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Ivy Ledbetter Lee and the Soviet Case: Implications for Public Relations Principles and Ethics

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The study examines the historical case of cooperation between one of the founders of PR theory and practice, American Ivy Ledbetter Lee, and the Soviet government in the 1920s. The main focus is on reconstructing the motives and circumstances of this event, as well as the political, media, and scientific discourse surrounding it. **The purpose of the study:** to clarify the influence of Ivy Lee's "Soviet case" on the formation of his professional views, as well as on the principles and the moral-ethical dimension of the theory and practice of public relations, and against this background to identify historical parallels with modern public communication, propaganda, and reputation management. To achieve this goal, the case study method was used, which concentrates on examining the historical essence of a unique event within a broader process. The study examined more than 50 major English-language sources. Using the comparative-historical method, the realities of the PR industry's formation and transformation, against the background of Ivy Lee's personal and professional development, were analyzed, and external factors that influenced this process were identified. **Conclusions.** Ivy Lee's visit to the USSR, which culminated in his cooperation with the Soviet government in the 1920s, is an important and revealing historical case at the intersection of professional PR practice and international politics. It focused attention on the possibilities of communication technologies to shape global public opinion and, at the same time, raised a number of questions regarding ethics and reputational risks that should be taken into account in modern public relations theory and practice.

Keywords: Ivy Ledbetter Lee, "Declaration of Principles", ethics, public relations, history, PR, propaganda, public diplomacy, reputation management, USSR

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«Радянський кейс» Айві Ледбеттера Лі: на принципи та етику паблік рилейшнз

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У статті розглядається історичний кейс співпраці одного з основоположників теорії та практики піар, американця Айві Ледбеттера Лі з радянським урядом у 1920-ті роки. Основну увагу сфокусовано на реконструюванні мотивів та обставин цієї події, а також на політичному, медійному та науковому дискурсі довкола нього. **Мета дослідження:** з'ясувати вплив «радянського кейсу» Айві Лі на становлення його професійних поглядів, а також на принципи й морально-етичний вимір теорії та практики паблік рилейшнз, і на тлі цього виявити історичні паралелі із сучасною публічною комунікацією, пропагандою та управлінням репутацією. Для досягнення цієї цілі було використано метод кейс-стаді, який зосереджується на розгляді історичної сутності унікальної події в рамках ширшого процесу. У межах дослідження опрацьовано понад 50 основних англомовних джерел. За допомогою порівняльно-історичного методу проаналізовано реалії, пов'язані з формуванням і трансформацією піар-галузі на тлі особистісного та професійного становлення Айві Лі, а також з'ясовано зовнішні чинники, які вплинули на цей процес. **Висновки.** Візит Айві Лі до СРСР як апогей його співпраці з радянським урядом у 1920-ті роки є важливим і показовим історичним кейсом на перетині професійної практики піар і міжнародної політики. Він загострив увагу на можливостях технологій глобального впливу на громадську думку і водночас поставив низку питань щодо етики та репутаційних ризиків, які мають бути враховані в сучасній теорії та практиці паблік рилейшнз.

Ключові слова: Айві Ледбеттер Лі, «Декларація принципів, етика, зв'язки з громадськістю, історія, піар, пропаганда, публічна дипломатія, репутаційний менеджмент, СРСР

In the 21st century, amid the escalation of hybrid conflicts and the full-scale russian-Ukrainian war, communications aimed at shaping global public opinion and building international relations are gaining exceptional importance. Alongside diplomats and politicians, public figures, journalists, and influencers often participate, becoming active not only in public diplomacy and state representation but also, at times, in justifying authoritarian regimes. Against this backdrop, the issue of ethics in professional public relations becomes particularly relevant. To deepen our understanding, it is helpful to turn to historical experience; in particular, the so-called Soviet Case of Ivy Ledbetter Lee – often called the “father of modern public relations” – is illustrative as he was one of the first to formulate and institutionalize the profession’s ethical principles, building on the paradigm of reputation management, transparency, and social responsibility.

According to Myers (2021, p. 7), “Lee’s contributions to the public relations field were significant because he established the first ethical guide to public relations practice with his 1905 Declaration of Principles, which sought legitimacy for the profession.” At the same time, Russell & Bishop (2009, p. 93) believe that “previous scholarship on Ivy Lee identifies the “declaration” as a seminal moment in public relations history, while also suggesting that Lee’s legacy is mixed.”

