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**SECTION B: PROGRAMME AND MODULE DETAILS**

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**SECTION C: ASSIGNMENT DETAILS**

Promotional media exists all around us, and there is no escaping it. It can be found on social media, in any store we walk in, in every television show, movie or song we watch and listen. Professor Aeron Davis so astutely noted that “promotion appears everywhere, so much so that we no longer notice” (2013). Since we live in a world that is not only promotionally saturated, but exists more and more on the digital platform. It is pertinent to understand the history and societal impacts of public relations in order to understand the future impacts it might have. As this is already such a broad topic, this paper will focus on the history of public relations as a whole, and then narrow down on the history and societal impacts on Sweden. As public relations is a very broad, and often ancient, term, this paper will analyze public relations under the definition as a type of promotional media where messages or information from an individual or organization is spread to the public. As will be explained further, Sweden is a country that does not use the term public relations to define the way a message is communicated to an audience, instead the term strategic communications is used. Despite this difference, an analysis will still be made on how promotional media can still be seen in all aspects of life, and how ‘communicating ideas to an audience’ can be used to help this promotion. Promotion is so ingrained in everyday life, that no one asks questions. Therefore, by analyzing the role of promotional media in Swedish society, one might understand how much of an affect promotional media has.

Public relations began during the 1920s when Edward Bernays’ coined the term public relations as a way to influence consumers. He coined this term after American society associated propaganda as the negative strategies used during World War I and II. Bernays’ insight came from his uncle Sigmund Freud’s theories on psychoanalysis. Using similar strategies to Freud’s, Bernays believed that one can influence an audience to believe they need what they want, and thus control the masses without them knowing. One of the most well know examples of how Bernays achieved this was through his tobacco campaign, which encouraged women to smoke tobacco. By strategically using ad placement—such as using models wearing the same colors as the tobacco packaging—using catchy slogans—such as torches of freedom, where the torches represented the cigarettes—and using media to his advantage. Prior to the parade where the torches of freedom campaign was first shown, Bernays had informed the press had been informed about the *Torches of Freedom* campaign and how there would be women smoking. This campaign not only showed the importance of public relations for campaigns, but also showed the importance of developing brands and strategically placing products in order to promote the brand and ideas. This campaign, along with many other successful campaigns conducted by Bernays, led to an increased interest in Public Relations.

While public relations has had a strong development in many western countries, it has found a different type of success in Sweden. This promotional media began in Sweden after World War II during the 1960s, after which the first Public Relations consultant agency was formed in 1956—*Svenska PR-byrån (Swedish PR agency)*. It wasn’t until after the mid 1990s that a majority of other agencies were formed (Falkheimer & Heide 2014). Yet, just as the term propaganda had a negative connotation in the United States Swedes associated public relations with pseudo-events, propaganda techniques and manipulation, and therefore many had an aversion to the term (Falkheimer & Heide 2014, Hammarström & Öster 2008). In fact, so negative was this connotation, the Swedish Public Relations Association (SPRA) ended up changing its Swedish name to the "Swedish Information Association" in 1991 (Hammarström & Öster 2008). Despite the aversion to Public Relations, courses were still tough throughout and after the 1970s, with some variation of the topic throughout the years. For example, Falkheimer and Heide (2014) explain that a general blind faith existed in information during the 1960s until the 1980s. This “blind faith” can be explained by the aversion to public relations, and instead using “information communication,” where focus was put into facts and information as a whole, instead of communicating a message to a target audience, through social marketing campaigns (2014). During this time, it was incredibly important for any information promoted to be delivered from a reputable source.

After the 1970s, the term “strategic communications” was used to describe the strategy of communicating ideas to a group (Falkheimer and Heide, 2014). Falkheimer and Heide (2014) explain that “the development of this concept is not based on an ideological aversion to public relation,” and instead use strategic communication because it “is wide and more holistic concept . . . integrating different fields of goal-oriented communication and using a multi-disciplinary and management approach” (2014). Falkheimer and Heide further explain that the increased interest in strategic communication can be explained from a social theoretical perspective as a consequence of modernity (2014). It wasn’t until the 1990s, however, that the conditions for the whole PR and information industry in Sweden were dramatically altered, which in turn lead to many structural changes. The reason behind this was a strong long-lasting economic upswing, increased market orientation in the society, and an increased political cooperation in Europe (Hammarström & Öster 2008). For example, in 1992 *Media and Communications* was launched a subject at many universities in Sweden, thus merging mass communication theory and information technique. Latter in early 2000s, “strategic communication” became a popular term for communicating messages to an audience (2014). Falkheimer and Heide explain that “it is not clear why this evolved, but one explanation is that strategic communication became more common in the industry and that some books and articles (e.g., Falkheimer & Heide 2003, 2007; Hallahan et al. 2007) emphasized SC as a modern concept for communication professionals and researchers” (2014). Public relations has had a long and confusing evolution in Sweden, especially in higher education. However, although strategic communication is the term most commonly found now, it still has many similarities to public relations does, with the most important being communicating ideas to an audience. It is with this definition that one is reminded that promotional media can truly be found everywhere, and sometimes this ends up successful, and other times unsuccessful.

