

EUPRERA

23rd Annual Congress

Vienna, 21st–24th September 2022

Public Relations in the Risk Society:
Dealing with Uncertainty, Insecurity and Crisis



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Call for Papers ◀

EUPRERA

23rd Annual Congress

Department for Foreign Language Business Communication,
Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

Department of Communication, University of Vienna, Austria

The **European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA)** is an autonomous organization with nearly 500 members across 40 countries, all with a shared interest in advancing academic research and knowledge in strategic communication. In order to explore new methods and disseminate the most up-to-date research, EUPRERA organizes a highly regarded Annual Congress each autumn in collaboration with a select university or college in Europe.

The 23rd Annual Congress will be hosted jointly by the Vienna University of Economics and Business and the University of Vienna. To accommodate scholars who are unable to travel to Vienna, there will also be an option to attend the congress online.

The Vienna University of Economics and Business is a leading academic institution and one of Europe's most attractive universities in the fields of business and economics. True to its role as an open-minded institution, WU also sees itself as an international university, as an important hub for global exchange, and as a place where students and teachers work

together. Open-mindedness and diversity were already among the university's key values at the time of WU's founding in 1898.

The University of Vienna was founded in 1365 and is one of the oldest and largest universities in Europe, made up of 20 faculties and centres, and about 90,000 students. The Department of Communication ranks among the top 20 communication departments worldwide (Shanghai Ranking), and is currently at number two in Europe. Its mission is not only excellence in teaching and research, but also societal relevance, demonstrable impact on world issues, and the support and development of academic talent.

LOCAL ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Sabine Einwiller, Professor
(University of Vienna)

Jens Seiffert-Brockmann, Professor
(Vienna University
of Economics and Business)

Elisabetta Giancesini, Administration
(Vienna University
of Economics and Business)

Claudia Koska, Administration
(University of Vienna)

Call for contributions

Academics, PhD students and practitioners are invited to submit papers and panel proposals related to the congress theme: Public relations in the risk society.

THE CONGRESS THEME

Technological developments and globalization have not only brought about progress, but also major challenges and risks for today's dynamic and complex societies. Many of the risks we face today are the product of human activity, created by both social development, and by the development of science and technology. Big data, artificial intelligence, automation and robots create many uncertainties and insecurities, and risks are often difficult to ascertain. Risks concerning health and the environment can turn into major worldwide crises, as we have witnessed with the nuclear disaster in Fukushima and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. Public and private organizations, stretching across business, society and politics, are constantly required to

respond and adjust to the changes and challenges caused by new forms of risk. Citizens and organizational stakeholders demand answers, explanations and actions from companies, NGOs and politicians, and they increasingly speak up themselves, both on the streets and on social media. Both the Fridays for Future and the #MeToo movements have shown how the perception of environmental and social risks can mobilise people around the world, and exert change in organizations and politics.

For public relations academics and practitioners, this raises important questions and challenges surrounding both the method and the impact of communication in today's risk societies. Questions include how we should communicate on issues and risks to decrease uncertainty, how to negotiate conflicts, and what types of roles PR-professionals and non-professional communicators assume in times of risk, uncertainty and crisis. For academia, it furthermore raises questions around the applicability of theoretical approaches and the necessity for further development.

We invite scholars to reflect on the role of public relations in the risk society and how to deal with uncertainty, insecurity and crisis situations. We welcome research spanning all approaches – theoretical, empirical, and applied – and look forward to a stimulating discussion on the congress theme and beyond.

SUB-THEMES

Track 1: Risk communication: Communication by companies, NGOs and governmental organizations about risks and hazards

The term “risk society” was coined in the 1980s, referring to “a society increasingly preoccupied with the future [...], which generates the notion of risk” (Giddens & Pierson, 1998). To take but one example, the effects of climate change have become more and more apparent for everyone, so much so that the issue is now in mainstream public consciousness. This increase in public awareness has largely been due to an increase in extreme weather events, such as heat waves, droughts, floods, and hurricanes, and it is now an issue that interacts with all parts of society. Companies, NGOs

and governmental organizations all have the responsibility to communicate risks in order to inform people about the potential hazards related to particular conditions or activities, and to thus reduce uncertainties and insecurities. In addition, risks may raise other issues for PR that require theoretical or empirical consideration.

Track 2: Emergency communication: Communication in the context of emergencies, especially health emergencies

The greatest health emergency of current times, the COVID-19 pandemic, has shaken the world. It created enormous challenges for communicators in organizations and politics to reduce uncertainties, generate trust, and win the support of stakeholders such as citizens, customers and employees. Yet, COVID is not the only challenge we face; floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires and the like all require elaborate approaches to communication to deal with disasters and their consequences. Established theoretical models of emergency-preparedness, and communication about disasters and public health crises, are put to the test, which may lead to extended or even novel approaches.

Track 3: Crisis communication: Communication before, during and after crisis situations

Crisis communication is an established field of research. Yet, with crises abound in a world that is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014), communication faces new situations and challenges. This includes, for example, the phenomenon of online firestorms (Pfeffer et al., 2014), dealing with disinformation and novel counter-audiences, and questions of organizational structures and processes to prepare for (or mitigate) crisis situations. Empirical investigations into current challenges of any kind, as well as updated theoretical or educational approaches to crisis communication, are welcome.