Lee’s career spanned more than 30 years, during which he consistently emphasized the need for openness and honesty in public relations. Still, Hainsworth (1987, p. 35) says, “overcoming misconceptions about Lee’s own career has proved difficult.” One of the most controversial cases

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is Lee's work with the Soviet government under Joseph Stalin, which continues to spark debate among experts over its impact on PR ethics and morals.

To illustrate, in May 1927, at the invitation of the Soviet government, Ivy Lee traveled to the USSR for a 10-day trip. His goal was to get to know the life of the newly born communist state with his own eyes, to talk to representatives of the authorities, journalists, and ordinary people, using the method of participant observation, which he often used in various research projects. Upon returning home, Ivy Lee put his impressions of his visit on paper. In July 1927, he published the book "USSR (Union of Socialist Soviet Republics): A World Enigma" in London (Lee, 1927), and a year later, its expanded edition under the title "Present-Day Russia" was published in the United States by Macmillan Publishing House in New York (Lee, 1928a).

Despite the significant body of research devoted to the figure of Ivy Ledbetter Lee and his role in the formation of public relations, the Soviet Case in his professional activity remains insufficiently understood in the scientific literature. The available works mainly record the very fact of Ivy Lee's trip to the USSR and the publication of the book "Present-Day Russia," but do not pay due attention to this episode in the context of the evolution of professional principles and moral and ethical foundations of the industry, as well as their connection with modern examples of communication practices.

Based on this, the *goal* of this historical investigation is to clarify the influence of Ivy Lee's Soviet Case on the formation of his professional views, as well as on the principles and moral and ethical dimension of the theory and practice of public relations, and against this background to identify historical parallels with modern public communication, propaganda, and reputation management, which involves finding answers to the following research questions:

RQ1. How did Ivy Ledbetter Lee's collaboration with the Soviet government in the 1920s influence the formation of his professional views on the principles of openness, honesty, and social responsibility in public relations?

RQ2. How was Ivy Lee's Soviet Case evaluated by the Western academic and media community, and how did this influence the perception of his professional and moral and ethical legacy?

RQ3. What historical parallels can be traced between the practices of public communication and legitimization of political regimes with Ivy Lee's participation in the 1920s and modern models of propaganda, international relations, and public diplomacy of authoritarian states?

Literature review

The sources analyzed fall into three groups. The first consists of scientific works focused on Ivy Lee and his background, offering context for the case. Notably, Hiebert's classic biography (1966a) provides a detailed chronology of Lee's career and early PR. Watson (2017) regards it as the first historical public relations study in the United States. This group also includes Grunig & Hunt (1984), who establish Lee's work as the historical basis for the "public information" model, as well as monographs and encyclopedias (Cutlip, 1994; Ewen, 1996; Gunning, 2018; Parry, 2022; Wilcox & Cameron, 2021), which consolidate and deepen Lee's legacy in the academic literature.

The second group includes research articles that detail specific aspects of Ivy Lee's work. Among a number of key works, Hallahan (2002) is worth noting, who described Lee's work as a consultant in 1914 and as an employee of the Rockefeller company in 1915, and identified his role in crisis communications during the Colorado coal strike. Harrison & Moloney (2004) made an important comparison of the careers of the American Ivy Lee and the British John Elliott, who laid the foundations of the public relations profession worldwide. Russell & Bishop (2009) examined the early activities of the "father of PR" in 1865–1904 through the prism of the "Declaration of Principles" he developed.

The third group of sources consists of works that, from different angles, directly highlight the case under study. First of all, these are Lee's own works (1927; 1928a), in which he discusses his



visit to the USSR and his attitude toward what he saw. Also included in this group are reviews of the book “Present-Day Russia” (e.g., Borders, 1928; Schuman, 1929), as well as press articles that shed light on this event (e.g., Ivy Lee Moved to Aid the Soviet, 1926; Ivy Lee dies at 57 of brain ailment, 1934).

