Awards for best master thesis in public relations

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Prague, September 22, 2023– The European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), a body of academic institutions, researchers and senior professionals in the field of strategic communication with 550 members from 51 countries has awarded two master students for their excellent theses in strategic communication.

The Master Thesis Award for Excellence is an annual prize aimed to celebrate the PR academia and the role performed by European Higher Education Institutions in the evolution of knowledge of this field. The jury, headed by Martina Topić, from Leeds Beckett University in UK, selected the winning theses in two categories:

Practical Impact Award: *PR Strategies for Audience Engagement and Dialogue on Social Media: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Select British NGOs' Twitter Posts*
by **Temitope Oyelade**, University of Stirling, UK
Supervisor: Sally Chalmers

This dissertation expands upon the dialogue theory of PR as enacted by Taylor and Kent in 2002 and 2014 by focusing on the use of social media for engagement by NGOs. It addresses the lacunae in PR research on social media engagement and dialogue within the relational paradigm, especially

regarding social media's multimedia affordances for facilitating dialogic engagement between organisations and their publics and building ethical Organisation-Public Relationships (OPR). The study indicates that purposeful selection of social media discourses for maximum cognitive and affective engagement may allow for more dialogically oriented conversations, and thus more ethical relationships with online audiences, as the presence of a dialogic orientation in the NGO communications has the effect of largely mitigating the effect of the unequal power dynamic that naturally exists between organisations and their audiences, leading to better OPRs in practice. The study also situates social media engagement within the dialogue theory of PR and provides direction for further research on the use of social media for dialogue, particularly the implementation of vulnerability, a key element of dialogic orientation.

Theoretical Impact Award: *The Role of Consumer PR in Feminist Menstrual Activism* by **Caitlin Carbury**, University of Stirling, UK
Supervisor: Clare McKeown

This dissertation sought to examine the role of consumer PR in Feminist Menstrual Activism (FMA) to gather insight into what PR does for FMA and menstruators, and what FMA can do for PR. The findings revealed three dominant categories of meaning which (re)produced both old and new meanings regarding menstruation: 1. Prepare and Protect, 2. Menstruation as Womanly, and 3. Feminist Menstrual Activism. These dominant categories highlighted that consumer PR's role in FMA is complicated by tensions and contradictions which largely stem from capitalism and commodification. Despite this, instances of transgression within the data suggested that PR has the potential to act as FMA. By drawing on these findings, this paper argues that PR practitioners

need access to the dominant coalition, a will to do the right thing and harbour a feminist intelligence if consumer PR is to play an active role in the progression of both FMA and PR practice. Moreover, the paper highlights the need for further theoretical and empirical research which incorporates more organisations and media platforms to draw stronger conclusions on the role of PR in FMA and what these communications mean for varying identities.

The PhD Award for Excellent Doctoral Thesis is a bi-annual prize awarded by EUPRERA aimed to stimulate the academic discussion and build the body of knowledge in communication management across Europe. The jury, headed by Prof. Winni Johansen and Prof. Wim Elving, selected as winning thesis:

The contribution of different communication channels and sub-state actors
to country perception in today's globalized and digitalized society.
A public diplomacy listening approach
by **Jérôme Chariatte,** University of Fribourg, CH
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Diana Ingenhoff

The thesis (179 pages) addresses new, relevant, and fascinating topics: listening within public diplomacy, as well as civic engagement across countries, and the role of sub-actors such as cities for the country image and the branding of a country. In addition, the relationship between place branding and public diplomacy in the digital sphere is addressed and extended by linking it to

concepts like global governance and social responsibility. Furthermore, the study contributes with combining new and multiple methods and ways to listen and to measure country image and public diplomacy that take into account the globalized and digitalized context of todays' public diplomacy efforts.

The methods are ambitious and broad ranged. Based on four different empirical studies the thesis contributes a mixed methods approach to study country image and public urban actors relying on both classical and recent research methodologies, such as media content and survey analysis, semantic network analysis, structural equation modelling and analysis of trace data. The analyses are thoroughly executed and based on appropriate and well-argued research methodologies. The 'mystery' of the thesis is clearly embedded in its implementation of new research methods adopted to match the digitalization and social media implementation in today's public diplomacy practices. Furthermore, the thesis contributes to strengthen the role and status of communication in the public diplomacy and country image branding, and to add new insights into methodological theories and issues related to public diplomacy research enriching the perspectives of diplomacy and urban civic engagement across countries.

The thesis clearly demonstrates how the field of public diplomacy and public relations can benefit from taking new theoretical and methodological steps forward.