed consent, respondents were asked to read an information sheet and electronically agree to take part in the survey in order to indicate that they had been fully informed about the aims of the survey. Any respondents who did not agree to take part in the survey were removed from the analysis.

LIMITATIONS

Although the wider survey enabled insights to be gathered from academics across the career spectrum, the survey was completed by a small sample of academics. This may limit the generalisability of the results gathered and therefore suggests that the conclusions drawn, may need to be considered with caution. Moreover, many of the respondents were from one country (Spain) and this may therefore mean that the findings may be most relevant to the Spanish academic landscape. Nevertheless, similar concerns emerged from both methods of data gathering, suggesting a clear agenda for discussion and further research.

RESULTS

Delphi phase

Twenty-five academics from across Europe, at associate professor level or higher, were invited to take part in the first round of the Delphi. Fifteen academics agreed to take part in round 1, which ran for 14 days between October 15th to October 28th 2019. The results from round 1 were analysed, and the questionnaire discussion for round 2 was developed to explore the comments raised and to achieve greater consensus. Twelve of the panellists from round 1 agreed to take part in round 2, which ran from November 1st to December 9th 2019. The third round of the Delphi ran from January 8th 2020 to January 21st. All twelve of the panellists from round 2 took part in round 3.

Publishing decisions

In the first two rounds of the Delphi, the most important factors reported to affect the decision about where to publish were as follows: 1) Journal linked to/ suitable for my research (100%), 2) Review process (e.g. quality/ speed) (58%), 3) Status of journal in field (e.g. age/ reputation) (50%). In order to achieve greater consensus, in the third round, panellists were asked if these factors reflect those that affect their publishing decisions. Most panellists (75%) agreed with the factors listed. Others suggested that impact factor alone is also considered when deciding where to publish.

When asked if they pay to publish (e.g. open access), the majority of panellists (67%) said they do not. When reasons for this were explored in round 3, most stated that academics should not have to pay to have their work published, especially as *'we already work as reviewers for free..'*. However, it was highlighted that there is a *'clear differentiation between paying to be published in "predator journals" and publishing open access'*, especially as *'all the best ranked journals in Communication are entering the open access by authors payment system'*.

Another factor that was highlighted in the early rounds of the Delphi was the dilemma of wanting to increase exposure in the PR community whilst also supporting the field by publishing in its journals. Panellists stated that they had to balance this against a) the lack of status and recognition that PR journals have due to their relative recency, b) methodological issues in some PR journals, and c) the need to publish in high ranked journals for career progression. When asked to reflect on this in round 3, panellists expanded on this, highlighting that some PR journals have a *'quantitative and often functionalist orientation'* which reduces the likelihood of using them as a publication outlet for qualitative work. Others argued that publishing in PR journals is essential in order to highlight the importance of the field to academia and to show *'my institution that this field has relevance'*.

Despite most respondents (86%) not having English as a first language, in the early rounds, there was a clear division of opinion between panellists over whether language is important in the selection of journals in which to publish. To clarify, in round 3 we sought to explore whether this is an issue that primarily affects non-English speakers, and so asked if language is a factor in the panellist's choice of publication outlet. Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of panellists (71%) agreed that language is considered. When reasons for this were explored, panellists highlighted that there is a focus on publishing in English, as it is *'internationally received'*, *'is the lingua franca of science'* and that *'my University wants us to publish in English'*. However, it was also stated that if the study is context bound, then it would be published in the native language, as studies *'from my country are often seen as not relevant / important / applicable for other markets'*.

Journal outlets

In rounds 1 and 2, panellists were asked to rank journals in order of perceived impact/importance. The journals that received the highest proportion of votes for each rank were identified. The top five journals were reported as follows:

1. *Public Relations Review* (receiving 66% of votes for 1st ranking)
2. *Journal of Communication Management* (33%)
3. *Corporate Communications* (25%) and *European Journal of Communication Research* (25%)
5. *International Journal of Strategic Communication* (33%).

