

# Foucault, Discourse, and the Birth of British Public Relations

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This article analyzes the emergence of public relations among corporations in interwar Britain. It adopts a discursive approach and applies the philosophy of Michel Foucault. It argues that public relations was a result of state propaganda during World War I, the emergence of a mass-media society, and criticism from a range of groups toward corporations during the period. It acted as an emergent institutional text, which taught corporations how to create corporate identities so as to garner public good will and institutional legitimacy. This was achieved by a range of strategies, including social programs and the creation of corporate narratives.

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Over the last thirty years, there has been an interest in the history of public relations (PR) in Britain.<sup>1</sup> This history has focused predominantly on its political and cultural aspects. It has failed, however, to examine its corporate characteristics and has not explained its emergence within this field. This article will attempt to do this by applying the philosophy of Michel Foucault.<sup>2</sup> Central to Foucault's thought is the concept of discourse: the creation and organization of statements, which create domains of human knowledge and practice.<sup>3</sup> Since Foucault argues that discourses are not based on timeless, metaphysical truths, but are historically constructed texts, there is clearly a link between history, corporate PR, and discourse. PR can be

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1. Anthony, *Public Relations*; Anthony and Mansell, *Projection of Britain*; Grant, *Propaganda*; L'Etang, *Public Relations*; LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy*.

2. May, *Philosophy of Foucault*; McNay, *Foucault*.

3. McNay, *Foucault*, pp. 48–88; Motion, Leitch, and Weaver, "Discourse Perspective," pp. 49–51.

seen as a historically constructed discourse, whose role is to create statements that legitimize government and corporations and influence public opinion. The history of PR can accordingly be narrated from a discursive perspective, creating a link between theory and content, and its impact on corporate development.

This article will first adumbrate historical research on PR. Second, it will discuss Foucault's theory of discourse and examine how this relates to PR. Third, it will explain the reasons for the emergence of corporate PR in the interwar period; and fourth, it will discuss its discursive formation drawing on Foucault's writings on discursive concepts and discursive strategies. Discursive concepts will be analyzed from the perspective of the emergence of ideas of responsibility and public goodwill. The development of corporate narratives will form the basis of the discussion of discursive strategies. Four corporations will be examined to map these developments, two in the private sector—the Prudential Assurance Company (PAC) and the oil company Shell-Mex—and two in the public sector—the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the General Post Office (GPO).<sup>4</sup>

### The History of PR

Public relations predominantly emerged in the United States and the United Kingdom in the first half of the twentieth century. Its development in the United States has been comprehensively mapped. Tedlow and Marchand have located PR in the rapid growth of large-scale corporations in the 1900s, and the opposition that it met from federal and state governments, trade unions, liberals, local businesses, and the media.<sup>5</sup> These new corporations were portrayed as monopolistic, soulless, and “un-American.” PR was a defensive function pioneered by individuals such as Ivy Lee, Edward Bernays, and Bruce Barton, who attempted to sell these organizations to the American people, develop corporate reputations, and fend off attacks and anti-trust actions.<sup>6</sup> Bird, for example, has shown how corporations in the United States used the new medias of radio, television, and cinema to create a new, dramatic narrative that emphasized that big business, and not government, was responsible for “better living” in the United States.<sup>7</sup> It was this unprecedented rise in living standards,

4. Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post*; Dennett, *Sense of Security*; Howarth et al., *History of Royal Dutch Shell*; Scannell and Cardiff, *Social History*.

5. Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*; Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image*; Tedlow, “National Association of Manufacturers.”

6. Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image*, Chapter 2.

7. Bird, *Better Living*.

corporations argued, which legitimized their size and role within American society.

In the United Kingdom, research has focused on the growth of PR within the public sector. Discussion has concentrated on how the state and local authorities developed communicative techniques in an age of mass democracy to interact with the public and stakeholders and influence public opinion. L'Etang has noted the emergence of PR and PR officers in central and local governments in Britain in the interwar period.<sup>8</sup> Grant has focused on the increased role of propaganda by the state, examining areas such as the GPO and public health campaigns.<sup>9</sup> Anthony has charted the pivotal role of civil servant Sir Stephen Tallents in pioneering PR, particularly in his roles at the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), the GPO, and the BBC in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>10</sup> Attention has also focused on the activities of the GPO in the 1930s, particularly its Film Unit under John Grierson, the *auteur* of the British documentary film movement.<sup>11</sup> Although this work has opened up new vistas of historical research, it has neglected the corporate and commercial aspects of PR. The latter is primarily discussed as political propaganda, or has been analyzed in terms of its creative content: PR *qua* art or corporate design. Little has been said regarding its role in developing corporate identity, and its market role and rise in the private sector have remained ignored.

### Definitions of PR in the Interwar Period

Public relations relates to three distinct but related phenomenon. These are the management of relations with various groups of the external public, the institutional management of the media, and the protection and enhancement of corporate reputation. All aim at the creation of corporate legitimacy. These ideas were evident among a number of corporations in Britain in the interwar period, although both the term PR and its underlying concepts were in their infancy, and the term was rarely used. When applied, it was often used interchangeably with the older term propaganda and with marketing nomenclatures such as publicity and advertising. All of the organizations examined in this article, even those with PR departments such as the GPO and the BBC, seldom used "public relations," and preferred to use the broader term publicity, instead.

8. L'Etang, *Public Relations*.

9. Grant, *Propaganda*.

10. Anthony, *Public Relations*.

11. Aitken, *Film and Reform*; Anthony and Mansell, *Projection of Britain*.

Yet even the term publicity was problematic and semantically extremely viscous. As Grant has observed, “The fact that the words publicity, advertising, propaganda and sometimes education were used interchangeably makes it difficult to provide adequate definitions which properly convey the meaning of these terms during this period.”<sup>12</sup> The term publicity was usually simply used as a synonym for advertising. This is evident, for example, in Sir Charles Higham’s *Scientific Distribution* (1916), a founding text on PR in Britain, and is apparent in most of the marketing discourse of the organizations examined in this article.<sup>13</sup> Occasionally the term was used to refer to a much broader use of communication that was not aimed at simply persuading people to buy products through posters or newspaper advertisements, but signified a very broad concept of communication that utilized, in addition to advertising, newspaper editorial, media coverage, events, educational and social programs, art, film, exhibitions, and even the use of public figures and celebrities. Furthermore this communication was aimed not simply at selling, but also at mass persuasion, the creation of goodwill, and attempts to change public behavior. This concept lay at the heart of Higham’s *Scientific Distribution*, as it did in the seminal American works of Lippmann (*Public Opinion*, 1922) and Bernays (*Propaganda*, 1928).<sup>14</sup> It can be found clearly in Tallents’s speech and pamphlet *Post Office Publicity*, composed when he was head of PR at the GPO.<sup>15</sup>

PR emerged in interwar Britain as a result of the experience of government propaganda during World War I, the rise of mass media in the interwar period, and the criticism toward the rise of the large-scale corporation.<sup>16</sup> Each of these will be briefly discussed.

