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You should deduct ~137 words from the word count if in-text citations are to be omitted.

[2012]

[Cultural and public relations aspects in today's age]

Essay 1: Discuss the relationship between culture and public relations.

Public Relations

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Day & Time of Tutorial: Monday, 14:30

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Declaration: "I certify that I can provide a copy of the
attached assignment if required" –
"I certify that the attached assignment is
my own work and that all material drawn
 from other sources has been fully
acknowledged"

Signed: …………………………………..

[Lexmilian de Mello]

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[12th March 2012]

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper defines the term 'culture' in easy simple to understand public relations (PR) terms and it also exemplifies the nature of PR as a practice in contrast to cultural scenarios. Facets of culture are explored so as to highlight the differences between both terminologies.

A brief overview of the public relation and cultural issues in six countries is examined in order to broaden the reader's scope of PR on a global level. The need for consideration of cultural differences in PR campaigns is emphasized. The concept of strategic public relations and the need for corporate social responsibility in PR campaigns is stressed with an end note of a Brazilian journal translated reading as a process of dialogue.

2.0 CULTURE

Dictionary definition defines culture as the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group – essentially it exemplifies the ways of living built up by a group of human beings. Culture has multiple definitions, as cited in Edwards & Hodges, 2011, p.16 in reference to Geertz, 2009:4:

> The total way of life of a people … the social legacy the individual acquires from his group … a way of thinking, feeling and believing … an abstraction from behavior … a storehouse of pooled learning … a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems … learned behavior … a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men … a precipitation of history …

2.1 SIGNIFICANCE TO PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations (PR) communicators use interactive means to better reach global and local audiences, ie: "stakeholder groups are also using social media to communicate with or pressure corporations, and this causes firms to rethink historical approaches to stakeholder relationships" (Wakefield, n.d.). A globalized PR frame-mind seems to be plenty of evidence in which an integrated world of public relations could reduce the impacts of culture and thus improve stakeholder relationships (Wakefield, n.d.). Related to stakeholders

is the concept of nation building where a political communication bias can result based on culture (Taylor & Kent, n.d.). A PR approach to handling culture conflicts in a national level has to be rather elaborate on how the meanings are constructed – PR management must then dwell in focus of communication and relationship circles in order to integrate with culture mandates (Taylor & Kent, n.d.).

Technology and social media has empowered groups and individuals more than it would have been imagined a decade ago. This means that a solitary individual can assume control of a keyboard and engage in entities anywhere around the globe – likeminded groups can pool their resources and put enormous pressure on corporations and governments (Wakefield, n.d.). Manipulation of culture by PR practitioners can be a pivotal tool to control such motions.

A good way for employees to avoid infusion into transnational identity imposed values of culture is for workers to draw their perspectives from familiar parameters of local culture (Wakefield, n.d.). But in order for a socio-cultural turn to be truly productive such dualities have to be overcome. This requires PR to focus on ontological and epistemological understandings. Public relations are recognized as "a locus of transactions that produce emergent and cultural meanings" (Edwards & Hodges, 2011). When meanings become embedded into culture it then becomes a fabric of society and are thereby integrated into PR eventually.

The impact of culture on public relations is at least as strong today as infused theories from two decades ago; there is little argument against that (Wakefield, n.d.). It is stated that cultural meanings circulate and are enforced in society through five 'moments': identity, consumption, representation, production and regulation. Du Gay states that each of these moments are connected to each other generating a web of which we term 'transactions' – meaning flourishes through these articulations (Edwards & Hodges, 2011). PR research as a cultural intermediary is fairly limited in relations to Du Gay's web to the following:

> - A producer of consumer culture.

> - A promoter of new tastes and fashions.

> - Marketing and publicity contexts.

> - Or as a tool of manipulation (Edwards & Hodges, 2011).

In relating culture to PR undertakings it is important to examine public relation practice in different countries. Different countries represent different cultures for the most part; an example can be contrasted when the 'neighborliness campaign in Malaysia' encouraged citizens of different ethnic groups to come together to in reconciliation. The United States stages a variety of secular events to bring together citizens from all walks of life in order to promote tolerance and understanding (ie: speeches, picnics, parades…). (Taylor & Kent, n.d.)

