

Theoretical approaches of International Public Relations



International PR

The body of knowledge of public relations has grown significantly in the last 25 years or so and public relations continues to evolve as a strong discipline.

As a profession, however, public relations is fast becoming global.



Reasons of Public Relations becoming global



The rapid expansion of communication technology

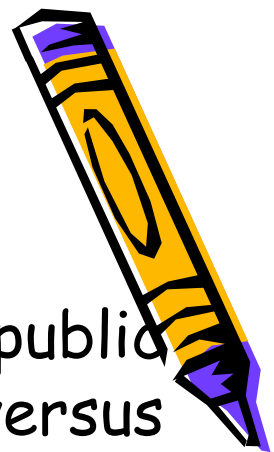
The realignment of economic power caused by the formation of multinational trading blocs such as NAFTA, EC, ASEAN, APEC

Necessity to replicate your business for another set of circumstances, a different locale and culture, with a different market, demands, needs and expectations.



IPR definition

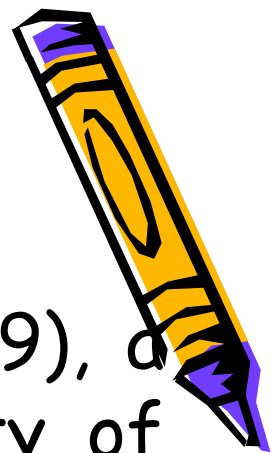
There are significant differences in practicing public relations entirely within one's own country versus across national boundaries (Foster, 1998; Ver_c_i_c, 2003). As Larry Foster (1998) stressed, "Of all the areas of public relations and public affairs, the international sector is the most difficult to manage. It is more complex, more unpredictable, and generates more risk than most domestic-based public relations programs" (p. 1). Nigh and Cochran (1987) added that these "characteristics inherent in the conduct of business across national boundaries" (p. 7) add great complexity in communicating with stakeholders.



IPR definition

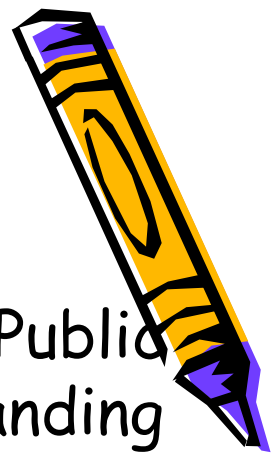
The definition given by John Reed (1989), a recipient of the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) Atlas Award for lifetime service around the world

"International public relations means you do it somewhere else, with audiences different from you cultural, linguistically, geographically (p. 12)"



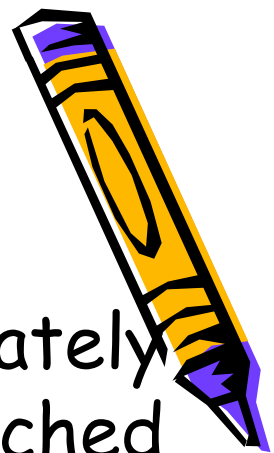
IPR definition

Omenugha (2002) surmised that when Public Relations is planned to bring mutual understanding between an organization and its publics in various countries where the organization operates, that PR is said to be international. She further explained that when Public Relations policies and programs are used in projecting a favorable image of the organization, its business and its country in the global community, in an interdependent world, that PR is international... [It is] a deliberate, planned and sustained effort geared towards securing the desired favorable image for the organization in the international community, paving way for profitable operations.



IPR definition

Hence Nwosu (1996) sees IPR as "deliberately planned, systematic and researched activities of an organization or nation which are aimed at maintaining sound, productive and mutual relations with international publics such as customers, agents, government, business and non-business organizations".



IPR definition

Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, and Agee (2007) said it better: "International public relations may be defined as the planned and organized effort of a company, institution, or government to establish mutually beneficial relations with the publics of other nations" (p. 516). The important elements in an international program, therefore, boil down to *where the entity is located and to which publics it must build relationships.*



IPR approaches

The 1990s heralded increased interest in gathering empirical evidence about public relations activities in different parts of the world.