### World War I and the Rise of State Propaganda

The emergence of the popular press in the late-Victorian and -Edwardian eras precipitated the rise of a limited system of media management at Whitehall. World War I saw the British State develop a far more proactive use of media management and state propaganda.<sup>17</sup> In 1914 a News Department was established at the Foreign Office to monitor the press and to carry out propaganda abroad. The government

12. Grant, *Propaganda*, p. 14.

13. Higham, *Scientific Distribution*.

14. Bernays, *Propaganda*; Lippmann, *Public Opinion*.

15. Tallents, “Post Office Publicity.”

16. Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*.

17. Grant, *Propaganda*, pp. 25–26; Tulloch. “Policing the Public Sphere,” p. 368.

created a secret War Propaganda Bureau, whose aim was to enlist the support of neutral countries, particularly the United States. An Official Press Bureau dealt with press censorship, while postal and telegraph censorship was overseen by the War Office, and the British Board of Film Censors dealt with film censorship. In February 1917 these disparate bodies were united into the Department of Information, which became the Ministry of Information in February 1918.<sup>18</sup>

Much of Britain's propaganda during the war was targeted at overseas nations, but some was focused on the home nation. Propaganda domestically focused on three areas: the encouragement (until 1917) of men to enlist in the armed forces, the purchase of War Bonds, and extortions to higher productivity of workers.<sup>19</sup> This was partially accomplished by the propagation of embellished or invented stories of German outrages, such as atrocities against occupied Belgium and the "corpse conversion factory," in which the Germans were said to convert dead bodies into soap.<sup>20</sup> Propaganda was spread by a number of channels, including posters, advertising, film, press releases, and event management. A particularly interesting example of the latter was the use of "Tank Banks." These were six Mark IV tanks that toured the country between 1917 and 1919 to promote the sale of War Bonds and War Saving Certificates. Encouraged by the tank craze that swept the country following the early military victories at Cambrai in November 1917, the Tank Banks used local dignitaries, performed stunts, and raised a great deal of money.<sup>21</sup>

The Ministry of Information was dismantled in 1919, although its contribution to the rise of PR in Britain was pronounced. The state had made an unprecedented use of modern mass media and the techniques of scientific publicity. The publicist Sir Charles Higham, owner of a large London advertising agency and well-known writer on the subjects of advertising and propaganda, commented in relation to the state's use of wartime propaganda: "We are still too close to that great advertising campaign to see its value in the proper light. But all clear-thinking people must have realised by now some of the significance of its cumulative effect."<sup>22</sup>

Higham served as director of publicity of the National War Savings Committee during World War I. In the 1920s he promoted the marketing and selling of British and Empire goods abroad, particularly

18. Grant, *Propaganda*, pp. 27–29; Tulloch, "Policing the Public Sphere," pp. 368–369.

19. Higham, *Scientific Distribution*, pp. 140–144.

20. Tulloch, "Policing the Public Sphere," p. 368.

21. Tate, *Modernism, History*, pp. 140–147.

22. Higham, *Scientific Distribution*, p. 142.

to the United States.<sup>23</sup> World War I witnessed state utilization of PR and publicity techniques that left an important legacy to the interwar period. It created a framework for mass media campaigns that were aimed at changing public attitudes and behaviors that were replicated in the 1920s and 1930s;<sup>24</sup> for example, the EMB, and most government departments, opened press offices and practiced PR and media management during these decades.<sup>25</sup> This was also adopted by nationalized industries such as the GPO and BBC, and spread to corporations in the private sector during this period.<sup>26</sup> Finally, several of the themes that were developed in the discourse of PR in the interwar period, such as national identity and technical efficiency, can be detected in the government propaganda of World War I.

### The Rise of Mass Media

The emergence of popular journalism in the late-Victorian and -Edwardian periods preceded the rise of mass media in interwar Britain.<sup>27</sup> Annual newspaper sales rose from 85 million in 1851 to 5,604 million in 1920.<sup>28</sup> The period also saw the emergence of mass national daily newspapers, such as the *People* (in 1881), *Daily Mail* (in 1896), *Daily Express* (in 1900), and *Daily Mirror* (in 1903).<sup>29</sup> The *Daily Mail*, selling for one-half penny, was often seen as the first tabloid newspaper. What was new about these papers was not only their mass readership, but also their style of journalism. Forgoing the mid-Victorian emphasis on information and education, they provided, in addition to news, entertainment and diversion through an emphasis on human interest stories, the home, sports, celebrities, patriotism, and titillation.<sup>30</sup> Although these newspapers were popular in scope, it should be noted that they appealed predominantly to an expanding lower-middle class. The majority of the working class was not part of their readership.

The interwar period, however, witnessed the rise of a popular press that catered to all social classes. National newspaper readership

23. LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy*, p. 163.

24. Anthony, *Public Relations*, Chapter 4; Constantine, "Bringing the Empire Alive."

25. Grant, *Propaganda*, p. 5; Tulloch, "Policing the Public Sphere," p. 371.

26. Anthony, *Public Relations*, Chapters 4 and 5; Heller, "Corporate Brand Building."

27. Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, Chapter 4; Lee, *Origins of the Popular Press*.

28. Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 37.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

30. Chalaby, "'Smiling Pictures.'"

expanded from 5.4 million to 10.6 million between 1920 and 1939.<sup>31</sup> This was partly driven by the expansion of tabloid newspapers that appealed specifically to the working class, such as the *Daily Herald*, whose acquisition by the Odhams Group in 1929 saw its circulation hit two million in 1933.<sup>32</sup> With such huge increases in circulation, and the advertising revenues that accrued from this, the popular press became independent and more politically assertive. As the media historians James Curran and Jean Seaton have noted, “an independent ‘fourth estate,’ prematurely announced in the mid-nineteenth century, came much closer to reality during the inter-war period.”<sup>33</sup> This fourth estate was not averse to publically criticizing politicians and the state, or indeed, as is noted in the next section, big business.

