PUBLIC RELATIONS SELF-REFLECTION: WHAT "DO" WE CALL OURSELVES? WHAT "SHOULD" WE CALL OURSELVES?

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a reminder that it is good to engage in systematic self-reflection and establish what public relations people call themselves. It provides a brief highlight of many ongoing discussions about how public relations can be professionalized, be credible and earn legitimacy. It provides a descriptive analysis of how five professional organizations (or recognized mouthpieces for the fields of public relations, marketing and advertising that they represent) regularly talk about public relations people and others who engage in related strategic professional initiatives. It does so recognizing that public relations, marketing and advertising people often compete for the same jobs and positions of organizational influence. Finally, it highlights future directions of study to bring an answer to the question of "what should we call ourselves?" once it establishes how public relations, marketing and advertising talk about themselves and their people. While both marketing and advertising are regularly mentioned in the public relations professional publications included in this analysis, public relations is almost totally absent in the analyzed marketing or advertising professional publications. Practical implications of findings are discussed, as well as suggestions for further research to pave a way forward to answering the question of what public relations people should be called.

Keywords: public relations, professionalization, legitimacy, credibility, business

INTRODUCTION

Self-reflection is a good thing. It can bring certainty that the path taken is the right one. It can also highlight missteps and point to a better direction. Self-reflection and direction are at the heart of this research effort. We address the question of, "how do public relations people refer to themselves?" as a precursor to "what should public relations people call themselves?" What we call ourselves is important; after all clients often contract with us to help them rebrand, rename, reimage, and position their organizations. Or, they depend on us for crisis negotiation through strategic positioning, careful labeling and vetted naming. Organizational decision makers often need public relations people to set long-term strategy with organizational sustainablity as the goal. Words matter. So do labels and lenses for communication. If we are to rebrand, rename, reimage, and position others, our own image, name and labels, too, are important.

All good self-reflection starts with answers to questions of definition. In this case, when we refer to "public relations people" we mean anyone who engages in public relations strategies, activities and discussions as a career path, both academic and non-academic. Second in our self-reflection

is the question of fact. For our purposes, this directs us to look for the kinds of names, labels and terms used consciously and subconsciously to refer to public relations people. As such, we want to know whether our professional counterparts in non-public relations careers, with whom we often compete for positions and influence, refer to themselves and us in similar or different ways; the narrative about public relations, what it is called, and how it is labeled among those in similar fields shapes future perceptions and labels to what public relations people do.

Apparent occurrences or contrasts that might hold significance for our field should be noted and a foundation should be established for future systematic explorations of whether we "should" or "should not" take a preferred path as we talk about ourselves. Important to this entire undertaking are the questions of "why" and "why should we care?" The "why" has been addressed often in professionalization, credibility and legitimacy discussions about the field. They are important. When public relations and its experts are taken seriously by decision makers, they bring value to organizational success. Long identified as "dominant coalitions," decision makers and the position public relations people should have with those groups has long been discussed in the field. A review of the dominant coalition discussions is provided by Bruce Berger (2005), Shannon Bowen (2015) and Christopher Wilson (2016).

It's good to engage in systematic self-reflection and establish what public relations people call themselves. In fact, self-reflection was the focus of a recent *PRWeek* (2020) report, "The evolving PR and marketing partnership: Benefits of self-reflection." The goal of the report was to have "PR pros take a true look at themselves... the [PR and marketing] disciplines must work together and appreciate the fact that each can benefit from the others' strengths to not only do their jobs better, but also to best serve their brands" (p. 2). However, the report focuses primarily on day-to-day job functions that establish the need to bridge the divide that exists between PR and marketing. While this knowledge is valuable, we argue that before public relations efforts can be truly appreciated, we need to take a step back and systematically explore the underlying narrative and labels used to describe public relations people. Perhaps those labels are powerful in positioning public relations people for influence, perhaps not.

This paper provides a brief highlight of many ongoing discussions about how public relations can be taken more seriously and its value clearly recognized. It provides a descriptive analysis of how five professional organizations (or recognized mouthpieces for the global fields they represent) regularly talk about public relations people and those who engage in related strategic professional initiatives. And, finally, it highlights future directions of study to bring an answer to the question of "what <u>should</u> we call ourselves?" To begin, a brief review of the public relations professionalization, credibility and legitimacy literature is in order.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professionalization

A first step in answering "what <u>should</u> we call ourselves?" is to look at how public relations and its people are professionalized. We frame this discussion from Pieczka's (2008) definition of professionalization as, "the way in which occupations become recognized as professions, usually explained by a range of factors related to the improvement of services offered and status enjoyed"

(p. 1). We focus closely on the idea of "status enjoyed" because public relations people still fight for a seat at the table, meaning they are often left out of executive conversations when strategic business decisions are made. They are not part of the dominant coalition nor do they have much influence on the dominant coalition. Therefore, it is not enough for public relations to be academically recognized as a profession; if public relations people do not achieve a "status enjoyed" in the minds of executive decision-makers and, in fact, do not become part of the executive decision-making group, they are indeed still not professionalized.