An example of a promotional media campaign in Sweden that can be seen as both successful and unsuccessful can be seen with the “bread campaign” which urged citizens to eat six-to-eight slices of bread each day. This controversial campaign took place during the late 1960s, after the General Director of the National Board of Health and Welfare, Bror Rexed, saw an increasing need for the health information to teach citizens how to protect and improve their health, and get them to actually listen (Norén, 2018). The goals of the health campaigns were to not only build trust of the citizens with the agency, but also communicate ideas on how the citizens could develop and maintain a healthier lifestyle. Rexed created the committee on Health Education (Nämnden för hälsoupplysning) developed multiple campaigns that promoted healthier lifestyle habits, ranging from exercise to diet. Since few newspapers, television and radio shows were willing to promote these campaigns, the Health Education committee partnered up with the food industry—a partnership that was favorable to all sides (Norén 2018). This partnership allowed for promotion of the campaigns to be set up all over the store—through banners, flyers, and even messages on food products such as cartons of milk (Norén 2018). All was going fairly smoothly, until the Bread Institute developed their campaign recommending citizens eat “six-to-eight slices of bready every day,” in order to promote bread sales. Despite this supposedly fair partnership, Bread Institute assumed full control of their campaign since they were funding it completely, while the name of the National Board of Health and Welfare was still attached to the campaign (2018). The campaign was promoted all over stores and products, using similar strategies from previous campaigns. Therefore, this campaign reached a lot of people, and it was due to being overly saturated with promotional media, that it led to the health organization losing the audiences and citizens trust.

When speaking to Peter Axelson and Jan Persson, both who were living in Sweden at the time of this campaign, they mentioned vivid memories of seeing signs from the government saying how everyone needs to eat between six and eight slices of bread. Although both were still young when this campaign took place, both remember being confused over why the government was telling them to eat bread, but doing so anyways because “it was the government telling us to do it, and why would they lie” (Axelson). Both Axelson and Persson explain that after a while of continued promotion of this campaign, everyone stopped believing and listening. This example shows how successful a campaign can be reaching a large audience through promotional media, yet when used excessively and for the wrong reasons, can result in an unsuccessful campaign.

A completely opposite example of the bread campaign—where promotional media is used for the “right” reason—can be seen through the *Curators of Sweden* campaign. As an attempt to promote travel to Sweden, VisitSweden and the Swedish Institute teamed up to develop a way to “present the country of Sweden through the mix of skills, experiences and opinions it actually consists of” (curatorsofsweden.com/about/). This communications campaign ran from December 2011 until September 2018. It took the form of a Twitter account (@sweden), where each week a different Swede had the freedom to talk about whatever they wanted, so long as it did not promote hateful speech that targeted specific groups, violate any laws, or promote a commercial brand. This campaign ended up being highly successful, with an increase of followers from 8,000 to almost 150,000 over a span of seven years. Although the end follower count of 150,000 may not seem impressive, it is considering the fact no other promotion of the account was conducted, and relied on word-of-mouth alone. Not only did this promote the country of Sweden as a whole, but also promoted all of these individual topics each curator would talk about—such as shows watched, food eaten, games played, etc. Sweden realized the advantage of individuality and promotional media that can be achieved through the social media site Twitter. By allowing an individual Swede to promote their own thoughts and opinions, Sweden the country was being promoted as a diverse nation that valued the induvial. Although there have been no studies to see if tourism has increased since the account, the amount of positive audience interaction (and follower increase) from both international and national accounts shows how much of a positive influence promotional media can have. Christensen (2013) also points out that “the broad range of media-related activities [such as Twitter] in which governments engage in the service of nation-branding projects, coupled with an increased use of social media in strategic international nation-branding and diplomatic projects (Szondi, 2010), point to a vibrant area for future research.” Because society exists more and more on social media, public relations as a promotional media will most likely continue to evolve through social sites.

As these two case studies show that promotional media exists in an abundance in Sweden, it is interesting to note that, despite interviewing four people, none knew how to answer the question of how public relations / strategic communications and promotional media has influenced Swedish society. Rebecca Persson, who worked in the marketing department of a American medical company in Sweden, said that although she does not know if or how public relations is used, she has noticed that Swedes favor practicality and factual information. Björn Widberg one who runs his own graphic design company creating traditional print media;

Out of all responses of not knowing how to help, Widberg unintentionally ended being the most helpful, as he proved evidence of how saturated of a world we live in, stating that he “skipped the carousel [of digital media] when the web and mobile media took too much space” (translated from Swedish). Widberg reasoned that it is because he does not work with ‘digital media’ he could not help in explaining the influence promotional media has. However, it was the statement regarding web and mobile media taking too much space that shows how saturated society has become with promotional media. So much promotion is taking place on digital media, that Widberg felt it best to go the more traditional and less competitive route. The last two contacted for an interview responded that they would think about it respond later, but never did. Despite the lack of success with these interviews, it is still important to note as it shows that despite being surrounded constantly by promotional media, few understand what this means nor recognize it.

Despite Sweden’s aversion to public relations and use of strategic communications instead, there is evidence that this nation is still saturated with promotional media. As was seen with the Curators of Sweden campaign as well as the bread campaign, promotional media can exist anywhere from the store you shop in to the account you follow. It can promote any topic ranging from health to leisure actives. Yet just as promotional media is surrounding us in everyday life, it is becoming more difficult to define. Professor Aeron Davis so wisely wrote “promotion appears everywhere and, at the same time, we no longer notice its presence.” This statement rings more true now than ever with the existence of technology and social media. Anyone and everyone can post their thoughts and opinions, promoting their own perception of the world around them, changing the entire world into one big promotion.

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