The interwar period also saw the development of the radio and the cinema. “Listening in” and “going to the pictures” became norms in British life. In the 1930s, between eighteen and nineteen million people weekly went to the cinema, and the country established one of the world’s first and best-funded public radio services in the guise of the BBC.<sup>34</sup> In 1939 nearly nine million households had a radio.<sup>35</sup> Britain had become, by the 1930s, a fully mediatized society. On the one hand, this was a threat for political and corporate interests. Mass media meant public scrutiny and criticism. Media activism by press barons such as Beaverbrook and Rothermere became a pronounced feature of the press, whether against wasteful government expenditure in the early 1920s, the British Empire in the 1930s, or the lack of accountability of the BBC in the interwar period.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, it also offered opportunities for government and big business to influence public opinion. Press editorials and mass advertising were used in the interwar period. Similarly, newsreels were used by the government and big business, as was the radio, which featured programs on the GPO and corporations such as Shell-Mex and the PAC.<sup>37</sup>

### Corporate Criticism

Criticism of corporations was not new in the interwar period.<sup>38</sup> Companies such as Lever Brothers and the PAC had been attacked by the

31. Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 44.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

34. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures England*, pp. 419, 476.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 457.

36. Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, pp. 50–51.

37. Heller, “Corporate Brand Building,” p. 202; Heller, “National Insurance Acts,” pp. 27–28.

38. Wilson, *History of Unilever*, Chapter 6; Heller, “National Insurance Acts,” pp. 14–17.

press in the 1900s. What was different was its extent and depth. All the organizations examined in this article experienced sustained criticism. In the 1920s, the PAC continued to be criticized by the national weekly *John Bull*. In 1911 the paper had run stories accusing the PAC of pressuring customers into buying bogus policies, of encouraging gambling, and of failing to honor payments to families on the death of insured customers. The PAC successfully sued *John Bull* for libel in 1912, but after World War I, the paper simply turned its criticisms to the entire life insurance industry. Its campaign, which claimed that the sector was the “World’s Biggest Swindle” and “Soulless and Unsympathetic,” spanned the entire 1920s.<sup>39</sup> In the interwar period, Shell-Mex was accused of polluting the English countryside by placing its advertisements along country roads and in villages. In the 1920s, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, a conservationist movement, launched a national campaign against such practices. In addition, oil companies were accused of being global, sinister, and bent on world domination.<sup>40</sup> In 1935, Adrian Corbett, a member of the American Department of the Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Company, argued in a speech that the oil industry had become a reviled sector that attracted unfair and unsubstantiated criticism. He pointed to fourteen books that over the past decade had attacked the sector.<sup>41</sup>

Criticism was also evident in the public sector. The BBC was subject to a barrage of attacks.<sup>42</sup> It was accused of being a monopoly and limiting choice, and that it did not reflect or care about the tastes or views of its listeners. While most people wanted light entertainment, sports, and popular music, it was complained that the BBC was more intent on providing classical music, talks on ancient civilizations, and other highbrow material. Under the leadership of its director-general, John Reith, the BBC was accused of giving people what it thought they needed rather than what they wanted, and that it reflected the views and tastes of the ruling classes, not the people. In 1933, for example, the *Daily Mail* commented: “We want, perhaps, two B.B.C.s. We might have one really independent and the other the official mouthpiece of our rulers.”<sup>43</sup>

Equally serious were criticisms against the GPO, a government department, which was the largest employer in Britain, with 280,000 workers.<sup>44</sup> The GPO was criticized for its failure to expand the British

39. Heller, “National Insurance Acts,” p. 17.

40. Heller, “Corporate Brand Building,” pp. 207, 210.

41. *Shell-Mex Magazine*, “Oil Policy and Publicity,” May 1935, pp. 213–216.

42. LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy*, pp. 273–285.

43. *Daily Mail*, “Capt. P. P. Eckersley Asks Do We Need a Second BBC?,” February 28, 1933, p. 4.

44. Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post*, Chapter 7.

telephone network. In the 1920s, the United States, Scandinavia, and Germany had higher telephone penetration rates than did Britain. This was felt to be socially and economically disadvantageous, and was seen to be a national disgrace. Blame was put squarely on the GPO. Its failure to adopt modern marketing practices was considered the cause of this.<sup>45</sup> In 1920, for example, the *Times* was scathing in its attack on the GPO:

The Post Office telephone system has not a friend from Land's end to John O'Groats ... because the Post Office has failed in its capacity of telephone authority, and no telephone user in the country has any other opinion. There are many square miles of houses in every big English city where a telephone, or perhaps two or more telephones, could be placed in every house. But nobody has been to those houses to tell the occupants how useful the telephone is; or advertised to them the advantages of the telephone service and its low cost or sent them pamphlets illustrating and describing the varied uses of the telephone.<sup>46</sup>

What was also new was the depth and breadth of these attacks. While criticism had always persisted in the press, it now emerged from other sources. Attacks on the PAC and the life insurance industry began to surface from the government, politicians, trade unions, and the British Medical Association. In 1919 the Parmoor Committee, appointed by Lloyd George, published a report castigating the life insurance industry for excessive profits. In 1923 the government appointed an Industrial Insurance Commissioner, whose role was to receive and investigate complaints from the public.<sup>47</sup> Attacks on Shell-Mex came from conservationists, who were supported by well-known artists, writers, and public figures.<sup>48</sup> Criticism against the BBC was voiced by the press, the Radio Manufacturers Association, senior public figures such as Sir William Beveridge, and even within the BBC itself.<sup>49</sup> This was also the case with the GPO. Attacks came from the press, the Telephone Manufacturers Association, and senior politicians. In the 1920s and 1930s, several official public inquiries were established to investigate the failure of the GPO to encourage Britons to adopt the telephone. It was as a result of these inquiries that the first official PR department was established at the GPO in 1933.<sup>50</sup>

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 282–304.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

47. Heller, "National Insurance Acts," pp. 17–18.

48. Heller, "Corporate Brand Building," p. 207.

49. LeMahieu, pp. 273–285; Memorandum Programmes Submitted by Radio Manufacturers Association, November 1935, Publicity Audience Research, 1934–36, BBC, R44/23/2, Written Archive Centre (WAC).

50. Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post*, pp. 282–304.

## Michel Foucault

A weakness of existing approaches to the history of PR in the United Kingdom and United States is that they are often highly descriptive. They tell us how PR was performed without elaborating in detail on the ideologies that was foundational to such behavior, which, in turn, would explain its practice. This approach is usually relatively monolithic. In the case of the United States, it is argued that PR was created to protect corporate interests; in the United Kingdom, to enhance democracy. This is to some extent true, but the finer points of these ideologies are missing. In addition, historical explanations for the rise of PR are highly dependent on the external environment. The rise of big business and government, the spread of corporate criticism, and the rise of mass media are often given as reasons. What is absent from this reasoning, however, is that PR both allowed corporations to react to environmental changes and to articulate ideologies that had historically emerged within the corporate sector and the societies in which corporations were embedded. Finally, existing accounts fail to explain why a certain type of PR was able to spread so quickly within the corporate sector in the United States and United Kingdom, and why PR in corporations in each country was so similar. This article argues that using Foucauldian discourse analysis can fill the above lacunae that traditional historiography either has rejected, ignored, or failed to engage with.

Foucault's impact on historical research is profound. His emphasis on the role of discourse in regulating and determining thought and behavior in areas such as health, sexuality, and crime; his historical approach of linking together modes of thinking with institutional practice; and his account of power as an essentially positive rather than negative phenomenon has provided historians with very different interpretations of modernity.<sup>51</sup> His work has contributed to the emergence of a historiography, often referred to as the linguistic turn in history, which has emphasized the role of cognitive structures, constructed ideologies, meaning, and identity in determining and explaining historical agency over macro-socioeconomic structures and events.<sup>52</sup> This has had an impact in social and cultural history.<sup>53</sup> Foucauldian concepts have also been used to analyze the development of disciplinary structures in large-scale organizations, as well

51. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Foucault, *History of Sexuality*; May, *Philosophy of Foucault*, pp. 66–81.

52. Stedman Jones, "Determinist Fix"; Spiegel, "Practising History."

53. Joyce, "Visions of the People"; Scott, "Evidence of Experience"; Stedman Jones, "Languages of Class."

as careers, employee motivation, bureaucratic power, and accounting history.<sup>54</sup> His work has also had a similar impact on PR. Academics such as Motion, Weaver, and Leitch have emphasized the role of PR in constructing discourses, whose aim is to influence public opinion and behavior, and construct individual and corporate identities.<sup>55</sup> These writers have applied Foucault's concept of power-knowledge to demonstrate how PR is concerned with constructing "truths" that privilege certain discourses over others, and which further governmental and corporate influence and power.

At the core of Foucault's thought is discourse. These make possible statements and are the basis of all forms of knowledge. In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault defined discourse as "the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation; thus I shall be able to speak of clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse."<sup>56</sup> He also referred to discourse as "sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualisable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements."<sup>57</sup>

These two quotes demonstrate that discourse does not simply relate only to statements or speech, but that it also refers to fields of expertise and practice. Discourse organizes speech, thought, knowledge and behavior. It describes and constitutes the world, creating our macro- and micro-environments and interpretive and behavioral domains. From a historical perspective, discourse creates fields of practices that explain behavior. It creates ideological frameworks that are produced, shared, and legitimized in societies that script historical agency and action. This is highly relevant to institutional settings, and thus to business history. In the context of this article, PR can be seen as an institutional discourse whose emergence explains the development, pattern, and practice of corporate identity and communication in large-scale organizations. In relation to the use of historical sources in this article, discourse has been traced both through corporate discussions of PR in areas such as corporate publications, articles, speeches, and minutes of meetings, as well as in the records of organizations that show how these discourses structured organizational and commercial behavior, such as advertising campaigns and public educational programs. Finding common terms and concepts in both institutional and noninstitutional sources, creating links between

54. McKinlay, "Dead Selves"; Savage, "Discipline, Surveillance and the Career"; Stewart, "Pluralizing Our Past."

55. Motion, Leitch, and Weaver, "Discourse Perspective"; Motion and Leitch, "Toolbox."

56. Foucault, *Archaeology*, p. 121.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

them, and then linking these to corporate action are key aspects of a discursive historiography.

Discourses are not only concerned with the articulation of statements, but also with the creation of systems of knowledge.<sup>58</sup> This lies at the heart of Foucault's power-knowledge principle, which was elaborated in works such as *Madness and Civilisation*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *Discipline and Punish*.<sup>59</sup> Foucault rejected the Enlightenment belief that knowledge was empowering, and that the "discovery" of truths could liberate mankind from the shackles of religion and superstition. Instead, he argued that knowledge was indelibly linked with power and control. In modern societies, discourses create knowledge that defines what is right and wrong, and rigidly determines behavior. Authorized by the state and "legitimate" institutions such as courts, hospitals, universities, and academies, regimes of truth are created that regulate behavior and legitimize control. In addition, these newer forms of power are far more effective than older models, which had depended on force and physical punishment. New scientific discourses are readily imbibed by individuals, who learn how to control and regulate themselves according to their precepts. Discourses such as psychology, criminology, education, and modern medicine are accepted as scientifically proven routes to better living, and are underpinned by the creation of a number of antisocial deviant types, such as the madman, the criminal, and the sexual pervert. In turn, those that reject these discourses, whose behavior matches these asocial types, can be legitimately controlled and placed in the new institutions that modernity has created, such as prisons, hospitals, and asylums.<sup>60</sup>

PR was developed in the interwar period as a discourse to harness the rise of mass media, to promote and justify the corporation, and to protect them from public criticism. It developed both defensive and positive functions through its role in media relations and the creation of corporate identity. In the remainder of this article, the historical emergence of PR will be analyzed from a discursive perspective. In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault referred to four rules that pertain to the historical creation of discourses: the formation of objects, the formation of enunciative modalities, the formation of concepts, and the formation of strategies.<sup>61</sup> These relate to the formation of phenomenon that discourses create, the positions that individuals

58. Motion, Leitch, and Weaver, "Discourse Perspective"; May, *Philosophy of Foucault*, Chapter 2.

59. May, *Philosophy of Foucault*, pp. 20–21, 75–76; McNay, *Foucault*, Chapter 3.

60. McNay, *Foucault*, Chapter 3; Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.

61. Foucault, *Archaeology*, Chapters 3–6.

can take within certain discourses, the concepts that they produce, and the themes and approaches that they engender. The discourse of PR that emerged in the interwar period in Britain will be analyzed from the perspective of discursive concepts and strategies.

