



# Do you see what I see? An examination of perceptions between advertising and public relations professionals



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## ABSTRACT

This study represents an initial step in the empirical understanding of integration as it relates to the advertising and public relations fields. Using a survey of practitioners ( $n = 1076$ ) it finds that while many practitioners are aware of integration efforts within organizations, they may be less than enthusiastic about the concept. The results offer suggestions both for the practice and education of professional communication.

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## 1. Introduction

Of late, the conversation surrounding advertising and public relations seems to be centered on the concept of integration. Recent popular web posts, for example, have included titles such as “Integrate or Die,” (Campbell, 2015) or “The New Frontier: Public Relations and Advertising working together” (Jeffrey, 2015). Whether or not this is simply the latest salvo in the IMC debate (which continues today) or if this is a new phenomenon remains to be seen. Clearly it is a topic of interest to both fields, and one which could benefit from empirical research.

As such, the purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of integration between public relations and advertising in terms of the perceived relationship between professionals in the fields, how each is managed (or should be managed) within organizations, and how education or training in the fields should be addressed. Another topic of particular interest is to determine who should be responsible for specific communication-related tasks within organizations. To accomplish this task, a survey of advertising ( $n = 384$ ) and public relations ( $n = 692$ ) professionals was conducted to determine the current state of the relationship between advertising and public relations.

The goal of this study is to establish a baseline for research that examines the relationship between the professions. It ultimately hopes to inform both the professional and academic disciplines of each field as to how practitioners are engaging (or not engaging) in integrative practices. While substantial research has examined the effect of integrated campaigns in both public relations and advertising, none have explored how practitioners in each field perceive the concept of integration from the perspective of the relationship between the fields.

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### 1.1. Literature review

The discussion of how, why, and when advertising and public relations can or should be integrated has long been a topic of interest to both fields. As early as 1928, Edward Bernays addressed the integration of the two disciplines and he indicated that challenges in both fields could be problematic for professional communicators, “To advertise on a scale which will reach fifty million persons is expensive. To reach and persuade the group leaders who dictate the public’s thoughts and actions is likewise expensive.” (p.37). He went on to describe the relationship between the fields as:

The counsel on public relations is not an advertising man but he advocates advertising where that is indicated. Very often he is called in by an advertising agency to supplement its work on behalf of a client. His work and that of the advertising agency do not conflict with or duplicate each other (Bernays, 1928, p. 39)

Baus (1942, p. 236), a publicity director and lecturer at the University of Southern California, echoed Bernays’ statements by stating “Business publicity. . . requires an understanding of advertising and selling. Often the publicist must co-operate with the advertising program”. John Hill, chairman of the board of Hill & Knowlton, wrote in 1958 with a slightly different take on the relationship between the fields. He stated:

Advertising, in the usual sense, is the use of paid space in newspapers, magazines, or on the air or billboards for the selling of products or services. Public relations, as a function, differs basically in that it is designed, mainly, to promote understanding and public acceptance of an idea or cause. Public relations has many techniques, one of which is the use of the technique of advertising whereby the “public relations message” can be placed before the desired audiences in exactly the desired phraseology (Hill, 1958, pp. 4–5).

So, though Hill took a slightly different approach to “integration” of advertising and public relations, it is clear that early thought leaders in the communication field had been at least considering the relationship between advertising and public relations as an important matter of interest.

These early thought leaders were not alone in their approach to combining public relations and advertising (along with other professional communication disciplines). Considered to be among the first marketing classes in the United States, the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania introduced a class in 1904 entitled “The Marketing of Products.” The course catalog at the time described the course as:

The methods now practiced in the organization and conduct of the selling branch of industrial and mercantile business. The principal subjects in the field are publicity, agency, advertising, forms and correspondence, credit and collections, and terms of sale (Maynard, 1941, p. 383).

Maynard (1941, p. 383) concluded that the course was indeed a marketing course, “but one distinctly in the area of advertising and sales promotion rather than basic principles”. Likely without much consideration of the debate between the independent fields of advertising and public relations within the matrix of “integrated marketing,” the Wharton School became a very early progenitor of the question – where do public relations and advertising belong in terms of both practice and education, and what is (or should be) the relationship between the fields?

Kotler and Mindak (1978, p. 13) questioned whether marketing and public relations should be “partners or rivals.” At the time, they found that both disciplines attempt to satisfy the needs of outside groups, but that both “normally operate separately, at some loss in overall effectiveness”. Their research concludes that:

It may be that the best way to solve a marketing problem would be through public relations activities. It is also possible that the best way to solve a public relations problem might be through the disciplined orientation that marketing provides (Kotler & Mindak, 1978, p. 17).

This approach to the integration of public relations with other fields of professional communication had not (and has not) gone unnoticed. Bishop (1974) was one of the first academics to begin looking at how public relations was being studied in combination with a variety of fields, including advertising. His comprehensive bibliography’s third edition (covering 1964–1972) revealed that nearly 300 scholarly articles, books and dissertations had already explored how the two fields might be integrated in terms of scholarly research and professional practice, though Cutlip (1974, p. xii) stated that the investigation revealed that “scholarly research. . . is urgently needed”. Multiple scholars have since taken up this call to action.

Newsom (2009, p. 474) indicates that a 1993 report to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication’s advertising and public relations divisions recommended “integrated curricula to prepare students for a more unified practice” based on a two year study conducted among advertising and public relations educators and professionals. Newsom goes on to say:

The concept seemed workable, but the plan ran into difficulties at both the professional and academic levels. At the professional level, the economics of advertising and public relations are different. Whereas public relations charges for professional services on a fee as well as an hourly basis. . . advertising billings are based on media placements. . . (Newsom, 2009, p. 475).

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