Method

The methodological basis of this research is the case study method, which examines the historical essence of a unique event within a broader process. Through the analysis of documents and texts, more than 50 primary and secondary English-language sources representing the case itself and the political, media, and scientific discourse surrounding it were processed. The historical-genetic method was used to reconstruct the motives and circumstances of Ivy Lee’s visit to the USSR and cooperation with the Soviet government. The comparative-historical method was used to understand the realities of the PR industry’s formation and transformation against the background of Ivy Lee’s personal and professional development, as well as to clarify the external factors that influenced this process. Systematization and generalization were used to examine the relationships and interdependencies among various factors within the conceptual and chronological architecture of the study. The method of scientific interpretation contributed to the crystallization of conclusions within the historical and contemporary field of development of public relations theory and practice.

Results and discussion

Ivy Lee’s personal beliefs and values are key to understanding his professional outlook and behavior, which influenced the overall development of PR theory and practice. His father, a Methodist minister whose sermons were “about thrift, love, diligence, and moral duties,” had a significant influence on Lee’s inner world (Hiebert, 1966a, p. 18). In addition, his father was a good communicator and a good networker. Apparently, Ivy Lee also inherited these important skills for PR professionals from him.

Relying on his own morals and worldview, Ivy Lee was convinced that he would never be in a situation where he would be forced to lie to the public, and thus became “the first person to put respect for the public on the agenda” (Gunning, 2018, p. 2). In his work “Publicity: Some of the things it is and is not,” Lee used a compelling comparison: “To utter a lie to the public is just as futile and will come back to plague you just as quickly as it will to utter a false check”. “If you utter a false statement to the public, it will be pointed out very quickly because there are a million eyes that are just looking for every false statement that comes along. If a person utters an untruth to the public that person is going to stand well in the public eye for only a very short time.” (Lee, 1925, p. 23).

In 1898, Ivy Lee graduated from Princeton University’s Department of Economics (Parry, 2022). He then worked as a journalist, writing for American newspapers and magazines on business, finance, and industry. His education and journalistic background gave him a strong grasp of economic principles, leading him to see capitalism as a model for industrial growth and recovery. However, as the “father of PR,” he also saw key flaws in capitalism – namely, unchecked corporate power undermining democracy and social trust. Ivy Lee explained this gap by the fact that “capitalism had advanced faster than the of the human intelligence to cope with it. Restrictions must be placed on the use of capital so as to obtain, at the same time, the utmost good for the community as a whole” (Olasky, 1985, p. 9). That is why Ivy Lee recognized the strategic role of public relations in harmonizing companies’ business interests with society’s expectations and eliminating moral and ethical contradictions between them. In addition, he considered public relations “the art of relating one’s ideas and purposes to the public, or the activity of explaining one group within society to another” (Hiebert, 1966b, p. 113). Ivy Lee “understood the power of words in swaying opinion and believed in the use of all available media” (Hainsworth, 1987, p. 36). “Ivy Lee’s basic



philosophy was that an individual's, a company's, or a country's reputation must rest on its actions. Words alone cannot bring about acceptance. Good public relations, Lee believed, is a reflection of the policies adopted and implemented by a company" (Primer, 1992, p. 322).

Ivy Lee's socially oriented worldview had much in common with Andrew Carnegie, "the controversial steel magnate and progressive-era captain of industry" (Lamme, 2015, p. 62). Like Carnegie, Lee adhered to the principles of Social Darwinism – the fittest should be able to profit over others, but they owe it to those below them to provide a ladder of opportunity that aspirants could climb, rung by rung. These principles, therefore, not only reinforced belief in public opinion but also later served as the basis for the theory of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Having founded one of the world's first public relations agencies, drawing on his own insights and practical experience, in 1906, Ivy Lee published a "Declaration of Principles" that he pledged to guide his agency, which included non-secrecy, accuracy, and truthfulness – all concepts that public relations professionals and scholars are familiar with today (Zoch et al., 2014).