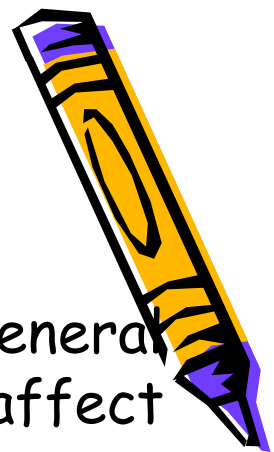
The debate on whether public relation can be practiced in similar ways in different countries was started three decades ago



IPR approaches

First, has relied on the application of a culture-general approach that focuses on how cultural differences affect communication between public relations practitioners, clients and publics from different cultures (Zaharna, 2001, 136).

The application of these cultural taxonomies has enabled, among other things, cross-cultural comparisons about preferred interpersonal relationship orientations within cultures (Kluckhohn&Strodtbeck, 1960); the amount of explicit and implicit information contained in messages and the division between "low-context" and "high-context" cultures (Hall, 1989); and the extent to which cultures believe that institutional power should be distributed equally or unequally, also called "power distance" (Hofstede, 2001).

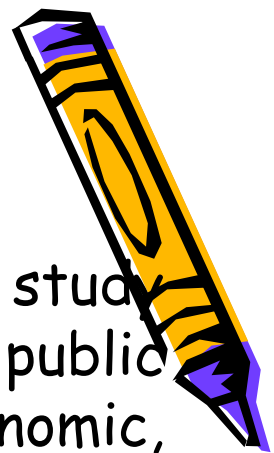


IPR approaches

The second component has been connected with the study of individual countries describing the state of their public relations industries and other historical, economic, political and media aspects shaping the practice of public relations.

The popularity of this approach has been reflected in a large number of books and journal articles studying public relations practices in different countries—like India (Bardhan, 2003; Sriramesh, 1992), Russia (Guth, 2000), Taiwan (Wu, Taylor, & Chen, 2001), Spain (Tilson & Saura Pírez, 2003), and Japan (Cooper-Chen & Tanaka, 2008), among others.

The main purpose of such comparative research of PR practice in different countries is to “identify more or less universal problems that challenge many or all nations, and to search for generic principles that apply widely”



IPR approaches

In the present age of digital communication, time has been compressed by reducing the distance between different points in space, and the sense of space has led people to feel that local, national, and global space becomes obsolete (Harvey, 1990).

All these innovations in digital media, or so-called new media, have changed and continue to change the way we think, act, and live.

For instance, socially and culturally, globalization has changed the perception of what a community is, redefined the meaning of cultural identity and civic society, and demanded a new way of intercultural interaction (Chen & Zhang, 2010).



IPR approaches

One ongoing conversation that has relevance in the global arena is the idea of two-way symmetrical communication between organizations and their publics—the heart of the generic/specific theory conceived by James Grunig, Lauri L L Grunig, Dejan Vercic in the early 1990s (J. Grunig, 2006).

Two-way symmetrical communication seeks mutually beneficial communication between the organization and its publics.



IPR approaches

Generic/specific theory

Early studies in this area incorporated two useful concepts into a comprehensive theory.

One side claimed international public relations had to be centralized to preserve global management strategies and messages; the other side argued for localization, because centralization could not possibly respond to local cultural differences and communication mandates. It was countered that neither approach was effective when practiced exclusively; rather, some combination of the two was most conducive to true effectiveness.



IPR approaches

As J. Grunig (2006) explained, "We developed a theory of generic principles and specific applications that falls midway between an ethnocentric theory (that public relations is the same everywhere) and a polycentric theory (that public relations is different everywhere)" (p. 170).