Public relations professionalization is a long-discussed topic of conversation among public relations people. Pieczka and L'Etang (2001) addressed "public relations and the question of professionalization" (p. 223) in a *Handbook of Public Relations* entry, arguing that "given the strong interest in professionalism [as a strategy to secure more perceived value] on the part of educators, researchers, and practitioners, some critical reflection is needed to understand how this concept has been used" (p. 223). While Yang and Taylor (2013) argued years later that public relations, as a field, has been professionalized through professional associations, codes of ethics, accrediting bodies, and the positive contributions it makes to society, public relations people still suffer from a negative image (Callisson, 2004; Hutton, 1999; Jo, 2003; Miller, 1999).

Breit and Demetrious (2010) discussed public relations and professionalization as an ethical mismatch, defining professionalization as "a process involving cooperation around work tasks…; unique knowledge and expertise; as well as a set of rules, conventions and structures designed to preserve and enhance professional control" (p. 20). They concluded that key characteristics of professionalization itself leads to a normative culture, and a normative culture "is at odds with ethical communication," which for them is the ultimate pursuit of all public relations. White and Park (2010) looked elsewhere and explored the negative portrayal of public relations among and by media representatives. They wanted to know if that portrayal negatively impacted the "public perception" of public relations at large. Interestingly, they found that there was no direct correlation; the public at large did not perceive public relations in the negative manner portrayed by the media under scrutiny. What White and Park did find as a concern was that even among persons who practice public relations, their understanding of the field limited it to "publicity, media relations, and an attempt to advance an organization's own agenda" (p. 323). They concluded "that the strategic functions [of public relations] that benefit society can be made more visible in order to enhance the credibility of the profession" (p. 323).

Bowen (2003) conducted research with university students and found that "the stereotype of public relations as 'hacks, flacks, and spin doctors' [portrayed in today's media] seems to be perpetuated on the campuses of the very institutions that fund the [public relations] program" (p. 211). Further, a study of the U.S. general public reported that, although participants described public relations people as outgoing, smart and friendly, negative characteristics such as liar, biased and spin doctor were also commonly used (Callison, Merle, & Seltzer, 2014). In a concurring study, recent research revealed by *PRWeek* concluded that two in 10 executives did not know what "PR" stands for, and 90 percent of study participants believed that public relations people deceive the public (Hickman, 2019).

Addressing negative perceptions of public relations. In an attempt to combat these "entrenched attitudes and perceptions of public relations" and "create a better understanding and appreciation

for what PR practitioners do" (Elsasser, 2009, para. 2), Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) launched The Business Case for Public Relations in 2009. According to the campaign website, the goal of The Business Case is to "drive industry recognition and growth by helping professionals in the field educate key audiences about public relations' roles and outcomes, demonstrate its strategic value and enhance its reputation" (The Business Case for Public Relations, 2019, para. 2).

Since the campaign launch, PRSA has developed a variety of resources—including public relations case studies that demonstrate tangible business outcomes and reflections from industry leaders making the business case for public relations—to achieve this goal. Yet, despite positive strides made to professionalize the PR field (there is still much work to be done here), we argue that public relations people still do not enjoy a "professionalized" status. To further explore this argument we move on to a discussion of the credibility of public relations people.

Credibility

Previous research, as well as our brief arguments and review, demonstrate that public relations people, more often than not, do not hold a professionalized status in the minds of others. This is problematic because it limits the extent to which others view public relations people as credible, despite the value they provide to organizations and our society. We argue that the questions about the credibility of public relations persons extends to the field itself as the two cannot be separated.

Concerns for the credibility of public relations go way back. Aronoff (1975) addressed the credibility of public relations for journalists, Childers (1989) looked at the credibility of public relations at the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Anecdotally, Devin (2007) provided ideas for addressing a public relations credibility crisis. Gillen (2008) wrote for the *PR Strategist* claiming that public relations amateurs threaten the credibility of the profession. White and Park (2010) took up the call and argued for emphasizing the strategic function [though they do not tell us how or where] of public relations in order to enhance the profession's credibility.

Names and labels as cues for evaluating credibility. How, then, do we determine if a public relations person is credible? We turn to credibility literature to develop an understanding of the characteristics that constitute a credible person. McCroskey and Young (1981) confirmed five dimensions of source credibility, or characteristics evaluated by others to determine if one is credible; the five are sociability, competence, extroversion, composure, and character. Other scholars identified perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness as critical dimensions used to evaluate one's credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). Titles, labels, names and cues are all keys to credibility.

