

## BOOK REVIEW

I-Huei Cheng\*

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Public Relations Theory II

*Carl H. Botan and Vince Hazleton (Eds.)*

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, New Jersey, 2006

Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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The recently published book, *Public Relations II*, edited by Carl H. Botan and Vince Hazlton (2006), comprehensively covered theoretical notions and research in the field of public relations. As promoted by the publisher, this updated edition, compared to its 1989 edition, is more of a new work than a revision because the editors brought together much broader variety of work by more public relations scholars with an intention to reflect advances or changes in the public relations academia since then. In short, this book have high aims: it hopes to document the current state of public relations research, serve as a corner stone for future development of public relations theories, and also demonstrate that our field is a solidly theory-driven, research-based discipline.

With such mission in mind, the editors collected a variety of essays, including relatively long-standing theories in the field as well as newer research that they considered worth more attention for future studies. The book is thus largely divided into two parts: “The Foundations” and “Tools for Tomorrow.” A list of the specific chapters for these two parts should be helpful for obtaining the general sense of the content, thus I list the table of content at the end of this book review for readers’ reference.

Overall, the book covers research lines that have been around for decades and dominated by several well-known scholars in the field, while the editors also try to bring

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about several areas that are still under-explored and have been only studied by few people. In the first section of the book, there are chapters serving as a good summary of research on a specific area, such as Chapter 6 on crisis management, written by W. Timothy Coombs. There are also chapters offering good critical review of research a public relations research topic, such as Chapter 4 on persuasion, written by Michael Pfau and Hua-Hsin Wan, who took a firm stance arguing that persuasion is an intrinsic function of public relations and opposing the venerable assertion of James Grunig and his colleagues that public relations practices should not contain an intention to persuade. The authors did a great job elaborating their reasoning, and it is pleasing to see such perspective included in the book.

In the second section of the book, the invited authors answered the editors' call for broadening the scope of public relations research by proposing new theoretical frameworks for areas that have been less studied, such as government relations. Some of the ideas are still very new and need more conceptual construction and empirical evidence to be validated. The author of the last chapter, Elizabeth L. Toth, acknowledge that, for example, there is very little theory building in public affairs, in public relations sense, and researchers in this area need to consult scholarly work in other relevant fields, such as political science. This recommended approach should be taken seriously because some of the topics that public relations scholars are interested in studying are in fact not only relevant to but actually overlap with other disciplines that have been rather established. As today we are more aware of the close connection with broader communication theories, business and public administration research, as well as social behavioral science theories, the earlier public relations the academy seemed having failed to incorporate, adapt or simply address theories in relevant disciplines that were already well developed.

The most thought provoking part of the book is the first chapter written by the editors. Besides the historical overview, they well pointed out that "having one clearly dominant theory [that is, the symmetrical/excellence approach] raises its own questions" (p.16). The first question is whether we focused such attention on a single view that we have missed other things. The second question is whether our field lacks forward movements that are usually driven by competition between different perspectives and characteristic of dynamic and challenging theoretic paradigm shifts. The editors diplomatically put it that "this is not a criticism of the dominant paradigm or its adherents, [but] a criticism of the rest of the field for failing to develop, test, and defend other strong

ideas” (p.17). I share similar opinions with the editors.

Unfortunately, although the need for fresher thinking in the field is recognized, there are no impressive chapters in response to this notion. The editors indicate several public relations areas where more research attention is desperately needed: feminist research, social responsibility, financial and investor relations, and homeland security. This call, however, does not necessarily come with an answer to the scholarly quest for innovative perspectives that may result in more compelling paradigms. This is particularly challenging as our academia tries to cover an extraordinarily wide spectrum of public relations topics: from feminism to rhetoric, from campaign strategy to relationship management, from crisis management to issue management, from employee relations to media relations to investor relations to government relations, and to cross-cultural, global public relations, etc. Many of our research topics have been categorized largely only based on differences in audience, channel or message. If the public relations academia keeps the same research orientation, we can at most describe or prescribe communication process in public relations practices, without being able to offer theories that explain the underlying mechanism or predict the communication effects.

Thus, one important question not addressed in this book as it aims to offer a new direction for public relations research is “what public relations scholars should study.” If public relations academics are responsible for theoretical development in the field, and if moving toward social science is the desired direction, then we should note that good scientific theories are that they should reflect real world facts, and explain and predict with parsimonious variables; and they should be falsifiable with possibility to make an observation that the theory is false. When compared to our brethren field of business, marketing and advertising, public relations relatively falls short of empirical evidence and practical contribution. The public relations academia had a deep root from real practices, while it is questionable whether we have offered meaningful and useful theories as of today. Of course, one can argue that public relations academics are entitled to study anything that suits their intellectual curiosity. Such debate is critical in discussing the research direction of an academic field but is rarely brought up in public relations academia, and neither is it seen in the present book. So, in conclusion, the book serves a good documentation of several major public relations research lines by the beginning of the twenty-first century, and it makes a good call for more critical thinking and theoretical development in the field, although not much of that is available in this edition.

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# 期待百家爭鳴的公關理論： 談 Public Relations Theory II

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書名：公共關係理論（二）（Public Relations Theory II）

編者：Carl H. Botan and Vince Hazleton

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最近由美國學者 Carl H. Botan 和 Vince Hazleton 所編成的《公共關係理論二》一書是它一九八九年的新版，這本書廣泛地包含了更多更新的公關領域的學術研究和論述。編者期望這本書反映這個學術領域的進步和展望，也希望藉此印證公關領域是有紮實的理論基礎。也因此這本書區分有兩大部分：「基礎篇」和「明日工具篇」。比較詳細的章節列在這篇書評的最後，以供參考了解這本書的內容。

大致來說，第一部分包括比較常見的理論和議題，這部分有的章節提供某個研究領域的總結，有的則能勇於提出不同於大師的異議；例如由 W. Timothy Coomb 歸納整理危機管理研究的第六章，及 Michael Pfau 和 Hua-Hsin Wan 所寫的第四章，論述「說服」是公關的一部分的，這兩篇都是值得一讀的章節。編者試圖在這本書的第二部分帶入一些更新的想法，不過多是還未成形的理論。勉強可以一提的是最後一篇作者 Elizabeth L. Toth 承認在政治公關的領域研究還很貧乏，她建議應該要參考相關的學術領域以求進步。

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全書最發人深省的是編者所寫的第一章，除了回顧公關理論與研究的發展過程外，編者提出深刻的反省：「（公關的學術領域）只有一個主導的理論顯然有它的問題」。編者指出長期以來許多公關的學術研究都是依據以馬里蘭大學 James Grunig 為主的論點，如此衍生的第一個問題是領域中其他不同的看法遭到忽略，另一個問題是公關的學術領域缺乏一個進步的動力。對此，我和編者的意見近似。

不過，這本書提到的未來的研究方向時，所舉的例子還是不脫過去的桎梏。我認為在反省和展望的同時，有一個更重要的問題是思考公關理論和研究到底應該探討什麼，許多公關學術研究的題目看似多元，其實只是針對不同的閱聽眾或訊息內容作描述，然而社會科學要求的應該是更深刻的、可以反映和解釋現實的、甚至對實務有用的、可以預測傳播效果的理論，比起相近的學術領域，我們在公關的學術研究明顯還有待努力。