### Discursive Concepts

For Foucault, discursive concepts create rules that allow statements to be made and applied. They are the building blocks of discourse. As he argued, “the rules of formation operate not only in the mind or consciousness of individuals, but in discourse itself; they operate therefore, according to a sort of uniform anonymity, on all individuals who undertake to speak in this discursive field.”<sup>62</sup> In relation to PR, two discursive concepts emerged over this period. These were responsibility and the creation of public goodwill. Responsibility lay at the heart of the discourse of PR. Under its rhetoric, big businesses transformed themselves from economic agents that produced goods and services to social institutions that served the nation. The phenomenon drew on three distinct areas: responsible advertising, industrial welfare, and the Victorian discourse of public duty.

Cultural historian D. L. LeMahieu has described the opposition during the interwar period of British elites to the rise of a mass commercial culture in music, cinema, popular newspapers, and advertising.<sup>63</sup> These were criticized for their American origins, egalitarian nature, and appeal to “crass” commercialism. Mass advertising was singled out as one of its worst symptoms, provoking widespread public criticism that argued for the rising of standards in advertising in the United Kingdom in an attempt to augment the visual landscape and improve the aesthetic standards of everyday Britons. Responsibility among corporations increasingly became defined in terms of the quality of their publicity.

In the interwar period, corporations increasingly employed artists for commercial work. A pioneer of this was Frank Pick and the London Underground. Pick employed British artists and architects to design poster advertisements and train stations. He believed that art could be found in everyday life, and that companies had a responsibility to provide this to their customers. Pick transformed London rail stations into mass art galleries that aimed at public improvement.<sup>64</sup> The patronage of artists was adopted by other organizations; for example,

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

63. LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy*, pp. 121–137.

64. Saler, *Avant-Garde*.

Shell-Mex was hailed as the modern Medici in its sponsorship.<sup>65</sup> This began with the London Underground's head of publicity, Jack Beddington, who commissioned leading British modern artists to produce paintings that were used in advertising campaigns. These depicted the British countryside and heritage sites such as Stonehenge and Bodiam Castle. Campaigns did not publicize products or services, but rather promoted the company as a whole.<sup>66</sup> Shell-Mex developed an association between modern art and tasteful advertising, and its advertising was shown in exhibitions across the country. This was evident in the introduction by the art critic Robert Byron in Shell-Mex's catalog of its 1931 exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts. Entitled "Responsible Publicity," Byron argued that Shell-Mex's use of advertising was salutary in the tastefulness of its content, efforts to improve its audience, and care for the countryside.<sup>67</sup>

The national movement for industrial welfare originated in Britain toward the end of the nineteenth century. The movement argued that big business should focus on developing relations with its workers in an age of mass production and bureaucratization.<sup>68</sup> Focusing on the "human element" in production was argued to be the chief responsibility of business. This was attempted through industrial welfare programs such as pensions, sickness and health benefits, regular rest breaks, and amenities (e.g., canteens, wash rooms, and recreational facilities). By the 1930s, most major companies in Britain were engaged in industrial welfare. This was facilitated by the establishment in 1918 of the Industrial Welfare Society, which supported member companies in developing programs for their employees. Companies were also keen to communicate their industrial welfare programs to the external public to enhance their reputation by demonstrating employer responsibility.

An example of industrial welfare as PR can be seen in the spread of company magazines among large-scale employers.<sup>69</sup> Company magazines enabled employers to communicate with workers, create organizational cultures, and project the organization internally. Magazines attempted to humanize the working environment by making it more meaningful and collective, which critics claimed was the very antithesis of big business. In 1932, Sir David Milne-Watson, managing director of the Gas Light and Coke Company, stated at the Industrial Welfare Society's Eleventh Conference on Works and Staffs Magazines:

65. Connolly, "New Medici."

66. Heller, "Corporate Brand Building," pp. 205–206.

67. Shell-Mex, *An Exhibition*, Introduction.

68. Fitzgerald, *British Labour Management*.

69. Heller, "British Company Magazines."

The difficulty is ... to make the company a unity. The man in Wick must be made to feel that he is the part of the same undertaking as the man at King's Cross; the man at Staines, working in a rural area, must be associated with his fellow worker at Beckton many miles away, working under entirely different conditions. These works magazines seem to me to focus the idea of the company as a whole. They circulate everywhere and give cohesion and a feeling of comradeship. ... Therefore, I believe that they are of the greatest possible value, and I think that a conference of this sort can do nothing but good.<sup>70</sup>

The Victorian principle of public service was increasingly adopted by corporations in the interwar period. This concept was based on the belief that the ruling- and middle-classes had a moral duty to improve society. Part of this lay in cultural and behavioral reforms, which were attempted through educational and moral campaigns.<sup>71</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, this discourse spread to corporations, which began to initiate social and educational programs. For example, the PAC became a major provider of public health. One element was its public health booklets *The Road to Health Series*, which were distributed across the country. These educational booklets were filled with advice, medical facts, and information.<sup>72</sup> As mentioned earlier, Shell-Mex held exhibitions, showing commercial art across the country and providing art to the Victorian Museum and Museum Department of Circulation, which in turn lent art to colleges and schools.<sup>73</sup> The BBC was a major provider of education through its talk shows, which covered a number of topics on the arts and sciences. It also collaborated with the British Institute of Adult Education and provided schools with radio educational broadcasts.<sup>74</sup> Such work was replicated by the GPO, which also collaborated with schools across Britain.<sup>75</sup> An April 1936 report demonstrated the extent of its pedagogical activities for the previous year. The GPO had worked with the London Chamber of Commerce in the postal education of junior clerks in commercial houses; posters by artist E. McKnight Kauffer, depicting airmail routes, had been sent to twenty-seven thousand schools. The GPO also had

70. *Industrial Welfare and Personnel Management*, "Magazines for Staff, Shareholders and Customers," p. 526.

