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LEXICON OF PUBLIC RELATIONS: EXPLORING EDWARD BERNAYS' INFLUENCE ON INTRODUCING PUBLIC RELATIONS CONCEPTS AND VOCABULARY TERMS

ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the profound influence of Edward Bernays, often regarded as the “pioneer of public relations”, on the lexicon and terminology of the field. It explores how Bernays redefined public relations from being associated with propaganda and manipulation to a profession of strategic counsel including persuasive communication that serves the public interest. His introduction of the term “public relations counselor” marked a pivotal shift, elevating the reputation of public relations professionals as the ones who provide strategic guidance to clients while considering the public interest. He laid the foundations for scientific approach as he advocated usage of techniques and methods to gauge public sentiment rather than simply disseminate messages to manipulate public opinion.

Additionally, Bernays' emphasis on “two-way communication”, although it was asymmetrical model, laid the groundwork for contemporary public relations and modern interactive public relations practices, fostering feedback and engagement with the public. His concept of the “engineering of consent” introduced a scientific approach to shaping public opinion, challenging conventional views. The notion of “third-party endorsement” highlighted the importance of credibility in messaging, opinion makers, influencing development of today's influencer marketing and endorsement strategies.

Furthermore, Bernays' focus on “image management” remains relevant, with the emergence of terms like “reputation management”. His contributions continue to shape the way in which public relations practitioners communicate and interact with the public, leaving an enduring impact on the profession. Bernays' innovative concepts and enduring legacy continue to influence and guide the practice of public relations in the 21st century, solidifying his position as a key figure in the evolution of the field's language and concepts.

Keywords: public relations, Edward Bernays, public relations counselor, lexicon.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Edward Bernays, frequently acknowledged as the “pioneer of public relations”, played a pivotal role in the development of this field, leaving a lasting trace, not just through his practical applications but also by influencing the lexicon and terminology within the profession. His imaginative concepts and groundbreaking endeavors have had a profound and lasting impact on the realm of public relations, reshaping the language and terminology used in this domain.

Following the aftermath of World War I, the field of public relations experienced significant growth and development. This expansion was particularly evident through state institutions, business organizations, labor and social movements. “In the United States, the training of personnel for the needs of public relations began as early as 1923, when Edward Bernays held the first public relations course at the University of New York” (Tomić, 2016: 1121). During this period, he also published the seminal work *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, marking a crucial milestone in the profession’s history as this work shaped the field of public relations and its practices in mass media. Notably, it was within the pages of this publication that Bernays introduced the term “public relations counselor” for the very first time.

Edward Bernays is credited with introducing the term “public relations” in the early 1920s in the United States. He did so by rebranding the somewhat negative term “propaganda” into “public relations”. Bernays effectively employed the technique of renaming to obscure the negative connotations and essence of the term “propaganda”. He was the first to recognize the necessity for professionalizing the field of public relations. His career has had a more profound impact on the strategy and practice of public relations than that of any other individual.

In line with this, given that we call him the “father of public relations”, we can also call him the “father of the language terminology of public relations”, taking into consideration that he made a decisive influence on the very name of the profession including the meaning it implies. He introduced numerous terms that revolutionized

the conventional understanding of specific public relations roles as well as terms in public relations that are still key concepts in the profession today, regardless of the fact that certain terms have evolved and taken on additional meanings or developed as strategies or techniques.

Edward Bernays, often referred to as the “father of public relations”, played a pivotal role in shaping and defining practices and concepts of the field. This paper extensively explores Bernays’ profound influence, examining the specific terms and concepts he introduced and their enduring legacy in the realm of public relations. These foundational concepts, including “public relations counselor”, “two-way communication”, “engineering of consent”, “third-party endorsement” and “image management”, have not only stood the test of time but have also evolved, serving as the cornerstones for the development of the modern public relations profession. Bernays’ innovative ideas and pioneering work have indelibly marked the profession and significantly impacted its linguistic landscape, emphasizing public feedback, strategic counsel and the integral role of public relations in contemporary organizational management.