The discussion of how titles and descriptions serve as cues that shape others' perceived credibility of occupations (Osipow, 1962) is not new. Robust valuation discussions of titles continue. History chapters in public relations texts illustrate the profession's evolution beginning with 1900s press agents and publicists. Cancel, Cameron, Sallot and Mitrook (1997) highlight the evolution and, even, contention among discussions of public relations.

Webster's New World dictionary (Guralink, 1984) defines advocate as "one who pleads another's cause or (pleads) in support of something" (p. 10). A review of practitioner descriptions of the function of public relations shows that advocacy has been an integral part of public relations ever since its dawning (Sallot, 1993). Bernays (1928), often called the father of modern public relations, defined *practitioners* as "special pleaders who seek to create public acceptance for a particular idea or commodity" (p. 47). Smith (1972) argued the function of a public relations practitioner is to advocate, much like an attorney representing one side of an issue. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1985) maintained that public relations must "ethically and effectively plead the cause of a client or organization in the forum of public debate" (pp. 450-451). Barney and Black (1994) argued that professional advocacy is a socially acceptable and socially necessary role of public relations. Similarly, J. Grunig (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1990) wrote, "Many, if not most, practitioners consider themselves to be advocates for or defenders of their organizations and cite the advocacy system in law as an analogy" (p. 32).

Despite the attestations to the existence of advocacy in public relations, some practitioners appear uncomfortable with the notion of advocacy because it is often associated with negative images of manipulation and persuasion. For example, L. Grunig (1992b) defined advocacy as an "unsolved problem" in public relations and asks, "How far in giving advice to clients can a consultant in public relations go without weakening his or her independence?" (p. 72). In contrast, Bivins (1987) argued that the function of advocacy in public relations "can remain a professional role obligated to client interests, professional interests, and personal ethics. What is required is an ordering of priorities" (p. 84).

The function of public relations as an accommodator or builder of trust with external publics is also evident in public relations literature. Cutlip et al. (1985) defined public relations as helping establish and maintain mutually dependent relationships between an organization and the publics with which it interacts. Similarly, J. Grunig, L. Grunig, and Ehling (1992) said that organizations and their respective public relations practitioners should build relationships and manage an organization's interdependence. (pp. 35-36)

It is clear that what public relations people do, should do, and should be known for doing is a lengthy discussion. Turney (2009) attempted to summarize the changing names of the public relations field itself. He claimed that "public relations" became the preferred title in the 1920s, but as the field grew and became more dynamic, other terms including communications, marketing communications, public information, and corporate communications gained popularity in the 2000s. He also provided an interesting anecdotal discussion (2013) of what public relations people call themselves as they perform public relations work. He put it this way, "I'm fascinated by the unusual and wide-ranging terminology some public relations people use to describe their work and the quirky titles they sometimes give themselves" (para. 1).

While we do not provide a comprehensive history or exhaustive list of titles for public relations people, nor for the professionalization or credibility of the field, we do argue that what we call ourselves matters because titles are indicators of professionalism, credibility, and perceived value. They are clearly linked to legitimacy and status.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is inextricably linked to perceived value, power or dominance. Sallot (2002) pointed to a long-standing contradiction in establishing assumed public relations legitimacy in the larger organization or business world. In understanding what public relations people do, it's clear that "public relations often attempts to serve two masters: the interests of the client or sponsor that the practitioner is representing and the public interest" (p. 163). Therein lies the contradiction or tension that exists for public relations and its people. And Sallot argued, this is a contradiction that leaves the legitimacy or legitimation of the field in question. Additionally, Wæraas (2009) pointed to Max Weber's concepts of legitimacy and legitimation as at the core of the public relations profession. "Acquiring and preserving support from the general public" (p. 17) is what we do, so "public relations is all about obtaining and preserving legitimacy" (p. 21). But, one might argue, at what cost to the assumed legitimacy or value of the industry itself (especially if we must also obtain and preserve legitimacy with whomever we represent)?

Merkelsen (2011) provided a complementary discussion of legitimacy and reminded us that the relationship between business and society is characterized by the challenge of legitimacy. Public relations, he argued, is by its very nature at the heart of that legitimacy challenge. He highlighted "issues concerning the profession's own legitimacy" as a double-edged sword and provided an attempt to "clarify the various aspects of legitimacy in public relations in order to establish a better understanding of the limits of professionalization" (p. 125). He argued that "not only is legitimacy, as a fundamental challenge in the relationship between business and society, the very object of the public relations profession, the public relations profession is itself subject to challenges of legitimacy in its relations with clients as well as with the public" (p. 125).