In round 3, panellists were asked whether the ranking reflected their perceived top-ranking journals in the field of PR and strategic communication. Whilst a third agreed with the ranking, giving a range of reasons as to why (see Figure 2). However, 50% of the panellists neither agreed nor disagreed, highlighting continued disagreement about the top-ranking journals. When the panellist's comments about their responses were explored, reasons for this could be elucidated. The prominence of English language journals was highlighted, with one panellist stating that the list *'doesn't reflect the European reality'*. Another panellist stated that

Most panellists stated that they agreed or strongly agreed (58.3%) that there are enough journals in PR and strategic communication, highlighting that it is important to consolidate the body of knowledge and therefore suggesting no more are needed. Panellists suggested that *'being supportive of non-English high ranked publications could establish a larger "PR" community'*.

Most panellists publish outside of the field of PR and communication management. We asked panellists about their experiences and perceptions of doing so. The most important reasons for publishing outside the field identified in rounds 1 and 2 of the Delphi included: 1) personal and academic goals (92%), 2) to link research with other fields (75%), 3) because of ranking problems with PR journals (67%), and 4) because of ranking opportunities outside of PR (67%). To explore reasons for this and to achieve greater consensus across the panel, we explored this again in round 3. Most respondents agreed with the order of the reasons provided, some suggested that ranking is the most important factor. Additional reflections suggested that there may be additional factors such as wanting to *'be a "public intellectual"'*.

Despite frequently publishing outside of the field of PR, some barriers were highlighted by panellists. The most important barriers were: 1) topic barriers (75%), 2) previous rejections or expectations of rejection (50%), and 3) methodological barriers (33%). When explored again in round 3, although most panellists agreed with these being the most important barriers, suggesting a certain degree of consensus had been reached, one panellist wanted to explore reasons why topic barriers are the most cited issue.

Institutional expectations and evaluations

In the early rounds of the Delphi, most panellists (75%) reported that journal articles were the main unit of assessment in terms of academic ranking in their institution/country. Other factors cited as eligible for assessment in ranking included book chapters, grant applications, and influence or prestige factors, such as international research projects. In round 3, all panellists agreed with journal articles being the main unit of assessment. In a later question it was highlighted that *'quantity above quality is what matters at university level'*, and this is especially the case for early career researchers who are looking to move through the ranks.

Most panellists stated that they are expected to publish in high ranking journals and that careers depended upon this. With publication quality assessed by journal indexes or national ranking systems. However, the pressure they feel to publish varies between institutions, with four panellists stating that they were not under any such pressure. This suggested considerable variation in the use of high-ranking journals in institutional/national assessment. To explore this further, in round 3 we asked panellists for their reflections. Some stated that variations could be explained by the *'country assessment model and scientific language policies'*. Other panellists highlighted that in addition to variations between institutions, variations may also exist between academics at different career stages, stating that *'ones [academics] not under pressure are probably older colleagues. The younger ones, who are still on the market, are definitely under pressure'*.

Wider survey

Eighty-seven surveys had been started. Forty-nine surveys were removed as they were less than 80% complete and/or had been completed in under 100 seconds. Another 5 surveys were not recorded as the respondent did not actively publish or were not working at an institution in Europe. As a result, 30 surveys were retained for analysis. Missing data from within the surveys that were retained were not included in the analyses.

The survey was completed by an equal number of female and male respondents. The respondents represent a sample of academics from institutions across Europe, with 13 from Northern Europe and Scandinavia (Austria/ England/ Finland/ Ireland/ Netherlands/ Switzerland/ UK/ Germany), and 14 from Southern and Eastern Europe (Bulgaria/ Italy/ Portugal/ Spain/ Turkey). The sample included early career (doctoral researchers and ECRs) (23.3%, n=7), mid-career (early to mid-tenure) (30%, n=9) and senior career (professor or similar) (46.6%, n=14) academics. Reflecting this European diversity, most respondents (n=29, 90.6%) did not have English as a first language. In terms of practical experience, over 80% (n=25) of respondents reported that they had worked 'in the field' as a practitioner, with a range of 2-30 years of experience. The roles undertaken included consultancy, directorships of communication organisations, and freelance work.

