

**van Ruler, B., Vercic Tkalac, A., & Vercic, D. (2008). *Public relations metrics: Research and evaluation*. London, England: Routledge.**

Reviewed by: [Kane Hopkins](#)

I have to admit that when I volunteered to review a book this wasn't the book I had hoped to receive. The other titles seemed more in line with my interest and experience, but after reading *Public Relations Metrics* I am all the better for it. It is an illuminating and paradigm-challenging read.

This book isn't a 'how to' guide on public relations research, rather a reflection on public relations research. It considers the theoretical angle of metrics in public relations and questions the ways in which definitions and measurement tools are applied. Measuring communication outcomes is more important than ever as organisations grapple with the current economic climate. In recent conversations I have had with public relations professionals, they have indicated their need to demonstrate the ROI on communication activities to managers, especially in the government sector.

Part One of the book, Fundamentals of Public Relations Research, is based on the premise that most books written on the subject of research and evaluation are introductory and are deficient in the detail needed to answer the 'what?' and 'why?' To this end, for James Grunig the greatest problem with public relations is not the lack of measurement but the lack of conceptualization" (p. 89). His basis for this claim is his belief that many public relations researchers and practitioners use metrics without understanding what concepts they are measuring. His resolution to this problem is to distinguish between three areas of research: research in public relations, research on public relations, and research for public relations. In doing so, Grunig provides a framework for conceptualisation that he believes is lacking. He alludes to the unhelpful tension between academics and practitioners that is not present in other professions. Academics while conducting research on the profession often develop ideas for the profession. However, academics need to understand the realities that practitioners confront by closely interacting with them and testing whether their scholarly-based ideas are in fact useful.

J. Grunig limits his discussion to quantitative research; however Larissa Grunig picks up the qualitative research argument in the following chapter. Earlier in the book, van Ruler, Tkalac Vercic and Vercic offer a public relations research grid that uses and builds on James Grunig's three-way 'on, for and in' approach to research. The grid highlights the discrepancies found between research that is conducted on public relations as opposed to for and in.

Part Two, Public Relations Methods, shows off the strengths of the book in that it draws from practical examples in Asia and Africa as well as the United States and Europe, avoiding the eurocentricism that is present in many communication texts. Reading the chapters on public relations in Africa, where public relations is developing and practitioners are facing unique situations, was enlightening and genuinely interesting. These chapters highlight the point that metrics are not universal but must reflect the culture and context within which the communication occurs.

The other chapter of note covers the role of research in developing and measuring the communication during London's campaign to hold the 2012 Olympic Games, and the need to build and maintain support for the bid. The campaign was designed to get all Britons, especially Londoners, supportive of the move. The chapter details the role of research and the multi-methodologies employed throughout the campaign. The chapter makes for a wonderful case study as it amalgamates the theoretical and applied nature of research undertaken and the influence this had on the communication decisions made during the campaign.

This book will give public relations academics a new perspective on methodologies and epistemologies that offer to reconceptualise future research. It is likely to create a large amount of future discussion among public relations academics. The editors believe their book has much to offer and will contribute to the growing body of knowledge in public relations research. I agree.

**About the reviewer:** *Dr Kane Hopkins is a lecturer in the Department of Communication, Journalism & Marketing, Massey University, New Zealand. He teaches Public Relations courses on the Palmerston North and Wellington campuses. His PhD considered blogs as political discourse in the 2005 New Zealand election and he is currently following up this study with an examination of the 2008 election.*