

# Public Relations in Spain

Prepared by Jenna Joerger, Illinois State University

## Part 1: Background information

**Official Name:** Reino de España (The Kingdom of Spain)

**Capital City:** Madrid

**Major Cities:** Barcelona, Valencia and Seville

**Official Language:** Castilian Spanish

**Type of Government:** All of the 17 regions of Spain are governed under a parliamentary monarchy.

**Location:** Southwestern Europe. Spain borders the Bay of Biscay, Mediterranean Sea, North Atlantic Ocean, and Pyrenees Mountains, and is southwest of France.

**Currency:** Spain is a member of the European Union and uses the euro as the form of currency.

### **Culture:**

According to Geert Hofstede's research on cultural dimensions, the Spaniard's view of distribution of power is split evenly with about 50 percent of the population accepting and expecting that power is distributed unevenly. The view of distribution of power represents the level of inequality in the country. The degree of individualism also falls close to the 50 percentile. This means that Spaniards have the ability to maintain a balance between an individual drive as well as a collective drive to work well in a group within their society. Through his research, it is shown that Spain is more of a feminine country, meaning that men and women have more similar values as opposed to a masculine country that creates a gap between the values of men and women. Research also shows that Spaniards are more tolerant of uncertainty. This means that they are more tolerant of views that are different from what they are used to, have fewer rules, and are not expected to express emotions, but rather to be more contemplative. The characteristics of Spanish culture are reflected in all different industries, including public relations.

## Part 2: Overview of the public relations industry

The public relations profession has matured greatly in a short period of time since its beginning in the 1950s. With the liberalization of political institutions and the economy after the end of the Francisco Franco regime came the increased freedom of the press, which contributed to the growth and development of the public relations industry. The 1960s marked the beginning of a dynamic consumer market, which led to the creation of



many public relations agencies with extreme growth into the 1980s. Now there are many public relations consultancy agencies throughout the country. Public relations firms in Spain have a range of clients from Spanish companies like El Corte Inglés, to American companies like Coca-Cola that are successful globally. With the increase of public relations firms and consultancies, a new professional society emerged.

The Association of Consulting Companies in Public Relations and Communication (Spanish initials, ADECEC) was created in 1991 and now includes 32 of the largest national and multinational public relations firms that represent 65 percent of the consultancy billings in Spain. Some of these firms include Burson-Marsteller, Hill & Knowlton, and Grupo Comunicación Empresarial. Most firms are located in Madrid and Barcelona because both cities are considered to be centers for Spain's business sector. The purpose of ADECEC is very similar to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). It provides professional development opportunities by offering seminars, workshops and job banks, and sets industry standards for ethical practice. After the success of ADECEC, various other professional associations were also created.

The industry is viewed as being an essential aspect of business. Consumerism in Spain is growing, so corporate identity has become even more important. The term "public relations" is not used as frequently as it is in the United States, and there are over 50 different designations for the public relations department. Most commonly, the word "communication" is used to describe the department because in some areas the designation of public relations has a negative connotation derived from the few practitioners who have historically associated themselves with superficial responsibilities such as organizing cocktail parties. A common misconception is that the public relations industry in Spain is strictly limited to public relations, but actually many firms offer a complete promotional package that includes advertising and other services. Integrated public relations is becoming more established as a professional practice in Spain. Media relations is the most important area of public relations in most Spanish firms. The communication of the corporate image and brand public relations is another important function, while they lack an emphasis on creating a crisis plan.

Spanish public relations practitioners believe in a close relationship with journalists as media relations is emphasized as the most important aspect of most public relations firms and departments in the country. Also, a large number of public relations professionals have an educational background in journalism. The higher education system gives students an opportunity to study subjects that will enhance their career in the public relations profession.

### **Part 3: Overview of public relations as it relates to students**

With the growth of public relations as a professional industry, the number of public relations professionals with a degree in public relations or the communication field is increasing. Staff members are no longer mostly ex-journalists or news people; they are graduates of universities with an educational background that has prepared them for a career in public relations.

Students typically major in communication at a public, private, technical, or public relations school, much like one would in the United States. A Spanish student can complete their undergraduate or graduate degree in communication. The University of Barcelona was the first university to have a public relations school. In 1993, public relations and advertising were linked together as one educational program under the law requiring classes in both fields. Many other universities, like Complutense University in Madrid and University Aut3noma in Barcelona, offer courses covering public relations through their Information Science degree program. The programs range between three and five years to complete.

Spain's public universities with programs in the communication field include:

- Universidad de Alicante
- Universidad Aut3noma de Barcelona
- Universidad de Barcelona/Escuela Superior de Relaciones Publicas
- Universidad de Girona/Escuela Superior de Relaciones Publicas (3-year)
- Universidad Complutense de Madrid and affiliated programs
  1. Centro Universitario Domingo Soto
  2. Centro Universitario Villanueva-Fundaci3n Cultura Empresa
- Universitat Jaume I de Castell3n
- Universidad de Malaga
- Universidad del Pafs Vasco-Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea
- Universidad Rey Juan Carlos
- Universidad de Sevilla
- Universidad de Vigo

Private universities:

- Universidad Antonio de Nebrija
- Universidad Camilo Jos3 Cela
- Universidad Cat3fica San Antonio de Murcia
- Universidad Europea de Madrid-CEES
- Universidad de Navarra
- Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca
- Universidad Ram3n Llull
- Universidad San Pablo CEU
- Universidad Cardenal Herrera-CEU de Valencia

Public relations is viewed and taught as a management function and coursework at the universities is widely theory-based. Students are exposed to a full range of mass media. The education system also focuses on the social effects of communication, making courses in psychology and sociology a mandatory part of the degree coursework. The students are encouraged to look at the changing values and standards of society in order to make corporate adjustments.

A more practical application of public relations education is done through an internship or major project that is completed in the final year of the four or five year program. Students also spend time learning from case studies and hands-on projects, much like students in the United States. The higher-level classes focus on group projects and on class exercises such as mock press conferences or formulating employee communication strategies. The degree program has four tracks of emphasis: public relations/advertising, international, business studies, and creative advertising.

The professional organization, ADECEC, also offers membership opportunities to students who can benefit from their job bank after graduation. Students can also find information in publications such as the journal *Revista Universitaria de Publicidad y Relaciones Publicas* that includes case studies and articles by respected practitioners.

**Resources Used:**

Tilson, D.J., & Perez, P.S. (2003-06). Public relations and the new golden age of Spain: A confluence of democracy, economic development, and the media. *Public Relations Review*, 29(2), 125-143

CIA World Fact book (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>)

Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (<http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>)

Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management  
(<http://www.globalpr.org/>)