



# PR- A Persuasive Industry?: Spin, Public Relations and the Shaping of the Modern Media

*Trevor Morris, Simon Goldsworthy*

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Like it or loathe it, PR has become a key ingredient in our lives, but surprisingly little serious thought is given to what PR is and what its practitioners do. Glancing, usually disparaging references to PR abound, and journalists and others feel free to make overarching comments based on scant evidence, but PR remains under-examined and hard to study. The big PR firms remain shadowy, and by tradition PR people working within big organizations do not seek the limelight. If PR is an industry, it is a fragmented and diffuse one, scattered across all parts of the economy and society in thousands of small cells. In both the UK and the US, for example, the largest consultancies employ fewer than 1% of those who work in PR. Similarly even the largest companies have PR departments that rarely have more than a hundred staff and usually many fewer. PR also operates under many aliases – it seems that only a minority of practitioners like calling themselves public relations people – and its border territories with other communications and marketing disciplines are blurred and often disputed. This makes it difficult for outside observers and scholars to get to grips with PR, but also surprisingly hard for those working in PR to know their own business: no one individual has real experience of all the main areas of PR work.

PR people have represented all kinds of causes and interests, and have done so using all kinds of tactics. They have been associated with many sins: creating false pretexts for wars; political spin and skulduggery; and seeking to excuse the worst excesses of the corporate world, to the point of claiming that ‘Toxic sludge is good for you!’ But, equally, your favourite charity, celebrity, hospital and politician, as well as the innocuous companies you rely on to meet your day-to-day needs, use PR. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela were all brilliant at public relations: Mandela still is. So, in their own ways, were Hitler, Stalin and Saddam Hussein. Public relations is a strangely contradictory business. The authors explain some of those contradictions.

This book is essential reading not just for journalists, students and PR practitioners - whether they work in business, government or for NGOs - but for anyone concerned about the ingredients of the media they consume. The authors use a skilful blend of inside knowledge, experience and scholarship to explore this rapidly growing industry and reach new and challenging conclusions about the role PR is destined to play in the 21st century.

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