Track 4: Ethical issues in risk, emergency and crisis communication

Challenging situations like emergencies, crises, and those containing an element of risk, all raise issues of ethics and morality. Ethical communication involves communicating with stakeholders with accurate and timely information, during the entire

crisis cycle, in a transparent, responsible and honest way; while at the same time contributing to the organization's strategy and reputational wellbeing (Jin et al. 2018). In other words, how can organizations accommodate stakeholders, while at the same time advocating their own stance during a particularly critical situation? Moreover, can (or indeed should) PR practitioners act as the "moral conscience" of the organization during times of crisis? There is a need to address these and other questions concerning the ethical issues in risk, emergency, and crisis communication – empirically and theoretically.

Track 5: Communication on risks and ethical issues regarding new technologies in communication/PR

It is perhaps a given that science and technology has brought many benefits to humankind – but it has brought significant risk too. Big data, artificial intelligence (AI), automation and robots create many uncertainties and insecurities, and risks are often difficult to ascertain at first glance. AI, for example, raises concerns around human autonomy, fairness, and justice, which calls for responsible

stewardship including public engagement and informed discourse (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021). Using big data for PR and strategic communication can be a valuable tool for gaining comprehensive insights into the interests, needs and habits of stakeholders (and subsequently for targeted communication), if ethical challenges regarding data protection and privacy are properly addressed. Applying automation technology for communication may improve efficiency in communication, but at what cost? These, and similar issues, deserve attention by communication scholars to ensure further technological development occurs in the most ethical possible way.

Track 6: Stakeholder activism: Communication by stakeholders to raise awareness on issues, nuisances and social injustice

Now so more than ever, NGOs, citizens and organizational stakeholders pressure organizations and politicians for answers, explanations and actions on the urgent issues and risks that societies face. Facilitated by social media, citizens are speaking up more and more – both on the internet

and on the streets. Recent examples of this activism include Fridays for Future, the Yellow Vests movement, and the #MeToo movement, which mobilise people around the world and exert change in organizations and politics. Societal issues and risks also stir up emotions in the workplace, which leads to employees speaking out, aiming to impact their employer's policies or conduct. Research on stakeholder activism, their communication, and its effects on companies and politics is needed, as well as theoretical approaches to capture the ever-growing phenomenon.

Track 7: Open track: Current research in (strategic) communication and PR

To open up the congress to the most recent and thought-provoking research, EUPRERA 2022 also welcomes work that sheds new light on other topics and challenges within the broad domain of PR and strategic communication – be it theoretical, empirical, or applied. We encourage the submission of original contributions, using innovative methods and interdisciplinary approaches, that contribute to the body of empirical knowledge and theory-building in our field.

Outline of program

TUESDAY 20TH–WEDNESDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER

› PhD Seminar

The EUPRERA PhD seminar will be held before the congress formally begins. The aim of the seminar is to provide an international setting where doctoral students in the fields of public relations and strategic communication can present their ongoing work, get feedback from experts and peers, and establish a valuable network for the future. More information on the seminar and on how to apply can be found on the congress website.

WEDNESDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER

- › Congress starts late afternoon
- › Keynote speaker 1 (plenary session)
- › Evening reception

THURSDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER

- › Paper presentations (parallel sessions)
- › Keynote speaker 2 (plenary session)
- › Poster session
- › EUPRERA General Assembly
- › Gala dinner

FRIDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER

- › Paper development workshop (PDW)
- › Paper presentations (parallel sessions)
- › EUPRERA Hour (awards, projects, networks)
- › EUPRERA 2023 Congress presentation
- › Congress ends late afternoon

We will again offer a Paper Development Workshop. It provides a special, interactive and engaged environment to discuss and develop papers with a potential towards very strong conceptual/empirical contributions develop papers that have the potential to offer very strong. All scholars can apply, but preference will be given to early and mid-career researchers (i.e., final stage of PhD or completed PhD within the last six years). Contact: alexander.buhmann@bi.no

SATURDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER

- › Social program

IMPORTANT DATES

- › Deadline for abstracts: 1st February 2022
- › Feedback/decision on acceptance of abstracts: 14th March 2022
- › Deadline for full papers: 29th May 2022
- › Feedback/decision on acceptance of full papers: 18th July 2022
- › End of early bird registration: 7th August 2022

All abstracts and papers are to be blinded (no author names and affiliations in the text or on the title page) and submitted in English. Presentation at the congress (paper or poster) is only possible if a full paper was submitted and accepted.

Abstracts: 800 words, excluding tables and figures, including bibliography.

Full papers: 30,000–40,000 characters, including spaces, excluding figures and tables. For formatting, please follow the author guidelines of the Journal of Communication Management (emeraldgroupublishing.com/journal/jcom).

Panel proposals: Rationale/abstract of 800 words, linking it to the congress theme and the relevant body of knowledge within strategic communication and PR research. Please include a title and a short description of each contribution, along with the name, affiliation and a short bio for each contributor. Each panel should be designed for a 60 minute session, with at least 15 minutes included for audience discussion. A panel should consist of 1 chairperson, 3 presenters, and (mandatory) 1 respondent. Nobody should take two roles. Panellists ideally represent various organizations and countries/cultures.

After the congress, authors of selected best papers will be invited to submit their paper to:

- › a special issue of the Journal of Communication Management (publication conditional upon the double-blind peer review process of JComm)
- › a book (edited collection), part of the Advances in Public Relations and Communication Management series, published by Emerald (publication conditional upon a peer-review process by the editors)

AWARDS

During the congress the following awards will be presented:

- › EUPRERA Best Paper
- › EMERALD Professional Impact
- › EUPRERA Best Reviewer
- › EUPRERA Master Thesis Award for Excellence – deadline for applications: 27th February 2022. For more information and how to apply, please visit: euprera.org.



More information:

euprera.org/congress2022



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