71. Scannell and Cardiff, *Social History*, Chapter 1.

72. *Ibid.*; Heller, "National Insurance Acts," p. 19.

73. Heller, "National Insurance Acts," p. 19; Heller, "Corporate Brand Building," pp. 207–208.

74. "Past and Present Practice in Listener Research & Memorandum on Listener Research," Publicity Audience Research Policy, File 1, 1937, R44/26/1, WAC; *The Listener*, "Progress in School Broadcasting," March 6, 1929.

75. POST 108 Sub-series, Post Office Publicity Committee, Minutes of Meetings 1935, "Progress Report 29.4.25," Royal Mail Archives.

prepared posters for schools in Birmingham that reproduced facsimiles of official forms that the public would be required to fill in. It had cooperated with the education authorities in Manchester to produce maps showing the volume of telephone and telegram traffic between that city and the rest of Britain; and it circulated 290 demonstration telephone sets in schools. It had supplied forms to be used in the teaching of civics; it had shown GPO films to forty-eight thousand children and two thousand teachers; and it had exhibited at the annual National Union of Teachers conference.<sup>76</sup> Both the BBC and the GPO had also provided a lecture service that gave talks to civil associations such as the Women's Institute and local chambers of commerce.<sup>77</sup>

The concept of public goodwill lay at the heart of PR. It was discussed in 1934 in a speech on publicity by Tallents, then director of PR at the GPO.<sup>78</sup> He argued that the need for publicity had arisen due to a growth in the size of the organization and the development of democracy. Organizations had become too large to be understood instantly by the public, yet the growth of democracy had led to the demand for more information. The first role of PR was to inform the public about the operations of organizations and the goods and services they provided. PR's second role, of course, was also to promote the organizations. Tallents termed these roles as "foreground" publicity. The third role was "background" publicity. This, according to Tallents, was the creation of public goodwill, which was vital to the smooth running of the GPO, and included three factors: the reduction in complaints from customers, the enrollment of public support, and the creation of word-of-mouth recommendations. "Everything," Tallents stated, "which increases the prestige of the Post Office in the public eye tends to make Post Office operations more efficient and less costly."<sup>79</sup> In 1936 the BBC echoed many of Tallents arguments in its explanation of the roles and functions of its PR. The BBC explained: "This is happening partly because the goodwill of the public is coming more widely to be recognized as an important economic asset, and friction between any undertaking and its public as a costly feature in the running of any machine."<sup>80</sup> In addition, the size and complexity of modern undertakings meant that organizations now had a duty to explain themselves to the public to garner trust. The BBC claimed that it was fulfilling this responsibility

76. POST 108 Sub-series, Minutes and Reports of the Post Office Publicity Committee, "Publicity in Schools," 23 April 1936, Royal Mail Archives.

77. *Ibid.*

78. Tallents, "Post Office Publicity."

79. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

80. B.B.C. Annual, "Public Relations," 1936, p. 91.

through its new initiative of listener research to discover the tastes, habits, and needs of its listeners. This was all couched in the language of public goodwill.

## Discursive Strategies

Foucault referred to discursive strategies as the themes that discourses address and the theories that they utilize.<sup>81</sup> In the interwar period, PR followed a discursive strategy of creating narratives around corporations to create positive corporate imagery and deflect criticisms. These narratives were disseminated to the public through a number of communication tools and media channels. They integrated the discursive concepts of corporate responsibility and goodwill, and were central to the implementation of PR in the United Kingdom. In this interwar period, three narratives emerged: narratives of care, narratives of national identity, and narratives of science and progress.

## Narratives of Care

Narratives of care were widespread among corporations in the interwar period, and can be found in all the organizations examined in this article. Through these narratives, corporations created stories that demonstrated institutional responsibility, and they adopted the role of corporate citizens who acted altruistically for the benefit of others and went beyond the profit motive in terms of corporate behavior.

An example of this narrative is the work of the PAC in health care. The Prudential Assurance Company transformed itself from a company that sold life insurance to a national public health provider through its work in administering the National Insurance Acts of 1911, its support of hospitals and charities, its publication and dissemination of health booklets, and its provision of visiting nurses to its customers.<sup>82</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, the PAC was responsible for administering national insurance for one in four people in Britain who were members of the Prudential Approved Society (PAS), a nonprofit organization. This was the largest approved society in Britain. The PAS expanded the welfare provisions of the National Insurance Acts for its members in areas such as dentistry and ophthalmology. At its peak

81. Foucault, *Archaeology*, Chapter 6.

82. Heller, "National Insurance Acts."

in 1946, the PAS had more than 4.8 million members and had paid out £7.5 million in welfare benefits on behalf of the state.<sup>83</sup>

In its drive to improve public health, the PAC's main goal was to portray itself as a public institution that provided a national service. This became a central plank in its corporate narrative. In 1934 the president of the Board of Trade, Robert Runciman, stated that the PAC was much more than a company: it was "an institution playing a part unrivalled in the country."<sup>84</sup> In 1948, the centenary year of the company, the PAC published an official history. Its title, *A Century of Service: The Story of the Prudential, 1848–1948*, provided a clear statement of the organization's self-concept and how it wanted to be perceived.<sup>85</sup> It was, in its own words, "a leading national influence for the betterment and conservation of human life."<sup>86</sup> This narrative was told to its key employees, including staff and sales teams, as well as to its customers, approved societies, the general public, the media, and the government.

Another example of a narrative of care can be seen in the development of Listener Research at the BBC. Criticism toward the BBC's broadcasting increased markedly in the 1930s with the rapid rise in the number of radio license holders in Britain. By 1937 there were eight million.<sup>87</sup> By this stage, the BBC's policy of "public uplift" became increasingly untenable. Competition from continental radio broadcasters such as Radio Luxembourg, which primarily provided popular entertainment, also put this policy under pressure. By the mid-1930s, the BBC's output progressively began to reflect its listeners' demands. There was an increase in light entertainment and popular music, and its Sabbatarian policy of only broadcasting religious services and chamber music on a Sunday was gradually abandoned.<sup>88</sup> The BBC also began to carry out listener research. This was developed in 1935 with the establishment of a PR division under Tallents.<sup>89</sup> Although listener research was limited—it consisted of two panel groups and one survey, and its application was circumscribed—its public impact was considerable. The development of listener research lay at the center of the BBC's PR strategy. It was developed to show both the public and critics alike that it cared about their wants

83. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

87. *The Listener*, "Testing Listeners' Tastes," July 21, 1937, p. 122.

