

**EDITORS' ESSAY**

# **EMPOWERING NARRATIVES IN PUBLIC INTEREST COMMUNICATIONS**

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**WORDS HAVE POWER**





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# Editors' Essay: Empowering Narratives in Public Interest Communications

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From its inception, the *Journal of Public Interest Communications* has sought to merge the interests of academics and practitioners to broaden our perspectives and forge new paths in the field. After introducing new practitioner content in the last issue, we now invite you to dive into Volume 7, Issue 2, which includes both original research and a complementary practitioner interview. As we grow the field and explore new avenues for researchers and practitioners to collaborate, it is important to remember we must be mindful of the voices we represent in our work. Reading through this issue's contributions, we were reminded of Maria Bryan's words from our last issue: "I learned the importance of centering the voices and perspectives of the communities I was serving in my communications work" (Bryan, 2023, p. 6). The work in this new issue underscores the voices of underrepresented groups, navigating dynamic topics including Indigenous protest art communities in Mexico and organizations that work with human trafficking survivors.

Elevating historically excluded voices and highlighting global struggles for basic human rights is about more than simply providing a platform. As researchers and practitioners of public interest communications, we have a profound responsibility to actively listen, deeply comprehend, and genuinely respond to the needs of communities striving to transform their reality and correctly reshape their historical narrative.

While we have moved beyond the trope of giving voice to the voiceless, which implies that these groups and individuals are silent, more work needs to be done in this area. The real work lies in creating spaces where these voices are not only heard but are also influential in driving change. It involves dismantling long-standing power structures that have muted these voices and

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replacing them with more equitable and inclusive systems. As communicators, we must continually question our methods, challenge our biases, and refine our approaches to ensure that our practice does not inadvertently reinforce the very inequities we seek to address. We seek to collaborate with, rather than speak for, these communities, helping to amplify their voices in a manner that respects autonomy and expertise.

How can we, as a discipline, foster this respect and challenge the master narratives that make these groups appear to be silent? One solution is foregrounding counternarratives to highlight the strengths and struggles of a more representative society. Public interest communications seeks to create change that transcends any single group or organization, and this issue's pieces highlight how we can center these narratives by acknowledging how those who may have been deemed silent have always had stories worth sharing. We must also recognize our own responsibility in how we have been complicit in these power dynamics.

In this issue, we offer insight into the evolving role of communications in social change. Building on critical trafficking studies and past *JPIC* work about how digital tools can help promote social advocacy for nonprofit organizations (Adams & Johnson, 2020), Rister writes about the importance of nonprofit partnerships and the role digital activism plays in supporting individuals who have survived human trafficking. While these partnerships are demonstrated to have positive impacts in training, advocacy, and support, Rister also explores how partners have the potential to derail efforts toward social change when they are misaligned with human rights approaches.

Affourtit explores public interest communications from an interdisciplinary perspective in her piece about the power of street art. Artist collectives during the Oaxaca Commune in Oaxaca City, Mexico, used street art to voice their dissatisfaction with government policies. These various artistic expressions lent movement organizers a stronger sense of community and identity, and allowed artists to reclaim political spaces as their own. Affourtit discusses the significance of growth and adaptability, showcasing the importance of female empowerment within the movement while acknowledging that this feminine presence could have been even stronger. Her analysis underscores the adaptability and growth of the movement, offering valuable insights into the intersection of art, politics, and social change.

This issue's practitioner interview highlights the work of Floyd Jones and his project centered around Black Philanthropy Month, aiming to address the systematic disparities impacting Black-led organizations in the philanthropic landscape. He showcases the need to move beyond the stereotype of wealthy benefactors at fancy galas helping the needy. Floyd emphasizes the importance of spotlighting Black philanthropy, recognizing the substantial contributions of Black communities despite limited purchasing power, and advocates for better resources to amplify impact. From a public interest communications perspective, Jones envisions how this project can be adapted to expand the movement over time, and how focusing on personal stories can help the collective effort for transformative change.

This issue also includes a book review of Caty Borum's *The Revolution will be Hilarious*. The book explores how comedy has centered different voices throughout time to destabilize the

status quo through the use of creative deviance. The review highlights Borum's analysis of 'creative deviance' in comedy, illustrating how humor can be a powerful medium for centering diverse voices and destabilizing entrenched power structures. The book is celebrated for its insightful examination of comedy's potential to drive social change, offering an intriguing perspective on the role of humor in public discourse and activism.

In conclusion, this edition of the *JPIC* represents a significant milestone in our ongoing journey to bridge the gap between academic research and practical application. Each contribution in this issue not only enriches our understanding of the complex landscape of public interest communications but also challenges us to think critically and act empathetically. The diverse range of topics covered—from the power of street art in political movements to the intricate dynamics of nonprofit partnerships in supporting human trafficking survivors—highlights the multifaceted nature of our field. These studies and interviews underscore the necessity of embracing a multidisciplinary approach to address the pressing issues of our time. The *JPIC* editorial team is excited to offer an interesting mix of original research and public interest communications practitioner voices in this issue. This body of work encourages us to get creative as we communicate with our own audiences, bring underrepresented groups to the fore, and build community in unexpected ways. Let us carry forward the spirit of innovation and inclusivity showcased in these pages, as we continue to shape the future of public interest communications.

## References

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