

Awards for best research papers in public relations: EUPRERA honours academics and practitioners from Europe University of Málaga (16-19 September 2026)

Málaga, September 18, 2026 – On the occasion of its annual congress, the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), a body of academic institutions, researchers and professionals in the field of public relations and strategic communication with 500 members from over 40 countries, has awarded authors for their excellent research and the best reviewer for their contribution.

EUPRERA Best Paper Awards 2026

The Awards were given to the authors of the three papers with the highest rankings in a blind peer-review process performed by experienced reviewers from the EUPRERA community, under the guidance of the Heads of the Scientific Committee, Martina Topić-Rutherford and Sarah Marschlich. The winning papers were selected for their conceptual contribution, methodological quality, and relevance to contemporary challenges in the field.

The three winning papers are:

1st place - Enacting Sustainability Through Communication: Transformative Roles, Ethical Agency, and Organisational Constraints in Paradoxical Times

by Francisca Weder, Chiara Valentini, Flora Hung-Baesecke



This paper is awarded first place for its ambitious and timely contribution to sustainability and strategic communication scholarship. It moves beyond viewing sustainability communication primarily as reporting or messaging and instead conceptualises communication as a practice through which sustainability is interpreted, negotiated, and enacted within organisations.

Drawing on 77 interviews across Finland, Austria, and Australia, the study demonstrates how organisational structures, leadership, and regulatory environments shape professional agency. Particularly valuable is its identification of change-agent roles centred on networking, coaching, storytelling, and challenging established assumptions. Its

conceptual ambition, comparative depth, and relevance to contemporary organisational challenges make it the strongest paper in this year's competition.

2nd place - *Not Any Stance, but My Stance! Why People Support Corporate Social Advocacy Only When It Aligns With Their Own Position*

by Thomas Koch, Sandra Mechler, Nora Denner



This paper is awarded second place for its conceptual clarity, methodological strength, and important challenge to assumptions about corporate social advocacy. Using a representative survey of 1,135 respondents, the study demonstrates that expectations of corporate advocacy are strongly shaped by people's own positions on controversial issues. Rather than broadly expecting

companies to participate in sociopolitical debate, publics appear more supportive when corporate positions align with their existing views. The study also shows that behavioural responses are asymmetrical, with avoidance and punishment more common than reward. These findings meaningfully complicate existing scholarship and offer important implications for organisations communicating in increasingly polarised environments.

3rd place - *Facing the Numbers: An Eye-Tracking Analysis of the Effects of C-Suite Visuals and Text Valence in Annual Reports*

by Laura Hackl, Andreas Enzminger



This paper is awarded third place for its methodological innovation and original contribution to investor relations, visual communication, and impression-management research. Combining eye-tracking with survey measures, the study examines how audiences process leadership imagery alongside positive and negative textual information in annual reports. The findings show

that executive images attract attention and can strengthen perceptions when accompanying information is positive, but cannot compensate for negative information. By demonstrating that textual valence can override visual cues, the study adds useful nuance to assumptions about visual impression management while also showing the value of eye-tracking for strategic communication research.

EUPRERA Best Reviewer Award 2026

The Best Reviewer Award recognises exceptional dedication, quality, and collegiality in the peer-review process, key values that uphold the academic standards of the EUPRERA Congress. This year's winner is:

Anastasios Theofilou, Bournemouth University, UK



This year's Best Reviewer Award recognises **Anastasios Theofilou**, whose contribution to the review process combines scholarly rigour, reliability, generosity, and genuine collegiality. This reviewer consistently accepts invitations to review and can always be relied upon to support the process, responding to requests with characteristic warmth and often with the reassuring words, "Of course, you can always count on

me." The reviews themselves are consistently detailed, thoughtful, constructive, and developmental, offering authors substantive feedback that helps them strengthen their work rather than simply assessing it. This commitment is reflected in consistently excellent evaluations, including five-star ratings and highly positive feedback on the quality and usefulness of the reviews. What particularly distinguishes this reviewer is the combination of intellectual care and personal generosity brought to an increasingly demanding form of academic service: responsive, friendly, dependable, and consistently willing to contribute while maintaining a very high standard of scholarly engagement.

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