2. FROM PROPAGANDIST TO COUNSELOR: BERNAYS’ GAME-CHANGING TERM

Bernays testifies to how important language and terminology are, precisely because his book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* begins with the sentence: “A new phrase has come into the language – counsel on public relations. What does it mean?”. Introducing and providing a clear definition for this term holds significance because it essentially defined the practice of public relations, a field that was initially associated with the perception of propaganda. In the past, professionals in this domain were often seen and referred to as propagandists.

At the time, others used the term press agent for the specific role. However, it is important to make distinction between these two terms as their meaning is completely different in terms of profession although some might consider it the same. Bernays writes that he and his wife coined

the term, denoting a person who advises management on the communication aspect of the work of an organization or company. However, “public relations counselor not only gives advice related to activities, but also advises how to use the media to present these activities to the public that the company aims to reach” (Tomić, 2023: 258).

It is important to note that the term public relations counselor takes on a much broader meaning both semantically and within the context of professional field. On the other hand, the term press agent remains in the narrow definition of an agent (person) in charge of creating publicity, which is considered the first model of public relations. However, it is often used in a negative sense. “Namely, this model is associated with the so-called ‘The Prince of Humbugs’, the expression Phineas Taylor Barnum (1810-1891) used to call himself, a famous press agent associated with the first model of public relations - the model of publicity, also called the Master of Ballyhoo” (Tomić, 2023: 238).

To sum up, at the time when Bernays was active, this was crucially important as the field of public relations was often associated with propaganda and manipulation. Introducing the term “public relations counselor”, he sought to rebrand the profession and emphasize a more strategic and advisory role. This helped professionalize the field and distinguish it from purely propagandistic activities.

Bernays (1961) explained that many organizations simply do not bother with an individual name and assign the duties of the public relations counsel to an existing officer. Vice-president of a bank is its recognized public relations counsel. Others either ignore the matter entirely or criticize the entire profession and its individual members.

Introducing the term “public relations counselor”, Bernays emphasized that public relations professionals should serve as advisors to their clients, offering strategic counsel, as the term “counselor” implies a role focused on providing advice, guidance and strategic counsel to clients or organizations. This concept introduced the idea of PR practitioners as strategic communicators, guiding clients in shaping public opinion and managing relationships with stakeholders.

This new term and role initiated new course in public relations and included the element of strategy. A public relations counselor is someone whose “activity will be to aid organizations, movements, and people. He will help them to fit better into the society of which they are a part” (Bernays, 2012: 129). This shift in terminology emphasized the consultative nature of the profession, highlighting the importance of informed decision-making.

Framing public relations professionals as counselors, Bernays aimed to elevate their reputation and credibility. This change in terminology conveyed a sense of expertise and responsibility in managing an organization’s relationships with its publics. As Bernays stated himself, “this is done by keeping track and understanding every contact with the public wherever and whenever it may arise” (Bernays, 2012: 94). This term significantly boosted the reputation of public relations professionals emphasizing their expertise, expanded role and track record of achieving positive outcomes for their clients. This shift in perception laid the foundation for the modern practice of public relations as a respected and integral part of organizational management.

In terms of gaining public feedback, the term “counselor” also implied a responsibility to gauge public sentiment in order to act in the best interests of both the client and the public. This shift encouraged a more scientific approach to public relations, promoting transparency and honesty in communication. “The public relations counsel must maintain an intense scrutiny of his actions, according to the propagation of unsocial or otherwise harmful movements or ideas” (Bernays, 1961: 215). In this context, Bernays argued that public relations counselors should act as intermediaries between their clients and the public. They have a responsibility to balance the interests of their clients with the best interests of the public. This means considering how communication strategies and actions impact not only the client but also the society at large.