Lee is largely credited with influencing the development of the profession by setting the ethical standards and philosophical underpinnings of how practitioners ought to work (Parry, 2022, p. 922). He communicated his perspectives to the professional community through public speeches, professional publications, and books, articulating his views on various aspects of public relations. Seitel (2017, p. 61) observed that Lee "disdained the press agents of the time, who used any influence or trick to get a story on their clients printed, regardless of the truth or merits. By contrast, Lee firmly believed that the only way business could answer its critics convincingly was to present its side honestly, accurately, and forcefully." In a democratic society, Lee reasoned, "nothing could succeed without public approval. If one's policies were not acceptable to the public, he must change them" (Hiebert, 1966b, p. 114). Furthermore, to earn a voice in society, a company must secure the public's trust and goodwill. Lee contended that the PR professional's responsibilities are twofold: "to relate his group to others through effective channels of communication, and to adjust those relationships by advising different plans of action when misunderstanding or conflict arose" (Hiebert, 1966b, p. 114).

However, working as a PR consultant for the Rockefeller companies, Ivy Lee not only had the opportunity to observe the other side of the morality of capitalist relations but also found himself in difficult reputational circumstances. In April 1914, an accidental shot during a miners' strike in Colorado (USA) led to a shootout in which three miners and bystanders, including two women and 11 children, died, trying to escape the fight by hiding in a pit under a tent, which then caught fire (Hallahan, 2002). This incident triggered a series of repressions and clashes, which led to even more deaths in what journalists called the "Ludlow Massacre," directly linking the tragedy to the Rockefeller company "Colorado Fuel & Iron." The billionaire family commissioned Ivy Lee to conduct an educational campaign and defuse the situation. As contemporaries acknowledged, Lee did in fact falsify the facts during the strike in Colorado and tried to show industrial magnates in a favorable light (Oltarzhevskiy & Zagorulko, 2025, p. 12). In general, for his attempts to justify the not always noble business practices of the Rockefeller family, for whom Lee worked as a PR consultant, he was called "a hired slanderer, a paid liar, and even a poisoner of public opinion" (Ewen, 1996, p. 83).

On the one hand, the tragedy in Ludlow gave impetus to the development of crisis communications as an independent field within the public relations system, and on the other hand, it exposed an important moral and ethical dilemma. On one side of the scale were the interests of business, which ensured material development and social progress; on the other – the reputation of the company, its owners, and the PR professionals themselves, who were called upon to balance them. Another important conclusion from this lesson is that PR cannot be a tool for protecting a business that ignores its own social consequences and the public's interests. Communication alone cannot save a company from liability for management miscalculations. Instead, to maintain social legitimacy and trust, businesses must choose a moral position in society, manage reputational capital



strategically, and use professional public communications grounded in the principles of transparency and stakeholder cooperation.

Meanwhile, across the ocean, a different socio-economic reality was rapidly developing. In 1917, the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia. Using bayonets and propaganda posters, they brought new values to humanity that contrasted with the principles of the capitalist system. The greatest paradox is that, despite poverty and repression by the authorities, the Soviet masses were sincerely inspired by the illusory ideas of socialism. For their sake, they were ready to put up with endless “temporary difficulties” and supported the tough decisions of the communist party and government. Of course, the key role in this was played by massive Bolshevik propaganda, which distracted citizens from the root causes and skillfully shifted logical and semantic accents, providing the authorities with total control over public consciousness.

Of course, the effectiveness of Soviet propaganda and the ideology behind it could not fail to interest Ivy Lee. He wrote:

I had heard that the Russian Government, the Communist Party, and the Communist International are all combined in a conspiracy against mankind, particularly capitalist mankind. I was anxious to find out, by first-hand examination, just what is the nature of that conspiracy and how it is functioning (Lee, 1928a, p. vii).

Such a position only confirms the professional curiosity of Ivy Lee, who was “an incessant collector of information and built his own background files or ‘morgue,’ a habit learned from his father who was always in search of sermon material” (Cutlip, 1994, p. 39).

At the same time, Lee maintained until the end of his life that “his interest in Communist Russia was personal and not a professional engagement” (Ivy Lee dies at 57 of brain ailment, 1934). Moreover, he perceived it as a kind of hobby: “Some people collect first editions, some people collect postage stamps, I collect information about Russia... My chief interest in it as a citizen is to see to it, as far as any influence I may have is concerned, that the problem is faced realistically, that we find out what the facts are...” (Lee, 1928b, p. 93). Cutlip (1994, p. 141) cites one of Lee’s colleagues as saying that he had been fascinated by Russia since his time in London in 1910–1912, long before the Bolshevik Revolution. After that event, he became seriously interested and concerned about the Soviet government’s news policy and its efforts to close all channels of communication with the outside world (Hiebert, 1966b, p. 118). Lee believed that only a free flow of information and communication between East and West could promote peaceful understanding between the two polar camps, and for this reason, in the 1920s, he began calling for dialogue and diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union, even as the US government strongly opposed it.