Publishing decisions

Most academics (n=28, 93%) regardless of career stage, reported that they can decide for themselves where to publish their outputs. However, some respondents stated that other actors, such as supervisors and collaborators can also influence publishing decisions. Other factors were also found to affect scholars' decisions about where to publish their research, with impact factor (n=21, 70%), special issue calls (n=11, 37%) and previous experience (n=15, 50%) reported most frequently. The methodology of outputs (i.e. qualitative or quantitative focus) was not reported to be an important influence in the choice of publication outlet for most scholars (n=20, 66%). Regardless of who decides where to publish and what factors affect that decision, it was reported by most, that the decision is made either at the conception of a study (n=18, 63%) or at the end of the writing up phase (n=12, 40%). Once the decision is made, respondents stated that the order of co-authors is most often determined by the author's relative contribution to the development of the paper (n=17, 56%).

Journal outlets

Over half of the respondents (n=18, 60%) prioritise publishing in PR or strategic communication journals. Reasons for this included the notion that such journals are '*read by our peers*' and that '*some discussions are better had with people attuned to specific topics*'. When asked about how likely they would be to publish in some of the most popular PR and strategic relations journals (as determined from the Delphi phase), respondents indicated a preference for Public Relations Review (see Figure 3a and 3b).

Respondents also indicated a preference for this journal when asked which journals they would be most likely to read. Mirroring this, *Public Relations Review* was also reported to be the most frequent outlet for publication amongst respondents to the survey. Despite a preference for PR and communication management journals, many respondents reported that they do publish outside of the field. Although many did not report to have experienced any

challenges with publishing outside of the fields, some respondents did report challenges (n=15, 50%) such as issues with language or differences in perspective or methodological approach.

Institutional expectations and evaluations

Less than half of respondents (45.1%, n=14) stated that their institution uses a system for evaluating academic outputs. Despite this, many respondents reported that evaluations of outputs can impact funding opportunities and/or career progression. Respondents highlighted that despite emerging fields like PR and communication management having fewer publication opportunities and a lack of ranking lists, their institutions do not evaluate publication outputs any differently.

Moreover, it was indicated that in most institutions, early career researchers are not expected to publish as frequently as more senior academics. However, some academics were unsure of expectations in their institution and others stated that there were no differences across career stages. Whilst some respondents stated that *'publishing is part of the job'*, and *'simply what you are paid to do'*, most respondents (n=19, 63%) reported that they felt under pressure to publish. Such pressure was reported by scholars across the career spectrum.

Figure 3a. Q3.7 - Please place these journal titles in order of how likely you would be to choose them as an outlet for publication (1 = very likely, 5= very unlikely) (wider survey)