Discussions of the professionalization of public relations, the credibility of the field and its people, as well as questions of legitimacy linked to public relations roles and perceived status are worth continuing. So, too, is clearly articulating what we call ourselves. There is no clear call for what we should call ourselves, but there is conversation about what we should stop calling ourselves.

Stop calling ourselves "PR practitioners"

A *PR Daily* article bluntly stated in its headline, "Stop calling us 'PR practitioners.' You never hear 'marketing practitioner' or 'advertising practitioner,' so why do people working in PR use this moniker?" (Headrick, 2013). Headrick argued that though the term "practitioner" is loosely linked to someone's attempt to "add credibility to the profession", but instead, overcompensates and separates us from our professional colleagues. As a VP of marketing and communications, he argued that we should "stop using silly words [like practitioner] in some lame attempt to validate our existence" (para. 8). He argued for the use of PR pro or PR professional. Additionally, Turney (2013) ended his muse about the many labels public relation people have used to refer to themselves and leaves us with this question, "If you currently work in public relations, the question you should be asking yourself is: Do I want to be known as a public relations practitioner, or would I rather have a more colorful and fun-filled job title?" (para. 15).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The varied narratives about public relations titles led us to ask six research questions.

RQ1: How do we (public relations people) refer to ourselves?
RQ2: How do those in closely related fields refer to themselves?
RQ3: How do those in closely related fields refer to us?
RQ4: How do we refer to those in closely related fields?
RQ5: Are there differences between how we refer to ourselves and how related fields refer to us?
RQ6: Are there differences between how we refer to related fields and how related fields refer to themselves?

METHOD

To answer our research questions, we engaged in a systematic, descriptive analysis of professional and academic publications representing public relations and the related fields of marketing and advertising. We sought publications from organizations that exist to establish professional and educational standards for public relations, marketing and advertising. We viewed them as global mouthpieces. The five publication sets included in this study were:

(1) PRSA is the leading professional association that advocates for the public relations profession and as such, PRSA's monthly *Strategies and Tactics* for year 2019 were selected. Content in this publication is reflective of the PR profession in its entirety; it educates public relations professionals on latest industry news and best practices, and "provides feature-length commentary on the strategic importance of public relations" (Strategies & Tactics, para. 2).

(2) The Commission on PR Education (CPRE) is an authoritative voice for public relations education; it influences public relations program certification, Certification in Education for Public Relations. CPRE's *Fast Forward: Foundations + Future State. Educators + Practitioners* (2017) report on undergraduate education was included as representative of public relations. CEPR has been earned by universities in more than six countries, with a total of 40 undergraduate certifications and four graduate certifications.

(3) The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) is one of two major accrediting bodies that oversee of business education standardization, including marketing programs; its bi-monthly *BizEd* magazine 2019 publications were included.

(4) A similar accrediting body is the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). It's quarterly *Impact* 2019 magazines were also included. Finally, an accrediting council for advertising programs was not identified. Both AACSB and ACBSP accredit schools of business worldwide.

(5) The Association for National Advertiser's (ANA) Advertising Educational Foundation (AEF) serves advertising and marketing professionals and academic communities. The AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* (2017) report was the final piece included. The AEF invites global participation.

In total, 23 publications spanning public relations, marketing and advertising were included for analysis.

Procedure

All 23 publications were downloaded from their host sites as searchable PDFs. The Adobe Acrobat search function was used to highlight and count each search term, combining singular and plural forms, highlighted in the search as "exact matches." A list of terms and their accompanying modifiers were recorded for each publication. For instance, if the term practitioner was found, yet it was modified by the term "PR" or "marketing" or "advertising," the modifier was noted as well. In addition, interesting contextualization of the terms, as those comments related to this study's purpose, were also recorded.

An original list of search terms was compiled by the researchers (who have more than 40 years of public relations experience between them) from readings of the literature review provided here, past readings and conversations, as well as a cursory reading of the texts selected for this analysis. Assuming a grounded approach, both researchers anticipated adding one or two additional search terms to the original list as the analysis progressed. The final list of terms searched for and counted (singular and plural forms) in all included terms for analysis were: practitioner(s), professional(s), leader(s), executive(s), manager(s), pro(s), counselor(s), consultant(s), strategist(s), and analyst(s). In addition, PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and the CPRE *Fast: Forward* report were searched for the terms business, marketing and advertising, respectively. The AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact*, and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications were searched for public relation(s), and PR(s). While not the original focus of the "what do we call ourselves" question, these search terms were added as the researchers took note that what we call ourselves as a "field" compared to what related fields "call us," if anything at all. This part of our research was particularly interesting as we sought to answer RQ5 and RQ6.

RESULTS

The results of our analysis are reported in Tables 1-4. At large, they provide insights in response to each of our research questions. The results in Tables 1 and 2 are reported beginning with the term practitioner, then by frequency of search term appearance. The results in Table 3 are reported in a public relations, PR, communication(s) sequence. The results in Table 4 are reported in a business, marketing, advertising, communication(s) sequence.