Today, in contemporary public relations language, the term “advisory” is often used interchangeably with “public relations counselor” to describe the identical role. Originally, the term “advisory” referred to a noun form of the verb “advise”

which means to offer guidance, suggestions or recommendations to others. This proves not only semantic development of the word but also development of this concept in terms of public relations profession. In her writings, L'Etang (2007) lists counseling and advisory as synonyms when referring to this specific public relations role.

3. EVOLVING LEXICON: HOW EDWARD BERNAYS SHAPED PUBLIC RELATIONS CONCEPTS AND LANGUAGE

Bernays established the groundwork for various terms in the field of public relations and over time, meanings of these terms have evolved in both the language and practice of the profession, closely following Bernays' pioneering principles. One of these terms, i.e., concepts is a "two-way communication". At the time, communication was largely one-way, with organizations disseminating information to the public. Dialogue and interaction were less common. Bernays advocated for a two-way communication model, although it was asymmetrical model, emphasizing active listening and engagement with the audience. This linguistic innovation introduced the idea of feedback in public relations, which has become a fundamental practice. While the term "feedback" may not be explicitly used, the book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* emphasizes the need for public relations practitioners to actively engage with the public, understand their opinions and adapt communication strategies accordingly. "The public and any force that modifies public opinion, interact. Action and interaction are continually going on between the forces projected out to the public and the public itself. The public relations counsel must understand this fact in its broadest and most detailed implications" (Bernays, 1961: 77).

While Edward Bernays did not use the term "two-way communication" in his writings, his ideas and practices were instrumental in shaping the shift from passive, one-way communication to more interactive and dialogic models in public relations. His influence on the field is evident in the principles and practices that emphasize audience engagement, feedback and ongoing dia-

logue with stakeholders, which are fundamental components of contemporary two-way communication in public relations.

Bernays (1961) explains that the primary role of a public relations counselor is a student. Their area of expertise is the public mind. They gain knowledge through various sources, such as real-life experiences, articles in print and digital media, advertising in publications, street billboards, transportation networks, political speeches, religious sermons, casual conversations, financial news, theatrical performances and interactions with fellow professionals who, like them, serve as interpreters, attuned to both the explicit and subtle expressions of the public's views.

Therefore, he emphasized the creation of ongoing conversations about an issue or topic. He believed that public relations practitioners should serve as advocates, engaging with the public and fostering feedback. While the term "two-way communication" was not used explicitly, the principles he advocated align closely with the concept. Bernays promoted the use of research and feedback in public relations. He believed that opinion research and surveys could provide valuable insights into public sentiment and help in crafting more targeted and effective communication strategies.

The public relations counsel employs all those practical means of gauging the public mind which modern advertising has developed and uses. He employs the research campaign, the symposium, the survey of a particular group or of a particular state of mind as a further aid, and confirmation or modification of his own appraisals and judgments (Bernays, 1961: 77).

This concept of two-way communication laid the foundation for modern interactive PR practices, such as social media engagement and community management.

Bernays also influenced and changed the course of public relations term "public opinion". Walter Lipmann discussed his idea of public opinion in his book *Public Opinion* from 1922 and he linked it to his "pseudo-environment theory". He stated the following:

The pictures inside the heads of these human beings, the pictures of themselves, of others, of their needs, purposes, and relationship, are their public opinions. Those pictures which are acted upon by groups of people, or by individuals acting in the name of groups, are Public Opinions with capital letters (Lippmann, 1998: 13).

Lippmann suggests that people's opinions consist of stereotypes, while Bernays deals with what forms and constitutes public opinion, claiming that "public opinion is the aggregate result of individual opinions – now uniform, now conflicting – of the men and women who make up society or any group of society. In order to understand public opinion, one must go back to the individual who makes up the group" (Bernays, 1961: 61). In summary, Lippmann's viewpoint on public opinion emphasized cognitive limitations and the use of stereotypes, while advocating for a governing class of experts. In contrast, Bernays was more optimistic, emphasizing the potential for persuasion, advocacy and dialogue in shaping public opinion through public relations efforts. In this example, it can be seen how Bernays again influenced one of important terms in public relations, i.e. public opinion as his definition that emphasized the potential for persuasion, advocacy and dialogue in shaping public opinion through public relations efforts has been more widely accepted and influential in the evolution of the public relations profession.