88. LeMahieu, *Culture for Democracy*, pp. 273–291.

89. *Ibid.*; Scannell and Cardiff, *Social History*, Chapter 16; Audience Research, File 1, 1930–1933, R44/23/1, WAC; Audience Research, 1934–36, R44/23/2, WAC; Audience Research Minutes 1936–38, R44/25, WAC; Audience Research Policy, File 1, 1937, R44/26/1, WAC.

and tastes. Public announcements in its broadcasting, articles in its publications, and its press releases and press conferences contributed to this narrative.<sup>90</sup> In July 1937, for example, the BBC wrote in *The Listener*, in an article on listener research:

Experience has shown that the listening public is not homogeneous, but rather an aggregate of many sections, each with its distinctive tastes and preferences, and usually with a sound claim to some share in the programmes. The reconciliation and adjustment of these claims is the B.B.C.'s greatest task, to the performance of which the collection of reliable information about the views and tastes of one particular section is a valuable auxiliary.<sup>91</sup>

Rather than being an adjudicator of taste, the BBC now claimed that its chief responsibility lay in listening to its multiple audiences and ensuring it catered to the demands of each.

### Narratives of National Identity

In 1932 Tallents published *The Projection of England*. He argued that in an age of globalization and mass media, it was vital for Britain to construct and project a positive image to maintain its global interests and great power status. In a global world, power was no longer only projected physically through armies and navies, but also psychologically and emotionally via reputation and the media. International relations should concern itself not only with diplomacy and military power, but also with image management. Tallents claimed that such a projection should consist of a number of elements of Britishness that included the traditional (such as monarchy and parliament), national qualities (such as a reputation for fairness, justice, and law and order), and everyday elements (such as sporting events and the English home). Finally, Tallents proposed that such a projection should make use of different forms of media, laying particular emphasis on the cinema and art exhibitions, and that it should be executed by a cadre of specialized artists.<sup>92</sup>

Tallent's text lay at the heart of the narrative of national identity. Corporations projected this by creating stories that claimed that they

90. *The Listener*, "Contact with Listeners," November 3, 1937, p. 946; B.B.C. Annual, "Public Relations," 1936, p. 91; "Outline of Address to Press Conference Tuesday, October 26," Audience Research Policy, File 1, 1937, R44/26/1, WAC; "Twenty-First Press Conference, 26 October 1937," Audience Research Policy, File 1, 1937, R44/26/1, WAC.

91. *The Listener*, "Testing Listeners' Tastes," July 21, 1937, p. 122.

92. Tallents, *Projection of England*.

represented Britain. This could be accomplished metonymically through the corporation itself; or it could be suggested through its products and services, which were claimed to be fundamental to the welfare of the nation. Britain needed the postal and communication services of the GPO, for example, the petrol and oil of Shell-Mex, the broadcasting of the BBC, or the sense of security and well-being that Prudential Assurance Company's life insurance policies provided. In his talk at the GPO on publicity, Tallents stated:

We need to build up, piece by piece, a picture for our own people, and also for others, of what this country has done, is doing and seeks to do in its endeavour to equip itself ... to meet a wholly new range of modern conditions.<sup>93</sup>

In the 1930s, much of the PR work at the GPO focused on this narrative in its projection of Britain and of the Empire.<sup>94</sup> For example, its poster series "Outposts of Britain" depicted the different locations across Britain to which it delivered mail.<sup>95</sup>

Of particular note were the films made under the GPO Film Unit. *Calendar of the Year* stands out in its attempt to project the nation. The film took the viewer through the four seasons and showed how in each the GPO was central to Britain. It celebrated the nation and the British way of life.<sup>96</sup> In the winter, the GPO kept ships safe at sea from storms; in the spring, it helped farmers market their products. The spring was also the season when the GPO began to lay its cables, such as the first television cable between London and Manchester. Summer was announced by people swimming in an outdoor lido. The scene then shifted to London and showed the Trooping of the Colour, the London fashion season, and the Russian Ballet at Covent Garden Opera House. Next the sporting events of the summer were shown, including yacht races, dirt track motor racing, cricket, and the Derby. All depended on the GPO for their results to be broadcast to the nation. Following this, the focus shifted to people going to the seaside for their vacations, and the GPO was vital for sending post-cards back home to loved ones. For the autumn, people were shown returning to work. Scenes portrayed lambs being sold at a market in Lanark, Scotland; docks receiving ships from all over the world; and Lloyds of London, the London Stock Exchange, and the Bank of England busily transacting the finances of the country. Finally, winter arrived, and people were shown flocking to football matches and

93. Tallents, "Post Office Publicity," p. 6.

94. Anthony, "GPO Film Unit."

95. "Outposts of Britain," POST 110/3180-83, Royal Mail Archives.

96. Spice, *Calendar of the Year* [motion picture].

Christmas approaching. People were shown shopping in London, fathers grumbling that they were not millionaires, children becoming mesmerized by toys, and the GPO continuing to work throughout the holiday season to make all this possible.

### Narratives of Science and Progress

In the *Projection of England*, Tallents wrote of the importance to Britain in communicating its scientific achievements to global audiences. Its centrality lay not only in prestige, but also in the responsibility that the nation had in sharing these achievements so they could be used by others.<sup>97</sup> This theme was taken up by corporations within Britain. They created narratives that portrayed themselves as pioneers in scientific research and as harbingers of modernity and technology. This was claimed to result in progress and the betterment of people's lives. Timothy Boon, for example, noted in relation to the 1920s and 1930s: "Particular technologies were widely considered to be emblematic of modernity in this period: the telegraph and telephone, railway and car, photograph and cinema, heavy electrical technology, broadcasting, ocean liners and steel-framed buildings."<sup>98</sup> Images of these technologies dominated the PR narrative of science and progress, and were found in the publicity of the GPO, Shell-Mex, and BBC.