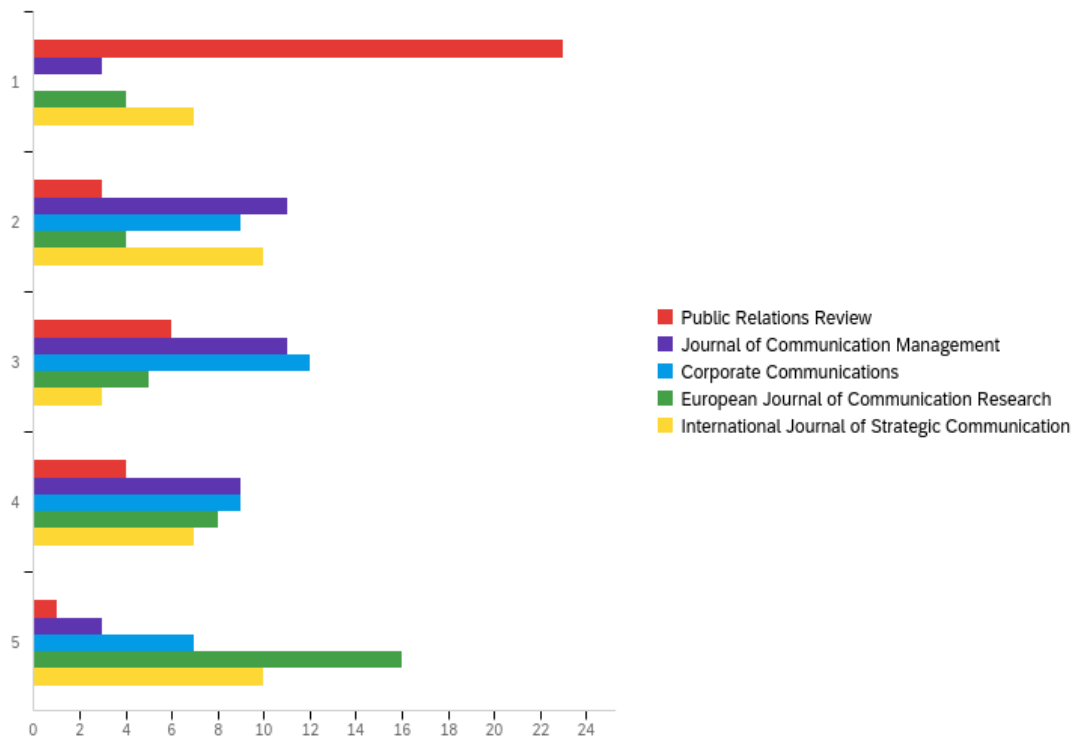
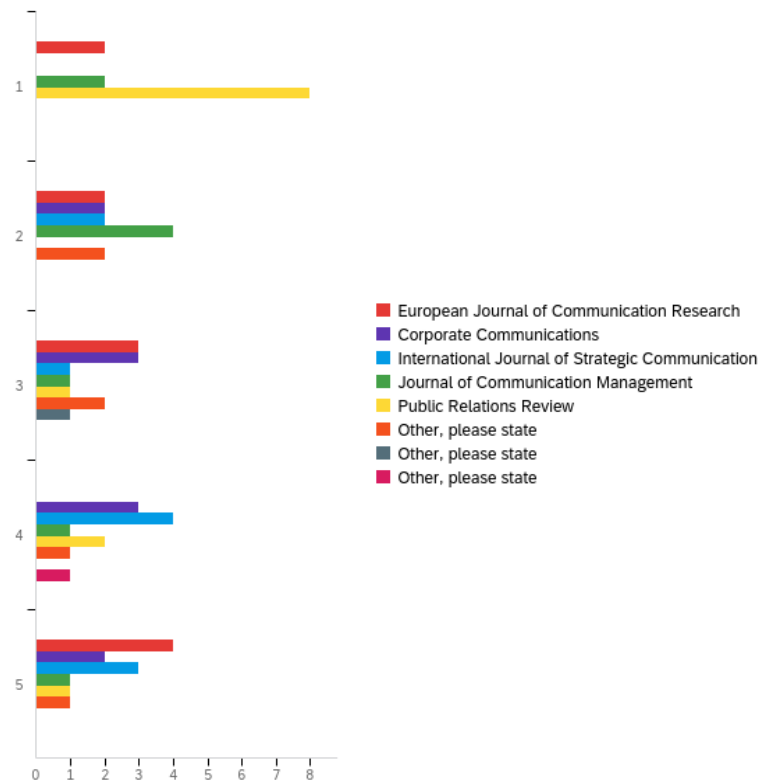


Figure 3b. Q1. Rank the journals to indicate your perception of their rank (impact/ quality) against one another. (1= Rank 1, 5, Rank 5) (Delphi, round 2)



Language challenges

Most respondents who completed the survey did not have English as a first language (n=27, 90%). Despite this, most reported that their institution did not offer any services to help with publishing in English. Instead, many reported using proofreading or editing services ahead of publication. Most respondents publish in non-English journals. Whilst some academics said that their institution is supportive of such publications, for instance stating that academics have *'total freedom concerning where to publish, the institution is rewarded for publishing in top journals, international or national ones'* other respondents were unsure if their institutions were supportive of doing so, and others even stated that their institutions were not supportive since they prefer *'internationalization, not national language publication'*.

Themes present in 'Other comments'

Respondents were asked to indicate if they had any other comments about their experiences of publishing in the fields of PR and communication management. Four key themes were apparent, including the perceived inferiority of the field compared to others; the lack of indexed journals in the field, the difficulties with publishing in PR and communication management journals (for example due to the slow review process) and the need for interdisciplinary research.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research highlights several issues facing public relations and communication management academics, namely:

Pressure to publish

Most respondents felt under pressure to publish, either through formal systems or because *'it's what you're paid to do'*. This echoes observations from literature that academics must 'perform' according to set indices in order to succeed. Most are conducted annually making the pressure continuous. The groups expressing most pressure were ECRs and senior academics, suggesting pressure at both ends of career trajectory. This anxiety largely relates to the relation between publications, career progression and funding opportunities. The numbers are small, but these results may reflect job anxiety among aspiring entrants to academia and status anxiety for their professors.