How Do We Refer to Ourselves?

Research question one was, "How do we refer to ourselves?" Because of Headrick's (2013) overt call in *PRWeek* to stop using the practitioner term, and Turney's (2009, 2013) question about the desirability of being called something "more" than a practitioner, the answer to Research Question one started with a search for "practitioner(s)." We wanted to know if practitioner(s) was prevalently used in the public relations publications as they named "us" as public relations people. The results of our analysis featured in Table 1 clearly show that the term practitioner(s) is used to refer to public relations people, and used a lot. We also often or sometimes refer to ourselves as

professional(s), leader(s), manager(s), pro(s), counselor(s), and consultant(s). We rarely refer to ourselves as executive(s), strategist(s) or analyst(s).

Table 1. Labels and descriptions of people in public relations—in public relations publications

	Count	Modifications
PRSA Strategies & Tactics all 2019 issues		
Practitioner(s)	85	public relations practitioner; solo practitioner; independent practitioner; practitioner and educator
Professional(s)	399	communications professional; public relations professional
Leader(s)	307	as more than practitioner or manager, in reference to those in leadership roles
Executive(s)	181	mostly in reference to key decision makers; in titles of authors; not in reference of PR people
Manager(s)	135	PR managers; communications manager; marketing communications; hiring manager
Pro(s)	47	PR pro, public relations pro, pro
Counselor(s)	49	counselors academy; PR counselor and practitioner
Consultant(s)	45	communications consultant; PR consultant
Strategist(s)	14	communications strategist; digital strategist; business strategist
Analyst(s)	2	research analyst; customer marketing analyst
Commission on PR Education 2017 Fast Forward report		
Practitioner(s)	530	public relations practitioner; practitioner and educator
Professional(s)	180	industry professionals; public relations professionals; professional development
Leader(s)	85	industry leaders; academic leaders(hip); leadership
Executive(s)	15	executive-suite; executive director; key decision makers
Manager(s)	4	hiring managers
Pro(s)	20	PR pro, public relations pro, pro
Counselor(s)	4	senior counselors; independent counselors
Consultant(s)	1	title of contributor
Strategist(s)	3	corporate strategist in contributor title
Analyst(s)	0	

PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term practitioner(s) 85 and 530 times, respectively, for a total of 615 uses. Of special note is the prevalent modification of it with public relations or PR. Additionally, but much less prevalent modifications of the term were solo and independent. A closer read of the publications indicated that practitioner was sometimes used to point to public relations people who do not teach it, e.g. practitioners compared to educators, or practitioners compared to scholars. PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term professional(s) 399 and 180 times, respectively for a total of 579 uses. Professional(s) was most notably modified with communications and public relations. It was also used to generally refer to any type of employee with whom one might work.

PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term leader(s) 307 and 85 times, respectively, for a total of 392 uses. Leader(s) was most notably used when referring to the development of any general employee in leadership capabilities, and as a distant second in referring to public relations people as leaders in their respective organizations. Leader(s) was sometimes discussed as something more than a practitioner or manager. PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term executive(s) 181 and 15 times, respectively, for a total of 196 uses. Executive(s) was used almost exclusively to refer to key organizational decision makers or policy setters, all of whom public relations people needed to "win over" or "earn respect from" before public relations could add value to an organization's efforts. An omission in the results was naming public relations people as executive(s) themselves, save one mention of a senior communications executive. There was no call for public relations people to occupy executive positions. PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term manager(s) 135 and 4 times, respectively, for a total of 139 uses. The manager(s) term was largely modified by the words PR/public relations, communications, and marketing.

It was very rarely modified by the word hiring. PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term pro(s) 47 and 20 times, respectively, for a total of 67 uses. The term pro(s) was always used to refer to a public relations person or persons. PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term counselor(s) 49 and 4 times, respectively, for a total of 53 uses. The terms were used all but two times to refer to someone who was a member of PRSA's Counselors Academy. It was used rarely to refer to a public relations counselor and practitioner. PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term consultant(s) 45 and 1 times, respectively for a total of 46 uses. Consultant(s) was almost always modified by communications or public relations or PR. PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term strategist(s) 14 and 3 times, respectively, for a total of 17 uses. Modifying terms used were communications, digital, and corporate. PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term analyst(s) 2 and 0 time(s), respectively, for a total of 2 uses. Modifying terms did not refer to public relations people, but instead to a research analyst and customer marketing analyst.

How do those in Closely Related Fields Refer to Themselves?

