
Guest editorial: Communicating in turbulent times

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It is an honor and a privilege to present you the special issue (SI) of selected papers of the Euprera conference, which was held in Prague in September 2023. The conference was expertly organized by Denisa Hejlová, David Klimes and Petra Koudelková at Charles University. It was wonderful to finalize the SI during and close after arriving back after the 25th Euprera conference in Bucharest. Euprera conferences have a high standard; it has a natural mix of research, education and practice and the attendants are a strong and very friendly community. But also, what has happened in a year's time is that communication, strategic communication and PR are at the heart and center of the big issues of our era, and beyond, I am afraid. The overarching issue we need to reflect upon and initiate discussions on is ethical issues related to our field of study.

An important ethical issue is the recent introduction of Large Language Models (LLMs). As educators, we already all have experiences of students using it. When that co-reader is ChatGPT or a father, mother or close friend, it does not really matter. Reading correct texts is only a joy and should always be encouraged. In the past, there were discussions about whether calculators were allowed in the classroom; later, the same kind of discussion was held on the use of computers and use of Wikipedia. This discussion will continue for a while, I guess, but it seems that we should encourage the use of all to help improve our efficiency, if they are available, if it is transparent (including prompts in references for instance). Conservatism was once explained to me that individuals did not want to cross the bridge and kept getting their pants wet because their ancestors did not use it as well. Not using LLMs certainly can be labeled as conservative. We encourage students to improve their writing by asking assistance from their social network, why should they not use LLMs to help them with this. If we learn them to be critical, then they certainly would detect the mistakes LLMs made, and of course, we also must be aware on the risks. The European Union has introduced the AI Act, proposed in 2021, which aims to establish a comprehensive regulatory framework for artificial intelligence within the EU. The act categorizes AI systems based on the level of risk they pose, from minimal to high risk. It imposes strict regulations on high-risk systems, particularly those used in critical areas like law enforcement, healthcare and transportation, ensuring transparency, accountability and safety. Additionally, it bans systems that pose an unacceptable risk, such as social scoring by governments. The goal is to foster innovation, while protecting fundamental rights and public safety (European Commission, 2021). This act is a good start, but probably not enough and needs to be developed further.

Another ethical issue is the use of social media, introduced only about 20 years ago, and from a promising start (*everybody can be citizen-journalist*), we see social media nowadays as monsters, with algorithms that are controlling what we see and that accelerated extremism and polarization. The freedom of speech is ironically becoming a ticket for insults, racism, sexist and misogynist content. Though there are some examples of counter movements, like Stop Funding Hate in the UK and the Lincoln project in the US elections, this is far from enough to stop this. It seems obvious that stricter regulations are needed to prevent further extreme positions, reduced mutual understanding and heightened antagonism, which can hinder constructive dialogue and consensus-building. Media framing, echo chambers and identity politics contribute to societal fragmentation, whereas climate change calls for dialogue collective action.



Recently, UN Secretary General António Guterres on the World Environmental Day at the American Museum of Natural History made a plea to ban fossil fuel advertising, just like countries did with tobacco advertising (June 5th, 2024). Excerpts from the speech:

‘Many in the fossil fuel industry have shamelessly greenwashed, even as they have sought to delay climate action – with lobbying, legal threats and massive ad campaigns’. ‘They have been aided and abetted by advertising and PR companies – Mad Men fueling the madness’. ‘Fossil fuels are not only poisoning our planet – they’re toxic for your brand’. ‘Your sector is full of creative minds who are already mobilizing around this cause’. And finally: ‘and I urge news media and tech companies to stop taking fossil fuel advertising’ (UN, 2024)

These are big words, coming from the highest ranked international governmental representative. Stop burning fossil fuels, and stop funding or getting funded by fossil fuels. This seems to be a fundamental step in setting the urgency for climate change and climate action, contrary to the inaction that many countries are currently taken. But I wonder whether this will lead to a change, the movie “Don’t Look Up” seems not to have been a wake-up call at all.

To label all these turbulences together and to reflect on the implications for teaching, researching and practicing strategic communication and PR, we need to raise awareness on ethical issues and need to work more on ethical guidelines. There is a growing body of literature regarding ethics, from the monologic versus dialogic campaigns (Botan, 1997), decision-making tools in ethical dilemmas (Boynton, 2004), information ethics (Jakopović, 2020) and ethical crisis communication (Jin *et al.*, 2018). As a member of the AW Page society, I share the Page principles (Page, 2024):

- (1) Tell the truth
- (2) Prove it with action
- (3) Listen to stakeholders
- (4) Manage for tomorrow
- (5) Conduct public relations as if the whole enterprise depends on it
- (6) Realize an enterprise’s true character is expressed by its people
- (7) Remain calm, patient and good-humored.

Whether these need an update is for others to decide, but they do make sense.

This special issue

The content of the current SI are papers selected from the Euprera conference held in Prague, September 2023. That the papers already have been selected from over 70 submitted full papers should already guarantee their quality, but they needed and are enlisted for a quality review procedure. As a guest editor, it struck me how many colleagues refused to review. For one of the selected papers, I needed to include more than 15 colleagues and invited them to review. The system of peer review would be broken if this is becoming the standard, and it will eventually harm our own profession. Peer review is the quality check needed to ensure robust and rigorous science. So maybe we should introduce an eighth principle for academic purposes and our academic community:

- (8) You do need to review when you are invited to do so!

Some of the serving reviewers might be surprised to see the paper that they reviewed being published, since they indicated that the paper should be rejected, whereas the other reviewers indicated major/minor revisions or acceptance. I had the back-up of the scientific committee of Euprera, who first selected the papers that need to be included in the SI. Though that is of

course not a confirmation that the paper is ready for publication, but combined with the other reviewer almost all the selected papers have been included.

Three of the seven papers deal with lobbying. Raknes and Ihlen (2025) describe the public interest topics used by public affair lobbyists and how politicians are evaluating these arguments that can help professionals in effective presenting arguments. Understanding these processes can lead to better understanding and more informed decision-making in democratic societies. Levasier (2025) presents a unique study among Public Affair practitioners and journalist focusing on the EU and the understanding of PA as an informal activity that has not been studied before. The last paper on lobbying in this issue is by Davidson and Lock (2025), which investigates argumentation strategies employed by organizations in their lobbying. The interesting angle in this paper is not only the focus on the lobbying of the Big Tech companies against online harm regulations in the UK, whereas public interest groups continuously stress the costs and risks for mental health if these regulations are not widened in scope or rigorously enforced.

The paper by Gualtieri and Lurati (2025) is a narrative approach to understand stakeholders that fills a gap, according to the authors. By including how to understand stakeholders' perspectives, the bridge between different players can be build, and polarization can be limited. Ertem-Eray and Ki's (2025) paper deals with a content analysis on the political corporate social responsibility by presenting a qualitative content analysis of the Russian–Ukraine war. Winkler et al. (2025) present the VUCA-Radar that provides a systematic overview of current digitalization challenges to strategic communication at the industry and practice levels that helps in balancing contradictory strategic responses at the level of positioning, analysis, organization and process design. Jacobs and Liebrecht's (2025) paper on issue communication deals with issue monitoring and communication practices in today's challenging media landscape emphasizing the need for continuous monitoring of issues in society. Finally, Stranzl and Ruppel (2025) paper deal with an appreciative working climate. The study provides knowledge of reasons for and forms of appreciation from an employee's perspective.

I think it is an exciting SI with a strong focus on lobbying and public affairs, which has not been a topic that has been very central in our research and our journals.

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