Tung and McKercher's (2017) study in tourism suggests that, whereas those who are now senior academics may have needed no teaching or field qualifications at the start of careers, current entrants must have both practice and academic credentials. It seems reasonable to extrapolate from the tourism research and conclude that younger researchers are under more pressure than their predecessors because of changing appraisal systems and a shrinking employment market.

Recommendation 1: *EUPRERA could work with universities and university colleges to develop resources and/or mentorship programmes to support scholars manage the pressure they face to publish.*

Publications in PR offer limited opportunities

Most of the respondents surveyed expressed the view that their publishing opportunities were limited by the small range of publications in the field though a sizeable minority thought there were enough journals. The Delphi panel felt that the low rankings of PR journals, together with problems of field definition hold back the development of the field. There were some calls for greater interdisciplinary research, and awareness that the dominant methodological approach of journals influenced decisions regarding where to publish. While the Delphi panel mostly submitted to journals that offered a suitable fit for their research, the survey respondents mentioned impact factor and previous experience with the journal above other factors. There was strong consensus around the top 5 PR journals, with the results (shown in Table 1) though the Delphi panellists expressed concerns about inclusion of *EJCR* in this list and exclusion of the *Journal of PR Research*.

The importance of prior experience can also have a negative effect on journal choice, with several criticisms of the processes of journals submission, review and acceptance, including multiple mentions of delay in reviews, particularly for some journals, such as *the Journal of Public Relations Research*. The Delphi panel offered detail examples of poor reviewing processes, long delays, contradictory reviews with no editorial guidance and other poor experiences. One quote sums this up:

'The academic world needs to re-examine the peer-review system how it works today: Too many articles, too little quality, too few time for good, high-quality reviews, too few reviewers, editors with no time to evaluate reviews and make meaningful decisions, too much "counting numbers" only. I think this system will collapse if it goes on like this...'

Recommendation 2a: *The annotated journal list (see appendix 1) should be distributed widely to help members decide where to publish by offering a data on the standing of different journals in the field (but see also point 4)*

Recommendation 2b: *A panel of journal editors in the PR field should be convened to discuss how to improve submission and review processes, including offering clearer advice to authors.*

It is important to support PR journals

Most respondents preferred publishing in the PR field because *'some discussions are better had with people attuned to the topic you are working on'*. Peer responses emerged as important factors in both stages of the research. Moreover, as one respondent put it (Delphi): *'A too large fragmentation leads to even more opacity and lack of clarity of the definition of our field (which still struggle obtaining a consensual agreement).'* Therefore, the survival and promotion of PR journals can be seen as a dimension of establishing the discipline.

Recommendation 3: *EUPRERA members should encourage members to publish in the core journals for the field*

Career development and funding requires publication outside the field

Respondents publish outside the field for two main reasons: a) to engage with other disciplines; and b) to secure publication in higher status journals. There was evidence, particularly from the Delphi stage, of wide engagement with journals covering subjects like art theory, social sciences, behavioural sciences, political opinion, culture and citizenship. This evidences the hybridity of the field, *contra* point 3, and is a strength. However, it is hard to capture this work as PR academic outputs. It is worth noting there were calls for more interdisciplinary journals in PR, but it would seem the interdisciplinary work is being published in a wide range of outlets.

Recommendation 4: *EUPRERA should publish a summary of members' publications at regular intervals to demonstrate the breadth of scholarship in the membership.*

Dominance of English language journals created barriers for non-native English speakers

Most of the respondents do not have English as a first language. However, the only journals with any ranking are all in English. While many respondents mentioned their national publications as a preferred outlet on both language and cultural grounds, they faced pressure to publish in English. Despite this, institutions did not appear to offer support such as translation, editing or proof-reading services. It would seem that respondents did not use any services, or paid for such services themselves, though this is not entirely clear. The dominance of English in academic publishing is not exclusive to public relations of course, but it does lead to unfair pressure on non-native speakers, as reported in responses.