Research question two was, "How do those in closely related fields refer to themselves?" The answer to this research question was undertaken through a search of the AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications for the same set of terms as used in the PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications. The terms searched were: practitioner(s), professional(s), leader(s), executive(s), manager(s), pro(s), counselor(s), consultant(s), strategist(s), and analyst(s). As featured in Table 2, we found that our industry colleagues only refer to themselves as practitioners when distinguishing themselves from academics or scholars. They largely referred to themselves as professional(s), leader(s), executive(s), and manager(s). They rarely referred to themselves as consultant(s), strategist(s), and analyst(s). They did not refer to themselves as pro(s).

Table 2. Labels and descriptions of people engaging in related fields in business, marketing and advertising—in business, marketing and advertising publications

	Count	Modifications
AACSB *BizEd* 2019 issues		
Practitioner(s)	48	scholars and practitioners; general use
Professional(s)	85	HR professionals; management professionals; accounting professionals
Leader(s)	204	business leaders; thought leaders; leadership; general use
Executive(s)	71	corporate executive; executive directors; executive MBA
Manager(s)	59	middle managers; financial managers; general use
Pro(s)	0	
Counselor(s)	0	
Consultant(s)	9	general use
Strategist(s)	5	business strategist
Analyst(s)	18	data analyst; financial analyst
ACBSP *Impact* 2019 issues		
Practitioner(s)	2	practitioner-based presentations
Professional(s)	22	general use; business education professionals
Leader(s)	118	entrepreneurial leaders; thought leaders(hip); industry leaders; general use
Executive(s)	14	executive leaders; executive directors; general use
Manager(s)	6	general use
Pro(s)	0	
Counselor(s)	0	
Consultant(s)	2	academic consultant
Strategist(s)	0	
Analyst(s)	3	financial analyst; marketing analyst; risk analyst
AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* 2017 report		
Practitioner(s)	1	"connect practitioners to professors"
Professional(s)	7	industry professionals; general use
Leader(s)	12	advertising leaders; general use
Executive(s)	19	advertising executives; C-suite executives; HR executives; marketing executives
Manager(s)	8	line managers; digital analytics managers; general use
Pro(s)	0	
Counselor(s)	4	career counselors
Consultant(s)	0	
Strategist(s)	0	
Analyst(s)	0	

AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term practitioner(s) 48, 2 and 1 time(s), respectively, for a total of 49 uses. The practitioner(s) term

was almost always used to differentiate people out in the field from those known as academics or scholars. Practitioner(s) was not used to refer to public relations people, nor modified by public relations or PR. AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term professional(s) 85, 22 and 7 times, respectively, for a total of 114 uses. Professional(s) was used generally; it was sometimes modified by HR, management, accounting, business education, and industry. Professional(s) was not used to refer to public relations people, nor modified by public relations or PR. AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term leader(s) 204, 118 and 12 times, respectively, for a total of 334 uses.

Leader(s) was used generally, as well as modified by business, thought, entrepreneurial, industry, and advertising. Leader(s) was not used to refer to public relations people, nor modified by public relations or PR. AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term executive(s) 71, 14 and 19 times, respectively, for a total of 104 uses. It was used to generally refer to higher order business people. It was also modified by corporate, advertising, C-suite, HR, and marketing. It also modified the terms directors and MBA. Executive(s) was not used to refer to public relations people, nor modified by public relations or PR. AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term manager(s) 59, 6 and 8 times, respectively, for a total of 73 uses. It was used to generally to refer to a wide variety of business people. It was also modified by middle, financial, line, and digital analytics. Manager(s) was not used to refer to public relations people, nor modified by public relations or PR. AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term pro(s) 0 times.

AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term counselor(s) 0, 0 and 4 times, respectively, for a total of 4 uses. It was used exclusively when modified by career. Counselor(s) was not used to refer to public relations people, nor modified by public relations or PR. AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term consultant(s) 9, 2 and 0 times, respectively, for a total of 11 uses. It was used generally, as well as modified by academic. Consultant(s) was not used to refer to public relations people, nor modified by public relations or PR. AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term strategist(s) 5, 0 and 0 times, respectively, for a total of 5 uses. Strategist was used generally, as well as modified by business. Strategist(s) was not used to refer to public relations people, nor modified by public relations or PR. AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term analyst(s) 18, 3 and 0 times, respectively, for a total of 21 uses. Analyst(s) was modified by "data," "financial," "marketing," and "risk." Analyst(s) was not used to refer to public relations people, nor modified by "public relations" or "PR."

How Do Those in Closely Related Fields Refer to Us?

Research question three asked how those in closely related fields refer to us. A starting point was determining the degree to which AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications "named" public relations or PR. We searched the following terms: public relations, PR and communication(s). What we found and presented in Table 3, is that public relations itself, much less its people, is rarely mentioned.