In 1926, Ivy Lee sent letters to members of the United States Chamber of Commerce calling for the restoration of relations between the United States and the USSR and even proposing the opening of a Chamber of Commerce advisory office in Moscow to exchange trade information. He also addressed this issue to US President Calvin Coolidge, the Secretary of State, and the Department of State, arguing the need to establish relations with the USSR on the grounds that it was impossible to ignore the presence of such a large country on the political map of the world and that contacts with it were inevitable. *The New York Times* of March 28, 1926 quoted Ivy Lee as saying:

Some day Russia has got to come back into the family of nations and we ought to try to help her to get back rather than to force a great nation like Russia to come back on her knees and in sackcloth and ashes (Ivy Lee Moved to Aid the Soviet, 1926).

Lee also believed that the USSR could be a promising partner for American business, especially in the energy and industrial sectors, and called for helping the Soviet Union establish



relations with Western corporations. At the same time, he categorically denied that he “sympathized in any way with Communism or with the attitude of the Russian Government toward private property” (Ivy Lee Moved to Aid the Soviet, 1926).

The “Soviet phase” of Lee’s work was received in the West with great ambivalence, provoking simultaneous interest, criticism, and controversy. According to Olasky (1985, p. 5), even Lee’s supporters were surprised that a “defender of capitalism” wrote a book filled with sympathy for Stalin. Moreover, despite his pioneering role, he was accused of dishonesty and criticized for his collaboration with the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce, which sought to legitimize economic relations with the USSR and help the Bolsheviks establish cooperation with the civilized world (Wilcox & Cameron, 2021). Ivy Lee was publicly criticized for his public sympathy for a country ruled by a dictatorship and systematically violating human rights. In addition to criticism of his political affiliation, in early 1929, he and two senators were accused of receiving improper financial compensation from the Russian government (Cutlip, 1994, p. 143). However, an independent investigation did not confirm this fact, so all charges were dropped.

From today’s perspective, it is difficult to assess whether Ivy Lee’s cooperation with the Bolsheviks was a fully conscious choice. Perhaps he was influenced by his own ideological errors. It is possible that he himself became a victim of Soviet propaganda, which, using his professional interests, was able to charm him with the idea of communism – a fantastic world where, unlike capitalism, everyone lives happily and justice and equality reign for all. It is also likely that Ivy Lee’s certain disappointment in the values of capitalism, accumulated while consulting American corporations, was added to this.

Cooperation with the Soviet government cannot be seen as a clear betrayal of Ivy Lee’s professional and ethical principles of honesty, accuracy, and truthfulness. Likewise, his book “Present-Day Russia” should not be considered a manual dictated by Kremlin propagandists. On the contrary, it presents many ideas at odds with communist ideology. In fact, the book was not published in Russian until 2018 and is still little known in the post-Soviet territories. Ivy Lee admired the scale of Soviet industrialization but was also wary of totalitarianism and censorship. Among his strongest criticisms was his view that the Soviet Government “can never enjoy the complete respect of enlightened civilization until within its own borders it does these things: First: Establishes real freedom of thought, action, and belief; Second: Establishes a system of justice based upon such fundamental principles as the Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights, principles which are inherent in the very nature of liberty itself” (Lee, 1928a, p. 200).

Another uncompromising position of Ivy Lee was that he considered the “enemy of humanity” not the Russians as a people (with whom, in his opinion, everything was fine) but the Communist International.

The supreme problem is how to drive a wedge between the Communist International and the Russian people so that the people themselves will come to feel that they want none of the International or its works. How would human nature react if the Russian people, instead of having to live on starvation wages, were able to earn enough to amass a little property? Would they want to hold on to that property or would they want to give it up? (Lee, 1928a, pp. 200-201).

