

Social Media and Public Relations

Fake friends and powerful publics

**Judy Motion, Robert L. Heath
and Shirley Leitch**

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
1 Identify the problems: social media and public relations	1
2 “Don’t do anything stupid”: social media affordances, policies, and governance agendas	16
3 Create yourself: corporate identity for interconnected publics	35
4 Speak the truth: transparency, power/knowledge, and authenticity	46
5 Engage: one-way, two-way, and every-way	66
6 Connect creatively: worlds, identities, and publics as content production and co-production	84
7 Engage critically: activist power	106
8 Protect yourself: issues of privacy and regulation	126
9 Know your risks: a collective orientation	144
10 Navigate the issues: situating power/knowledge within public relations	164
11 Reshape policy: public–private clashes and collaborative dialogue	184
12 Conclusion	206
<i>Index</i>	216

Preface

As we began this project, we knew that we would have to overcome two obstacles, at least. One was the study of a topic that was in its formative stages. Given that social media are continuing to develop, as are the patterns of users, we would be writing on a topic for which little historical perspective was available. We knew that it would be challenging to know what was going on and how people and public relations practitioners were using and responding to social media trends. Scholars, practitioners, social media developers, and skilled users were deeply engaged in making something happen. In the midst of all of that uncertainty, we were confronted with the notion that social media were (or were constrained from) being used for sociopolitical activism, terrorism, and marketing. As we immersed ourselves in social media, we joined various communities and sought to understand not only public relations practices but also gain insights into user perspectives. Social media became a distraction, a fascination, and at times, a procrastination technique. As critical scholars, our attention was drawn to the cultural clash between the promotional cultures of public relations and participatory cultures of social media; the shift in power/knowledge relations; and the ways in which sociality played out in various social media. At the heart of our inquiry was a concern for democratic principles and equity practices. It seemed to us that social media was driving a cultural transformation in which identities were formed and performed as users engaged in collaborative relationships, exchanged information and meanings, and shared their everyday lives more publicly. We have sought to document, theorize and critique these cultural changes and the ways in which public relations seeks to influence such processes.

The second problem was time and geography. What seemed to be a workable timetable failed for many reasons, and distance led to the difficulties of coordinated work. On this last point, we decided that each of us would be the lead author on various chapters, but no one would have the task of making style and presentation totally consistent. Each of the authors had special interests, read each other's chapters, and made comments. Most importantly, rather than severely differing over matters we tended to help one another make points clearer and more forcefully. We shared articles, cases, and encouragement.

In that spirit, rather than having the book read like something that was an edited work, we agreed to acknowledge the individual chapters and the writer who was primarily responsible for them, but the work is ours as a team. Judy led [Chapters 1, 2, 7 and 12](#), and co-authored [Chapter 5](#) with Bob, who also authored [Chapters 6, 9, 10 and 11](#). Shirley authored [Chapters 3, 4 and 8](#). However well we presented the technical elements of social media, we do believe that we shared a critical perspective, a pragmatic sense of the possibilities and limits of social media, and confidence that something important is happening, something that needs early on a critique of purpose and practice. This book represents the culmination of many years of critical discussions about public relations and its role in society. We believe that communication, through the practice of public relations, can make society more fully functioning, and a better place to live. But we also know that swords have two edges and cut both ways.

Acknowledgements

Our very sincere thanks to the many people who have contributed to this book. So many wonderful students, academic colleagues and practitioners have supported our work over the years—we are deeply appreciative of your warm generosity. We would also like to acknowledge the series editor, Kevin Moloney, who encouraged us to tackle this topic and Sinead Waldron, the editorial assistant, whose encouragement and constant assistance was invaluable. It is important for us to thank people who have contributed to our individual chapters:

Judy: Thank you so much to Dan O'Reily-Rowe who helped me get started, Kathleen Williams and Susanne Pratt for the scholarly provocations and encouragement, Madeleine my inspiring cheerleader and muse, and my beloved Tony whose complete disregard for social media served as a valuable counterbalance.

Bob: Having advised public relations students in the 1990s that the Web would be their playground, I thank those students, and colleagues, who helped make my prediction come true. Thanks also for explaining to me how social media work, and how people relate to them. Thanks to my four grandchildren, I am at the cutting edge of technological and social use among youths.

Shirley: I dedicate my contributions to this book to: Summer—who taught me all I know about social media; Jeanette, David, Ian, Dianne, Tony and Gail—for the many, wonderful dinners at which they indulged my social media obsession; Leo and Oscar—for their boundless joie de vivre; and NJ—for always seeing the possibilities.