Recommendation 5: *EUPRERA could either provide directly or compile a directory of translation, proof-reading and editing services to assist those wishing to publish in English.*

Support for scholars including Early Career Researchers

The insights from the wider survey suggest that all academics, but particularly ECRs at the start of the career trajectory and professors, at the end of the trajectory, feel under pressure to publish. In research conducted by Tung and McKercher (2017) perceived pressures to adopt research and publishing approaches amongst tourism academics were explored. They summarised career advice for academics across the career spectrum, indicating that collaboration and co-authorship are highly ranked as methods to improve career progression, without increasing pressure to publish in predatory journals.

Recommendation 6: *EUPRERA could develop a scholarly network across members to facilitate collaboration across the career spectrum and across the continent.*

CONCLUSION

PR and communications management is an emerging academic discipline without an accepted list of high quality or impactful journals. Findings of our two phase study indicate that academics across the career spectrum face a dilemma when making decisions about where to publish; they need to publish in high impact journals for institutional evaluations but want to support the field by publishing in PR and communication management journals, which may not be included in journal ranking lists used in institutional evaluations. Academics also indicate that whilst English language journals are prioritized, they face language challenges and are not always supported to overcome these by their institution. All academics, regardless of career stage, feel under pressure to publish. In this report we have summarised some of the key challenges that PR and communications management academics across the career spectrum face when publishing. We have provided a series of recommendations for EUPRERA to consider, that may aid academics to navigate the publication journey. We have also provided an annotated journal ranking table (Appendix 1), which should aid ECRs to decide which journals to target when publishing their research.

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Publishing issues in PR and communication management

APPENDIX 1.

1	Journal name (Year established)	Publisher	Aims or scope	Rank indicators	Issues per year	Articles per issue	Language	Comments on the review process from the project
1	Public Relations Review (1975)	Elsevier	Articles examine PR in depth, and commentaries by specialists in the field - based on empirical research	1.616 (JIF); 2.34 (CiteScore); 75 (SJR, H index); A (ABDC)	5	~15	English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Extremely good visibility in the PR community</i> - <i>Review process professional, helpful and thorough</i> - <i>Methodological misunderstandings</i> - <i>Outdated focus</i>
2	Journal of Communication Management (1996)	Emerald Group Publishing	International journal for research-oriented communication professionals and researchers – seeks to develop or challenge practice.	Signatory of DORA; B (ABDC); 62 (SJR rank)	4	~6	English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Good visibility in the PR Community</i> - <i>Practical focus</i> - <i>Short publishing process</i> - <i>Does not consider perceptions on communication or PR as relevant</i>
3	Corporate Communications (1996)	Emerald Group Publishing	Explores the relationship a communications department has within an organisation and the relationship between the organisation and its external public.	Signatory of DORA; B (ABDC); 1 (ABS 2010); 37 (SJR rank)	4	~11	English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Good visibility in PR</i> - <i>Practical emphasis</i> - <i>Wide approach</i> - <i>Well respected editor</i>
3	European Journal of Communication (1986)	SAGE journals	Explores research and theory in all its diversity. Seeks to reflect and encourage the variety of intellectual traditions in the field and to promote dialogue between them.	2.015 (JIF); CiteScore (2.590); SJR (1.340)	5	~10	English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Broad coverage of a range of fields of communication</i> - <i>High impact</i> - <i>May not aid career and research decisions (in PR).</i>
5	International Journal of Strategic Communication (2010)	Taylor and Francis	Aims to advance the theoretical and practical development of strategic communication globally. Examines the philosophical, theoretical, and applied nature of strategic communication.	19 (SJR, H index); B (ABDC)	5	~6	English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Good quality reviews</i>

APPENDIX 2.

Publishing advice (Tung and McKercher, 2017)

1. Collaborate with others
2. Select journals strategically
3. Seek feedback
4. Project and time management
5. Persevere
6. Write clearly
7. Contribute to the field

Career and life advice (Tung and McKercher, 2017)

1. Collaborate and find a mentor
2. Personal qualities (e.g. persevere, confidence)
3. Publish frequently
4. Define career goals
5. Work/ life balance
6. Passion
7. Work hard