

Awards for best master theses in public relations

EUPRERA Annual Congress 2026

University of Málaga (16-19 September 2026)

Málaga, September 18, 2026 – The European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), a body of academic institutions, researchers and senior professionals in the field of public relations and strategic communication with 500 members from 40 countries, announced the 2025 winners of its master theses awards.

The **Master Thesis Award for Excellence** is an annual prize aimed to celebrate PR academia and the role played by European Higher Education Institutions in the evolution of knowledge in this field. The jury, headed by Martina Topić-Rutherford, from the University of Alabama, USA, selected the winning theses in two categories. Both winners were formally recognized during the EUPRERA Annual Congress 2026.

Theoretical Impact Award

Esther-Lea Schlegel, Hochschule Darmstadt, Germany

Sustainability Communication in Times of Change: The Need for Strategic Adaption

Supervisor: Lars Rademacher



Martina Topić-Rutherford, Esther-Lea Schlegel, Sabine Einwiller

This dissertation was selected as the winner in the theoretical category for its strong conceptual foundation, originality, and engagement with one of the most pressing challenges facing contemporary strategic communication. The thesis brings together stakeholder theory, integrated communication, and CSR and sustainability communication scholarship to develop a coherent understanding of how

organisations can communicate sustainability credibly in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing environment. Its particular contribution is the A.D.A.P.T. Framework, which synthesises theoretical and empirical insights into an integrative model connecting internal and external communication, stakeholder expectations, regulatory pressures, credibility and organisational transformation. By distinguishing normative, strategic and operational dimensions and showing how these interact within sustainability communication, the dissertation offers a particularly clear and useful conceptualisation of

a fragmented field. The reviewers particularly recognised the relevance and originality of the research, the clarity of its argument, and the holistic nature of the framework it develops.

Practical Impact Award

Magda Sarsevanidze, Lund University, Sweden

NGO Communication Countering Character Assassination in Georgia

Supervisor: Marlene Wiggill



Isabel Ruiz Mora, Marlene Wiggill, Martina Topić-Rutherford, Sabine Einwiller

This dissertation was selected as the winner in the practical category for its outstanding combination of contemporary relevance, rigorous research, and clear value for communication practice. Focusing on how NGOs in Georgia respond to character assassination and deliberate delegitimation, the thesis addresses an urgent strategic communication challenge in a politically volatile environment and provides insights with

relevance well beyond the immediate national context. Its particular strength lies in translating research into practical guidance: rather than simply documenting reputational attacks, the study identifies seven empirically grounded counter-tactics that NGOs can use to strengthen reputational resilience and respond strategically to political pressure. The research is further distinguished by its careful attention to cultural and political context and by an abductive approach that enables the findings to move beyond description towards meaningful practical conclusions. By connecting reputation management and character assassination with the lived experiences of NGO practitioners, the dissertation offers an original, timely and highly actionable contribution to strategic communication practice.

Please access the EUPRERA website for details on the 2027 edition of the MA Award and 7 of the PhD Award.

www.euprera.org/ma-award

www.euprera.org/phd-award