While Lippmann's insights on the role of stereotypes and cognitive limitations in public opinion are important for understanding human behavior and decision-making, they are not as directly applicable to the practice of public relations as Bernays' more proactive and strategic approach. Bernays' emphasis on the use of psychology, research and strategic communication to influence public opinion and build relationships between organizations and their stakeholders has had a lasting impact on the field of public relations. His approach aligns more closely with contemporary public relations practices, which focus on engaging and persuading diverse audiences, managing reputation as well as building meaningful connections with the public.

The next very influential term that Bernays introduced in the 1920s is "engineering of consent" - "a scientific approach to the shaping and dynamics of public opinion" (Tomić, 2020: 225). He argued that public relations professionals could orchestrate public opinion by appealing to people's emotions and desires. This concept highlighted the role of public relations in molding public sentiment. Bernays believed that individuals were often irrational and driven by unconscious desires. He argued that public relations professionals could use psychological techniques to guide and influence these desires to achieve specific outcomes. Although, many understood this term as manipulation and propaganda, Bernays claimed that the goal of the "engineering of consent" was to create a consensus or "consent" among the public in support of specific ideas, products, or causes. "Leaders in virtually every great society throughout history understood the importance of influencing public opinion through persuasion" (Seitel, 2017: 56).

The engineering of consent is the very essence of the democratic process, the freedom to persuade and suggest. The freedoms of speech, press, petition, and assembly, the freedoms which make the engineering of consent possible, are among the most cherished guarantees of the Constitution of the United States (Bernays, 1947: 114).

However, this notion influenced evolution of public relations as it laid the foundation for audience analysis and tailored messaging and more directed use of persuasive tactics. Another influential term Bernays brought through his work is "third-party endorsement". He highlighted the importance of using credible third-party endorsements to enhance message credibility.

In his book *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, Bernays defines public relations through a series of examples, he uses the third person to applaud solutions of public relations counselors in addressing a diverse array of challenges presented by clients. These challenges span from assisting a packing house in boosting bacon sales to aid-

ing Lithuanian nationalists in their pursuit of independence. In this context, Jansen (2013) writes that Bernays is the self-styled genius behind his ingenious solutions, who successfully creates the illusion of a third-party endorsement of his own work, which is an extraordinary example of a tactic that he would later describe approvingly as “semantic tyranny”.

This term undoubtedly became firmly established in every aspect and had a significant impact on evolution of other concepts in public relations, as this concept paved the way for opinion makers and credibility in messaging, influencer marketing as well as endorsement strategies in modern public relations campaigns.

Bernays (1961) stressed the importance of managing the image and reputation of individuals and organizations which leads to next important term such as image management. In this context, Bernays describes these ideas in *Crystallizing Public Opinion* and among others, referring to example of American Railroads and their conclusion that their most important problem for solving was “the problem of selling themselves to the public”. His writings on shaping public perception and maintaining positive images is foundational to the practice of image management in modern public relations. The linguistic development has led to the emergence of terms like “reputation management”, reflecting the central role image management plays in public relations.

4. CONCLUSION: BERNAYS' ENDURING INFLUENCE

The influence of Edward Bernays on the lexicon and terminology of public relations is profound and enduring. Bernays, often recognized as the “father of public relations”, did not only redefine the profession but also played a crucial role in shaping the language used within it. His introduction of the term “public relations counselor” was a pivotal moment, as it shifted the perception of the field from propaganda and manipulation to one of strategic counsel while considering the public interest.

Emphasizing the role of public relations professionals as counselors, Bernays instilled a sense of responsibility and expertise in the profession. This shift in terminology contributed to the professionalization of public relations and elevated their reputation. The concept of “two-way communication”, although not explicitly named as such, introduced the idea of feedback and ongoing engagement with the public, laying the foundation for modern interactive public relations practices.