2.2 FACETS OF CULTURE

The origin of the word 'culture' has roots with the meanings of 'cultivation', distinguishing that of which is under human control (growth) such as farming the products of nature. This contrast pervades the variety of the word's meaning (Gusfield, 2006).

In regards to culture, commodity cannot be misunderstood as an aspect that simply compels uniformity. In contrary, if culture is to be industrialised we may adopt a mode of 'a smorgasbord of cultures' where heterogeneous lifestyles may coexist (Hutnyk, 2006). Culture is not something people have, it is something that they do or what they are, there should be no interpretation in that. As culture evolves from something it becomes clear that today culture is not equivalent to identity either (Hutnyk, 2006). Culture is something to be understood in old anthropological sense as long as cognizance of the politics of translation and situated nature of subjectivity takes place (Hutnyk, 2006).

The roots of culture may take place in the bounded form of commodity, identity, the perceived notion of culture as a resource, activities and associated industries and modes that led towards the projection of what we deem as cultural aspects (Hutnyk, 2006). PR may mediate the process of culture only if it were to look at the process of local struggles whilst supported with Universalist maxims (Hutnyk, 2006).

Cultural studies can be achieved through examination of social problems and public problems. However, limitations do occur as even scientific examination leads to a limited theory – quite often PR staffs have to immerse themselves into a given culture in order to completely understand it:

> Studies of social problems have focused on how conditions come to be interpreted as public problems. Studies of social movements have examined the process of framing—which involves the categories of language and belief by which situations are defined. Even scientific knowledge has been found to use cognitive paradigms that lead and limit theory and experience. (Gusfield, 2006, p.44)

3.0 PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relation (PR) practice is about fundamentally producing, sustaining, and regulating communication meaning – it is recognized as a locus of transaction that produces emergent social and cultural meanings (Edwards & Hodges, 2011).

3.1 COUNTRY/CULTURE CONTRAST

This segment co-relates public relation practice to culture as experienced on a few sample countries. It is intended that a greater understanding of the crucial connecting points to PR and culture will be exemplified. 'Appendix I' correlates Hofstede's studies to the examined countries.

Germany

Almost 3 out of 4 Germans used the internet during 2007 (this has not impacted traditional media usage) – more than the Euro average. Germans are still influenced by brand name of TV and in the future it is expected that the use of social media will be a major agenda for PR in the future (Hines, 2009).

PR writers actively commune news releases to major print media and it is stated that bribing media representatives is much rarer in

Germany than elsewhere around the globe (Hines, 2009). German

readership rates amongst the highest in Europe.

<u>Kazakhstan</u>

PR in Kazakhstan is epitomized by the language money can present

(bribery is prevalent). Citizen activism has risen over the last few

years but remains dangerous for PR staff and journalists.

Journalists, in turn, are poorly paid – they work for government-

controlled media outlets since few independent can survive as social

and economic targets (Terry, 2004).

Kazakhstan makes great usage of representational moments such

as; jargon, stories, dialects and even gestures in speech. This

representation indicates how a cultural product (text, practice, object)

builds on culture and meanings towards identity. "For example, the

yurt in Kazakh culture identifies its roots in the nomadic tradition of

the steppes. Other cultural products are encoded with specific

meanings in the moment of production and are incorporated into

everyday life" (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2002 – as cited in Terry,

2004).

Mexico

Mexico has been economically unstable since the 1970s, however, the situation has improved in recent years through joining of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1992 – this promoted rapid change throughout Mexico. The country is on a major transition phase in PR and its cultural practices are well established with a focus towards family values over work.

Culturally, politically and economically, Mexico is bolstering through major changes. PR practices refer to Mexico now as an urban, opening to democracy, and market-oriented environment – in contrast to rural, undemocratic and protectionist (Feehery-Simmons, 2008).

Hong Kong

Hong Kong PR practices are influenced by social, economic, political and cultural changes with resilience in its PR industry. There are abundant economic and health crisis in Hong Kong that are challenging the best PR staff. Impacting PR is the major health crises, changes in the media, integration with China and the rise of advocacy and activism. Since 1997 Hong Kong has been getting better in tune with China, more emphasis on crisis and reputation management plus how businesses interact in relationships, and there is a growing professionalism in PR practices (Martin, 2009).