Table 3. Labels and descriptions of PR and communication(s)—in business, marketing and advertising publications

	Count	Modifications
AACSB *BizEd* 2019 issues		
Public relations	2	public relations firm Edelman; public affairs
PR	0	
Communication(s)	49	general public communications; marketing communication
ACBSP *Impact* 2019 issues		
Public relations	0	
PR	0	
Communication(s)	16	general use; titles of people (director of marketing and communications)
AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* 2017 report		
Public relations	0	
PR	1	reference to advertising and PR university program
Communication(s)	10	Publicis Communications; professor of integrated marketing communications

AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term public relations 2, 0 and 0 times, respectively, for a total of 2 times. One was contextualized as "public relations firm Edelman" when discussing trust in business and its leaders. The other inferred public relations by naming "public affairs." AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term PR 0, 0 and 1 time, respectively, for a total of 1 use. It was used in a credential for a contributing author who was an educator in an advertising + public relations program. AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect* publications used the term communication(s) 49, 16 and 10 times, respectively, for a total of 74 uses. Communication(s) was used to discuss general notions of dyadic and business school communications among faculty and students. It was modified by marketing, included in a reference to an individual who was a professor of integrated marketing communications and embedded in titles of contributing persons. Best practices for communication(s) was a regular focus in *BizEd* for SoBA schools. One reference discussed public communications responsibility as business school dean responsibility, defining it as "engaging with the press, blogging, or using social media."

How Do We Refer to Those in Closely Related Fields?

Research question four was, How do we refer to those in closely related fields? A starting point in answer to this research question is determining the degree to which PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications "named" marketing and advertising. We searched the following terms: business, marketing, advertising, and communication(s) and presented the

interesting results in Table 4. Business was named as something public relations took part in as a matter of course. Marketing was prominently named, many times in association with marketing communication. Advertising was named less prevalently. Communications was widely named and referred almost exclusively to public relations as a mutually interchangeable term.

Table 4. Labels and descriptions of business, marketing, advertising and public relations fields—in PR publications

	Count	Modifications
PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* 2019 issues		
Business	399	business objectives; business strategy; business impact; general use
Marketing	225	influencer marketing; digital marketing; PR and marketing must work together
Advertising	47	native content; advertising coordinator
Communication(s)	925	in lieu of public relations; marketing communications as PR
Commission on PR Education 2017 *Fast Forward* report		
Business	94	business acumen; business strategy; business communication; business planning
Marketing	14	to separate from PR
Advertising	20	advertising and PR as together in one program
Communication(s)	312	in lieu of public relations; marketing communications as PR

PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term business 399 and 94 times, respectively, for a total of 493 uses. Business was used in a general sense, and as a modifier of objectives, strategy, impact, acumen, communication, and planning. It was not modified by public relations or PR. PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term marketing 225 and 14 times, respectively, for a total of 239 uses. Marketing was referred to as something separate from public relations. It was often referred to as a field that must work together with public relations and/or a field with much in common with public relations. The term was also modified by influencer and digital.

PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term advertising 47 and 20 times, respectively, for a total of 67 uses. Advertising was referred to as part of contributors' credentials, was modified by coordinator, and was referred to as a source of native content. It was also once referred to as part of a combined university program between public relations and advertising. PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications used the term communication(s) 925 and 312 times, respectively, for a total of 1237 uses. Communication(s) was often used in lieu of public relations to refer to what public relations people do, and to the

field in which they work. It was also modified by marketing as an interchangeable term with public relations.

Are There Differences Between How We Refer to Ourselves and How Related Fields Refer to Us?

Research question five asked if there are differences between how we refer to ourselves and how related fields refer to us. Ten interesting observations were recorded: (1) Public relations calls itself practitioner(s) at a much higher rate (615:51) than does marketing and advertising. Public relations clearly names its people as practitioner(s) in general and as distinct from scholars/academics. Marketing and advertising only refer to its practitioner(s) to distinguish from scholars/academics. (2) Public relations names its own people as professionals; it also names marketing and advertising people as professionals. Marketing and advertising name their people as professional(s), but do not name public relations people as professional(s). (3) Public relations speaks variously of leaders. Marketing and advertising speak variously and often of leaders. (4) Public relations names executive(s) as something its people are not. Marketing and advertising name executive(s) as something their people are. (5) Public relations clearly names its people as manager(s). Marketing and advertising clearly name its people as manager(s). (6) Public relations clearly names its people pro(s). Marketing and advertising do not name their people pro(s). (7) Public relations does not name its people as counselor(s) except through its people's affiliations with PRSA's Counselor Academy. Marketing and advertising do not name their people counselor(s). (8) Public relations generally refers to its people as consultants. Marketing and advertising refer to their people as consultants to a much smaller degree. (9) Public relations does not refer to its people as strategists. Marketing and advertising rarely refer to their people as strategists. (10) Public relations does not refer to its people as analysts. Marketing and advertising sometimes refer to their people as analysts, particularly in reference to digital, business and risk.