Narratives of science and progress were particularly prevalent at the GPO. This is no surprise as it was particularly innovative in the interwar period in areas such as microwave technology; and the development of international radiotelephony, airmail, teleprinting, and picture telephony.<sup>99</sup> A major theme in its PR was the strengthening of imperial unity through its development of these international forms telecommunications. The opening of a new international telephone line or the launch of an airmail service was often marked by ceremonies involving ministers, dignitaries, businessmen, and the royal family, and which were skillfully broadcast through press editorials and newsreel productions.<sup>100</sup> In addition, the GPO heavily promoted its research work and technological achievements. In 1933 its film unit produced the documentary *The Coming of the Dial*, which focused on the GPO's pioneering work in telephone research and its development of automatic telephone exchanges. The film was highly

97. Tallents, *Projection of England*, pp. 20–26.

98. Boon, "Old Industry," p. 28.

99. Anthony, "GPO Film Unit," p. 10.

100. POST 108 Sub-series, Press and Broadcast Notices 1925–1939, Royal Mail Archives; POST 108 Sub-series, Minutes and reports of the Post Office Publicity Committee, 1931–1938, Royal Mail Archives.

modernist in production and style, and it was filled with images of technology: laboratories, circuits, wires, electromagnetic relays, control boards, and automation.<sup>101</sup> The social progress that the GPO rendered through this work was a central theme of the documentary. Such narratives can also be found in Shell-Mex, which was also keen to emphasize its scientific work, the benefits of which accrued to society. Developing its international air travel and its global aeronautical infrastructure were particularly strong themes of the company. Proof of this can be found in its publication *Shell Aviation News*, in its company magazines, in its press editorials, and in the two documentary films it made in the 1930s: *Contact* (1933) and *Airport* (1935).<sup>102</sup>

### Conclusion

In the interwar period, as PR emerged in UK corporations, it became increasingly institutionalized. It began to act as a normative structure, as a set of instructions, which told corporations how they should interact with stakeholders, how they should communicate, and how they could influence public opinion.<sup>103</sup> The ultimate aim of this discourse was the creation of corporate identity and corporate legitimacy, and the creation of narratives of care, of national identity, and of science and progress. This discourse was based on concepts of responsibility and public goodwill. Through its development, big business transformed its public face and attempted to change its relationship with stakeholders. The PAC became a provider of health care. Shell-Mex created a corporate identity based on art, culture, national identity, the British Empire, and science. The BBC became a supplier of media that informed, educated, and entertained, and a corporation that cared and listened. The GPO became an emblem of the nation and harbinger of science and modernity. Through PR corporations portrayed themselves as progressive and caring institutions that connected people and communities together, provided education and information to the nation, and used the wonders of modern science for the good of all.<sup>104</sup> It was a discourse that aimed to create corporate legitimacy.<sup>105</sup> This legitimacy was essential for large-scale organizations, which at

101. Legg, *The Coming of the Dial* [motion picture].

102. Heller, "Corporate Brand Building," pp. 200–205.

103. Hansen, "Business History," pp. 695–699; Lipartito and Sicilia, *Constructing Corporate America*, p. 12.

104. Anthony, "GPO Film Unit"; Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post*, pp. 304–322; Scannell and Cardiff, *Social History*, Chapters 13 and 16; B.B.C. Annual, "Public Relations," 1935; Tallents, "Post Office Publicity."

105. B.B.C. Annual, "Public Relations," 1935, p. 13.

the time represented a novel form of production and distribution in terms of their size, reach, and managerial–bureaucratic structures. PR enabled them to exist, function, and demonstrate purpose. The survival of the corporation was not only based on transactional costs, superior forms of production, and organizational behavior, but also on symbolic interactions with the public.<sup>106</sup>

The development of PR followed a different trajectory in the United Kingdom than the United States because of the distinct conditions of its emergence. The emphasis in British PR on art and documentary films, for example, was a result of the discomfort that its elites felt toward the rise of a mass commercial society. Modernity was never as fully endorsed by corporations and leaders as it was in the United States. The importance of its monarchical–aristocratic traditions and the centrality of class and Empire meant that PR in Britain adopted a unique sociocultural form.<sup>107</sup> Britain’s liberal political culture also resulted in a form of PR that was neither purely propaganda, as was the case in many parts of Europe, nor purely commercial, as in the United States.<sup>108</sup> It was one that depended on consensus, plurality, and cooperation with external stakeholders, such as educational institutions, civil society, and public figures. PR may not have originated in Britain, but its genealogy meant that the discourse and narrative that it created was never simply an import from overseas.

PR emerged in both the public and the private sectors in Britain. It was adopted and developed by private companies such as the PAC and Shell-Mex, and it emerged in local and central governments and in public enterprises such as the GPO and BBC. Stefan Schwarzkopf has noted this public–private dichotomy, commenting: “The increasing interlocking of expertise between government and the private sector in the fields of communication, propaganda, and marketing became one of the most outstanding features of the 1930s.”<sup>109</sup> Adopting a discursive approach to the emergence of PR provides an explanation of how this was possible. The discourse of PR that emerged in the interwar period was a shared one in both the public and private sectors. It enabled cooperation and cross fertilization to take place in PR, marketing, and corporate communication, as has been detected by Schwarzkopf.<sup>110</sup> Much of the common emphasis in both sectors on civic responsibility, education, and the provision of public information was a result of this, and would remain so throughout the twentieth century.

106. Ibid.

107. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures England*; Weiner, *English Culture*.

108. *The Listener*, “Propaganda and Private Industry,” January 30, 1935, pp. 195–196.

109. Schwarzkopf, “Markets, Consumers and the State,” p. 179.

110. Ibid., pp. 179–180, 184–185.

Finally, the adoption of Foucault and discourse in explaining the emergence of PR in Britain in the interwar period provides a different framework for discussing business history. The discipline in the United Kingdom is still predominantly concerned with explaining the failure of British industry and management in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and with the adoption of functionalist and technological frameworks to explain business and organizational behavior and performance. This approach, however, sits uncomfortably in the new post-Chandlerian and postmodernist age. It also fails to account for the overwhelming success of the corporation as an organizational and institutional model for business and public services in the United Kingdom in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A discursive approach to business history sees organizations as sites of ideologies and meanings, whose success is premised on interaction and adaptation with both internal and external environments. These environments are not simply economic and technological, but are also social, cultural, political, and institutional.<sup>111</sup> The success of the British corporation over the last two centuries has been premised not simply on its economic performance, but also on its ability to ideologically interact with these multiple environments and with the publics that inhabit them.

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111. Lipartito and Sicilia, *Constructing Corporate America*.

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