Italy

There is a shortage of PR professions in Italy and there is a dire need to acquire more knowledge from other parts of the world. There is "scant intellectual production coming from continental Europe, particularly the Mediterranean arch countries: Italy, France and Spain" (Valentini, 2009). It was only in the mid-1950s that Italy's first PR agencies were established – once established they were strongly influenced by US approaches. Italy's first PR officers were trained at the United States Information Services (USIS). Italy's political scandals led the way to a professionalized and regulated way to carry public relations (Valentini, 2009).

Since there is no specific PR law in Italy anybody who has a consulting business can theoretically claim PR skills (Valentini, 2009). Hence the credibility of PR in Italy is also related to a problem of accreditation of the profession.

Thailand

PR practices in Thailand can be traced 720 years ago when a set up system was put in practice where people could report their critical problems such as flooding, natural disasters, or epidemics, by ringing the bell on front of the King's palace. Thailand is in need of PR specialists that are well rounded in issues management, which can be defined as "the strategic use of issues analysis and strategic

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responses to help organizations make adaptations needed to achieve harmony and foster mutual interests with the communities in which they operate" (Chaidaroon, 2009).

The second issue Thai PR professionals must heed is the patterns of communication when dealing with stakeholders from different cultures. Thailand is a cultural diverse country and failure to understand a segment could end up in cultural/PR clashes (Chaidaroon, 2009). Finally, and most importantly, PR practices in Thai need to focus on the aspect of ethics and the principle of governance (Chaidaroon, 2009).

3.1.1 PR ACROSS CULTURES

Consideration for cultural differences is crucial for a PR campaign. It is essential for PR practitioners to analyze likely cross cultural differences that may ensue. In order for a PR campaign to be successful abroad it is required that an appreciation for the target language and nuances be established (Payne, n.d.). Areas where the spoken word is to be used (ie: conferences, interviews, etc…) should be adapted within a cross cultural framework (Payne, n.d.). Communicative styles differ across cultures. In short PR campaigns must make use of the following in adherence to cultural standings:

➢ The spoken word.

➢ The Written word.

- ➢ Communication channels.

- ➢ PR materials (ie: logos, slogans, pictures, colours and design) (Payne, n.d.).

3.2 STRATEGY/CULTURE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Strategic public relations' (SPR) key to success rests within the means of integrated communications as a means to reach desirable output. "Needless to say that such exercise requires management commitment and set of managerial skills" (Khodarahmi, 2009). Consideration for culture, communications, strategic thinking, actions and proactive plans are crucial matters of any SPR. "It is therefore important to adopt an appropriate approach which does not offend anyone, if not satisfying everyone" (Khodarahmi, 2009).

"CEOs were often credited with changing corporate culture towards adopting Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR) (Benn, Todd & Pendleton, 2010). Aspects of value creation, leadership and accountability are fulfilled through CSR adaptations for the most part. CSR can be understood from stakeholder theory in the sense that a firm ought to go beyond compliance and shareholder worth to address the legitimate interests of stakeholders (Benn, et al., 2010).

The critical reflective evaluation that individuals and society manifest is more than a simple glance at an individual, a questionnaire, or an inquiry into the interdependency of all. Here it is manifested with the

holo-grammatic (Morin, 2001, as cited in Baldissera & Solio, 2005), this is the part that is in everything that is encompassed by the system, but at the same time is approximately part of it all. That is, culture can be understood by PR through a process of dialogue which can be understood as a 'process of construction and dispute of senses' (Baldissera & Solio, 2005). Across this it is evident that the necessity to revert to the 'lenses' (employed to think and act in organizational communication, and particularly in PR) is essential for when breaching cultural differences (Baldissera & Solio, 2005).

4.0 CONCLUSION

The sole purpose of establishing a cross cultural analysis in PR is to construct campaigns that target the audience and stakeholders as best as possible – this whilst appealing to their view of the world while avoiding offence (Payne, n.d.). Whilst I strongly believe cultural factors attribute to establishment of PR practice, I also believe that PR and culture must remain two distinct responsibility centers. PR must not answer to culture, period. They must work closely together – culture centered on marketing concepts, desires, PR centered on relationships. Culture should be centered in group scenarios whereas PR ought to be centered on the citizen. PR is not interchangeable with the term 'culture' but PR practice may be affected by culture, and vice versa.