Lee’s critics also shared these views. Thus, Borders (1928, p. 677) emphasized that

... private property is the basis of all sound economics. Anything else is contrary to human nature and cannot permanently survive. Bolshevism is a disease that flourishes on poverty and discontent. The cure lies in the opportunity to “taste the joys of high wages, comfortable incomes, and the possibilities of owning property.” But Russian youth is being trained in the art of revolution and the hatred of capitalism. This training turned to the use of the hungry hordes of Asia might start a conflagration that would set the world on fire. Thus, Bolshevism remains the chief enemy of mankind. The question is how to smite it.



In general, the Soviet Case should be seen as just one episode in Ivy Lee's multifaceted professional activity as a private consultant at the intersection of public relations, lobbying, international relations, and public diplomacy. Taking on large-scale global projects, he regularly traveled abroad, participated in the formation of American foreign policy, supported international organizations through the Association of Non-Party Organizations of the League of Nations and the World Court Committee, and participated in the Council on Foreign Relations and the Institute of Pacific Affairs (Primer, 1992, p. 323). Lee consulted the governments of Poland, Romania, Hungary, France, and other countries on reputational issues and external communications. In the 1920s, he was the first PR consultant to realize the importance of trust in national currencies (Hiebert, 1966a, p. 266). This highlights the fact that in the first decades of the twentieth century with Ivy Lee's involvement in public relations, a new direction, "state PR," emerged, which became a strategic part of the support for the internal and external image of the authorities of various countries, including the USSR. This experience became the basis for the information policy of the then Soviet government, and was later inherited by the ideologists of the Russian Federation.

Was it useful for Soviet propagandists to have contact with one of the world's first reputation management experts, who had significant practical experience in resolving crises? Absolutely. Relying on the technologies of bleaching a tarnished image, which Ivy Lee knew, they sought to change the opinion of the general public in the West about the USSR in order to return it the opportunities for economic cooperation (and this is the first parallel to the relevant foreign policy goals of modern Russia). But this required not only Lee's professional know-how, but also his authority in the professional world.

At that time, the use of foreign public figures as advocates of Soviet policy was a common practice among Kremlin propagandists. David-Fox (2011) cites as an example the "Soviet visits" in the 1930s of artists, intellectuals, and opinion leaders such as George Bernard Shaw, Henri Barbusse, and Romain Rolland, who consciously or unconsciously participated in the creation of new myths about the Soviet Union, acting in the status of its "Western friends."

A case study described by Gamache (2014) and associated with the names of two famous journalists of the time deserves separate consideration in this context. One of them is the Welsh reporter Gareth Jones, who first opened the world's eyes to the Holodomor in Ukraine. The second is Walter Duranty, an Anglo-American journalist, correspondent for *The New York Times* in Moscow, who denied the genocide of the Ukrainian people organized by the Soviet authorities, and in 1929 took an exclusive interview with Joseph Stalin, in which the dictator appeared as a wise leader of a powerful country. Thus, propagandists used Walter Duranty to confirm and promote the messages they needed – a well-known manipulative technique called "borrowed authority."

To draw parallels with the present day, in February 2024, American TV host Tucker Carlson interviewed Vladimir Putin for the first time among foreign journalists since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Carlson, 2024). The Kremlin explained its choice by saying that Carlson's approach "differed from the one-sided coverage" in Western media. In reality, the interview was used as a propaganda tool to promote Russian narratives and whitewash the image of the aggressor country and its leader.

Another aspect of the manipulative legitimization of the authoritarian regime was the formation of a picture of its "international recognition" through the documentation of events. Just as almost a hundred years ago, Ivy Lee sought to present an impartial assessment of the situation in the Soviet Union in his books and letters, today Kremlin propagandists present their narratives on behalf of Western experts and celebrities, whom the public mistakenly perceives as expressing the views of the majority. An example of this is the documentaries about Ukraine, which were shot by Hollywood film director Oliver Stone and which Russian channels periodically rebroadcast as "evidence-based," justifying the Kremlin's aggression in every possible way.

Thus, the history of almost a century ago demonstrates that, even at an early stage of the professionalization of public relations, the tools of public opinion management could be integrated



into the propaganda strategies of authoritarian governments, relying not only on communication technologies but also on symbolic Western expert authority. This, of course, echoes the modern methods that Putin's Russia uses in its hybrid aggression against Ukraine, in which propaganda, disinformation, manipulation, and other means of communication are used together with military weapons. In this sense, Ivy Lee's legacy appears not only as the basis for the instrumental support of the profession but also for the moral side of public relations, where the line between informing, persuading, legitimizing, and propaganda can blur, consciously or unconsciously.