Bernays' ideas on “engineering of consent” challenged the conventional understanding of public opinion and provided a scientific approach to shaping and influencing it. While some critics viewed it as manipulation, Bernays believed it was about creating consensus. His emphasis on the “third-party endorsement” underscored the importance of using credible endorsements to enhance message credibility, contributing to the roles of opinion makers and development of influencer marketing as well as endorsement strategies in contemporary public relations.

Finally, Bernays' focus on “image management” remains relevant today, with the emergence of terms like “reputation management”. His writings on shaping public perception and maintaining positive images have been foundational to the practice of image management in modern public relations.

Edward Bernays' innovative concepts and groundbreaking contributions to the field of public relations have not only shaped its language and terminology but have also left an indelible mark on the profession. The enduring legacy of his ideas and the evolution of these key terms continue to influence and guide the practice of public relations in the 21st century. Bernays' contributions to public relations vocabulary are deeply embedded in the linguistic landscape of the profession. His innovative ideas continue to shape the way public relations practitioners communicate and interact with the public. Bernays' concepts have not only stood the test of time but have also evolved, shaping the dynamic field of public relations into what it is today. Bernays' influence on public relations vocabulary is a testament to his visionary thinking and lasting impact on the profession.

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LEKSIKON ODNOSA S JAVNOŠĆU: ISTRAŽIVANJE UTJECAJA EDWARDA BERNAYSA NA UVOĐENJE KONCEPATA I TERMINOLOGIJE U PODRUČJU ODNOSA S JAVNOŠĆU

SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad istražuje snažan utjecaj Edwarda Bernaysa, često nazivanoga „pionirom odnosa s javnošću“, na leksikon i terminologiju u tome području. Istražuje kako je Bernays redefinirao odnose s javnošću, koji su tada percipirani kao propaganda i manipulacija, u profesiju s percepcijom strateškoga savjetovanja koja uključuje persuazivnu komunikaciju koja odgovara javnomu interesu. Njegovo uvođenje termina „savjetnik za odnose s javnošću“ označilo je ključan pomak, podižući ugled savjetnika za odnose s javnošću kao onih koji pružaju strateško vodstvo klijentima uzimajući u obzir javni interes. Postavio je temelje znanstvenoga pristupa zagovarajući upotrebu tehnika i metoda za procjenu mišljenja javnosti umjesto jednostavna širenja poruka u svrhu manipulacije javnim mišljenjem.

Osim toga, naglasak Edwarda Bernaysa na „dvosmjernoj komunikaciji“, iako asimetričan model, postavio je temelje za suvremene odnose s javnošću i moderne interaktivne prakse u odnosima s javnošću, s naglaskom na *feedback* javnosti. Njegov koncept „inženjering suglasnosti“ implicira znanstveni pristup u oblikovanju javnoga mišljenja. Koncept „potpora treće strane“ istaknuo je važnost vjerodostojnosti u komunikaciji, kreatora mišljenja, utječući na razvoj današnjega *influencerskog* marketinga i srodnih strategija.

Osim toga, fokus Edwarda Bernaysa na „upravljanje imidžom“ ostaje relevantan, s kasnijom pojavom termina poput „upravljanje reputacijom“. Njegovi doprinosi i dalje oblikuju način na koji praktičari odnosa s javnošću komuniciraju i interagiraju s javnošću, ostavljajući trajan utjecaj na profesiju. Inovativni koncepti i trajno naslijeđe Edwarda Bernaysa i dalje utječu i usmjeravaju praksu odnosa s javnošću u 21. stoljeću, čvrsto potvrđujući njegovu poziciju kao ključne figure u evoluciji terminologije i koncepata u tome području.

Ključne riječi: odnosi s javnošću, Edward Bernays, savjetnik za odnose s javnošću, leksikon.