'Appendix II' to this essay illustrates an example in which an organization was able to instill its own PR culture to society by simply largely ignoring criticisms.

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APPENDIX I:

Geert Hofstede's work on cultural differences between nations shows a clear distinction on the role of PR practitioners for five of the six examined countries. The study portrays cultural differences between nations and it is evident that PR practices are directly related to the level of intercultural values imbued.

Power distance – extent less powerful members expect unequal power distribution.

Individualist/collective – degree in which individuals are integrated into groups.

Masculinity/femininity – preference in society for achievement, assertiveness and material reward for success vs cooperation and quality of life.

Uncertainty avoidance – a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity.

Long term orientation – society's time horizon and attachment to the future.

Source - http://geert-hofstede.com/geert-hofstede.html
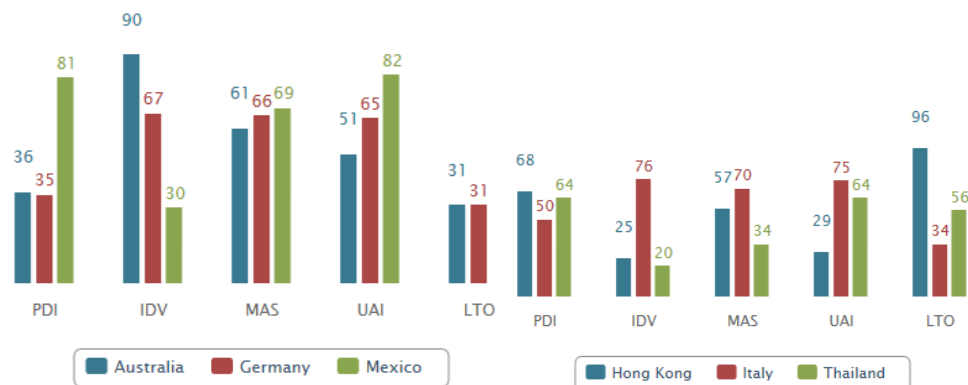
APPENDIX II:

Culture's impact on public relations

By Shane

Organizations are diverse. They can be big or small and they can form anywhere, from the largest city to the smallest town. People tend to regard them differently based on how big they are or where are located. While both of these can impact an organization, the one thing that is often overlooked is culture. This will have a major impact on public relations efforts.

For the purposes of this article I am going to define culture as a set of values that drive the behavior of an organization. Why do we care? The culture of an organization is going to influence everything that a company does. Let's look at an example.

Apple, under Steve Jobs, was seen as a secretive company that would do what it thought was right while ignoring its critics. In the summer of 2010 when the iPhone 4 came under fire for reception issues, dubbed antennaegate, they found themselves in a crisis. The textbook crisis response, "immediately address the issue, apologize, and promise that the issue will be fixed as soon as possible while making sure to keep all lines of communication open," was ignored. Apple didn't even acknowledge the problem for a couple of weeks. When it scheduled a press conference, Steve Jobs had a fix for

customers (a bumper) but he didn't apologize as much as he told users to hold the phone differently and inform us that this was an industry issue.

Throughout the entire process, tech analysts and public relations people were shocked at Apple's response, claiming that it was not what should have happened. However, they totally ignored Apple's culture. The textbook way of handling a crisis didn't align with Apple's culture and in the end the culture drove the response. While certainly free to critique Apple's response, nobody should have surprised by it.

Culture guides organizations so don't be surprised if you find it guiding your public relations efforts as well.

Source - http://dshanecarpenter.com/2012/02/20/cultures-impact-on-public-relations/

To notice: Apple had a culture and their PR staffs were acting in accordance to it. The Apple culture is not that of the typical 70's company that is riddled with corporate rigidities. Thus, stiffness and regulation is just not on the list of policies that are set in place. It was said that even Steve Jobs, the company's CEO, would walk around the office barefoot even when Apple was already among the top corporations in the world. The antennaegate response attitude was just simply part of the Apple culture.