Conclusions

Ivy Lee's visit to the USSR in the 1920s, at the apogee of his cooperation with the Soviet government, can be considered a historical case at the intersection of PR practice and international politics. The results indicate early forms of using public figures as tools to influence transnational public opinion, which correlate with modern practices of strategic communication and international image-building, and also highlight ethical and reputational risks that remain relevant in the context of modern global crises.

RQ1. As this study shows, Ivy Lee's professional principles are based on his personal values and beliefs, shaped by parental upbringing, economic education, and journalistic experience. Based on them, Lee laid down and consistently defended the ideas of truthfulness, openness, public accountability, and faith in the power of public opinion, considering public relations a tool for harmonizing interests with society. His "Declaration of Principles" was an attempt to generalize and canonize these beliefs as ethical standards for the profession, which contributed to the development of modern reputation management approaches and the concept of CSR. In the modern context, this can be compared with institutionalized professional standards, which also uphold principles of transparency and responsibility, but face limitations in the practice of international communication. In general, the analyzed case contributes to expanding scientific understanding of the PR industry's development and complements the picture of Ivy Lee's perception, who is traditionally considered an authority in PR.

RQ2. Ivy Lee's Soviet Case became one of the most controversial episodes of his career, sparking discussions about professional ethics in public relations. Despite the declared commitment to the principles of truthfulness and accuracy, the activities of the "father of PR" at the intersection of lobbying, international communications, and public diplomacy have always been in the realm of personal reputational risk, given the position and behavior of customers. This partly explains the similarity of the cases of consulting the Rockefellers and the USSR government. At the same time, the study's results show that the Soviet Case cannot be unambiguously interpreted as Lee's departure from his own principles, but rather as a manifestation of a complex moral dilemma between faith in the power of truth and communication and pragmatic geopolitical considerations. In the context of its influence on the development of PR theory and practice, this once again emphasizes the importance of the personality of the industry leader and his personal beliefs, which lie within the realm of professional morality. The analyzed case also reveals the problem of personal risk for PR professionals who, while working to improve their clients' reputational perception, jeopardize their own reputations and expose themselves to public criticism. Similar risks are observed in modern practice, particularly in cases of cooperation between communicators and state or quasi-state structures, where the line between informing, lobbying, and propaganda remains blurred.

RQ3. The study revealed historical continuity in the use of technologies to manipulate public opinion, which may be associated with subsequent changes in society's perception of the PR industry. Among them, one can mention the methods of "borrowed authority" and documenting events as tools for legitimizing the authoritarian policies of the USSR and modern Russia, which involved Western journalists, intellectuals, and public figures. Just as in the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviet government used mechanisms to form a positive image of the USSR, the current Russian



Federation replicates these practices, involving foreign media actors to promote its own narratives. Thus, the Soviet Case of Ivy Lee appears not only as a historical precedent but also as an analytical framework for studying modern strategies of propaganda, reputation whitewashing, and manipulative public diplomacy. This study also outlines the path to understanding the expanded role of PR professionals, in which the possibilities of managing public opinion go beyond the boundaries of individual companies or industries and can be scaled in the political environment at the global level, influencing international communication processes. Thanks to such historical precedents, PR began to be perceived as a global discipline capable of influencing the life and fate of global society.

And the general conclusion from the analyzed material is that, depending on the strategic goals, public relations methods can serve as a tool for encouraging openness and harmonization of relations in global society, as well as a propaganda tool for authoritarian regimes to legitimize wars and repressions. This actualizes the role and ethical boundaries of the profession: should PR be a neutral practice of decision-making or an effective actor in shaping the agenda of modern society, with all the responsibilities that rest on PR professionals? Such a paradigm can serve as a basis for further research into historical and contemporary cases of professional ethics and approaches to regulating PR activities in light of public morality.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process. The author confirms that no artificial intelligence tools were used to create, write, or edit the text during the preparation of this manuscript except for translation. All results are original and obtained without the help of AI.

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