Are There Differences Between How We Refer to Related Fields and How Related Fields Refer to Themselves?

Research question six asked about differences between how public relations refers to related fields and how related fields refer to themselves. The results were clear. In general, public relations does not exist for marketing and advertising as represented in AACSB *BizEd*, ACBSP *Impact* and AEF *Bridging the Talent Disconnect Fast Forward* publications (3 mentions in total). Neither does PR. PRSA *Strategies & Tactics* and CPRE's *Fast Forward* publications clearly name marketing (239), advertising (67) and business (493). Public relations refers often to communication(s) (1,237), generally as interchangeable with itself, while marketing and advertising refer to it significantly less (74) and restricts it largely to non-public relations discussions.

DISCUSSION

Names, labels and titles matter. Our research sought to illuminate how the public relations field refers to its own people, as well as how those we work closely with in marketing and advertising refer to themselves. We also examined how we refer to each other. We did this because public relations, marketing and advertising people are in related fields. They often compete for jobs and for organizational influence. The results indicate that there appears to be quite the disconnect in

self-descriptions. The publication mouthpieces analyzed for public relations relied heavily on the term practitioner to refer to its people. Interestingly, the marketing and advertising mouthpieces did not name public relations as a field. The public relations publications often referred to marketing and marketing communications as fields. In addition, while the practitioner term was used infrequently in the marketing and advertising publications to distinguish academic from non-academic professionals, the marketing and advertising publications referred to their people most often as leaders. The public relations pieces referred to public relations people as leaders at a much less frequent rate, using professional as a second most frequent term. In the publications analyzed, the term executive was used almost exclusively to refer to non-public relations people.

Public relations people keep talking about the need to be taken seriously by businesses, business leaders, and policy makers or dominant coalitions. It seems, however, that how we talk about ourselves in the very publications we author meant to advance the field and professionalize public relations do little to advance it or its people. In short, we call ourselves practitioners to the exclusion of all other terms. Our marketing and advertising colleagues do not do that. We do not recognize ourselves as executives. Our marketing and advertising colleagues do. We talk about being professionals before being leaders. Finally, as a profession, public relations is missing from the marketing and advertising narratives.

If we continue to rely on Pieczka's (2008) definition of professionalization as something that occurs when occupations are *recognized* by others as professions, this research study shows us that public relations is not recognized. We are not surprised. It may be that to be *recognized*, we should reevaluate what we call ourselves. We need to ask, "What should we call ourselves?" and supply an answer based on systematic self-reflection and robust data-driven dialogue. It seems that we also need to find a way to write public relations into marketing and advertising narratives. In addition, given that our marketing counterparts out earn most public relations professors (CUPA and AAUP both report the differences), and that public relations people often report to a marketing director or VP of marketing in non-teaching settings, we can look closely at how they present themselves for new ideas about how to present ourselves. We can even go so far as to ask ourselves, clearly, why marketing people rarely report to public relations directors or public relations VPs. We can, in turn, make the same observations and ask the same questions about other public relations people and other business leaders.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

The results of this study call for additional research. First, similar descriptive analyses should be undertaken with additional publications, proceedings, transcripts, and reports provided by other representative sources. Second, a gap analysis addressing how public relations people are represented compared to how public relations people want to be represented needs undertaken. Third, a perception study assessing concepts such as the professionalization, credibility, legitimacy, value, prestige, and desirability of labels such as practitioner, professional, leader, executive, manager, pro, counselor, consultant, strategist, and analyst should be implemented. A fourth option for future research is a series of experiments assessing subjects' perceptions of public relations people, and their professional counterparts, when variables such as practitioner, professional, leader, executive, manager, pro, counselor, consultant, stragetist, and analyst are manipulated.

CONCLUSION

This study relied on PRSA and CEPR publications as the voice of public relations people. It relied on AACSB, ACBSP and AEF publications as the voice of marketing and advertising people. We conducted this analysis, using these publications, as a starting point for what public relations people call themselves most often. We also documented what public relations people's professional colleagues most often call themselves. The results were clear. The term practitioner is highly favored by public relations people. It is not favored by marketing and advertising people, or by others represented by AACSB, ACBSP or AEF. These people favored professional, leader, executive and manager to a much greater degree. The "why" question remains to be explored. The impact on the field also remains to be explored, pointing us to the "why should we care" question. The practitioner term may be helping or harming public relations people and the industry reach a point of professionalization, credibility and legitimacy. It may be working against it. It may be helping public relations people be part of and influence the dominant coalition, or it may work against that. Additional research can help us answer these questions.

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Quarterly Review of Business Disciplines

August 2020

Volume 7
Number 2