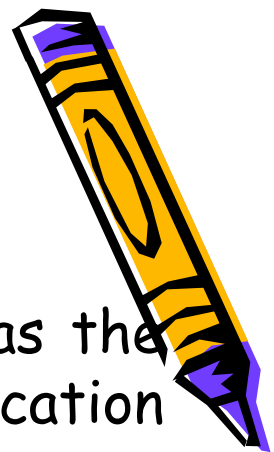


IPR approaches

The second basis of the generic/specific theory was the theory of excellence in public relations and communication management

Most important, the theory presupposed the need for *two-way symmetrical public relations* that seeks mutually beneficial communication between the organization and its publics.

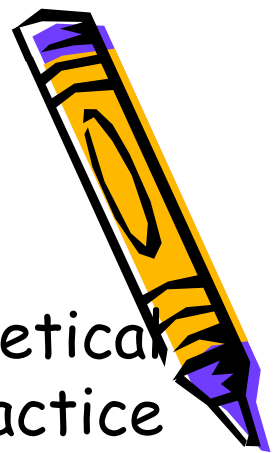
Conceptualized by J. Grunig (2006), the symmetrical model proposed that "individuals, organizations, and publics should use communication to adjust their ideas and behavior to those of others rather than to try to control how others think and behave"



The Excellence Theory

..... proposed establishing "a set of theoretical benchmarks by which to help solve the practice problems of public relations."

The excellence theory resulted from a study about the best practice in public relations, which was headed by James E. Grunig. The excellence theory resulted from a study about the best practice in public relations, which was headed by James E. Grunig and funded by the Foundation of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) in 1985.



The Excellence Theory

.....One of the best attempts to come up with a critical assessment of the international applicability of the generic principles proposed by the Excellence Theory to a cross-cultural, multinational context, was the research conducted by the American scholar Robert I. Wakefield from 1995 to 1998 which "evolved into three cumulative studies that combined the wisdom of 79 public relations experts in 30 countries... using the excellence variables as the measuring stick"



The Excellence Theory

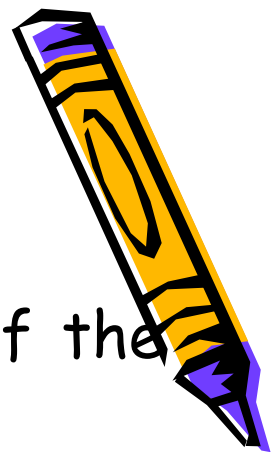
Public relations practice can be found in different locations. Instead, it would maintain that not all of these forms of practice will be effective in helping organizations resolve conflict and build relationships with their publics".



The Excellence Theory

Contextual variables which can explain some of the potential limitations or constraints

1. *The Political-Economic System.* The type of political and economic system in a particular country and the degree of freedom tolerated and practiced in it are important determinants of the possibility of excellence in public relations practice. For example, it can be argued that an authoritarian political system is most likely to suppress freedom of expression and democratic practice and, therefore, is more inclined to foster and promote propaganda, rather than professional journalism. The problem with propaganda, however, is that "It is not about communication between organizations and their publics; it is about communication".



The Excellence Theory

2. *Level of Development.* This variable refers to the degree of achieving economic and technological growth in a certain nation. "The development level often determines who controls public relations. In developed nations, public relations is a tool for market competition; in developing nations, it assists the government in rallying its citizens. The development levels also influence literacy rates and the media that are available for public relations activities".



The Excellence Theory

3. *Culture*. This is a highly complex and ambiguous concept, which is usually difficult to define and to study, yet the influence of communication on culture is widely accepted, and, therefore, the study of the impact of culture on public relations practice is also important, because public relations and communication have also been largely seen as synonymous and interlinked.



The Excellence Theory

4. *Extent of Activism.* Activism is another highly complex and elusive term, which is highly relevant to public relations, in general, but is especially acute in the realm of international public relations, in particular. The form and extent of activism varies widely across different countries and cultures, in light of the type of political, economic, and social system prevailing in each society. Responding to activists and issues is more challenging in the international domain. This is because multinational organizations face more stakeholders than domestic organizations, which makes it more difficult to identify international issues and publics. Also, multinational organizations face interest groups that transcend boundaries. Finally, issues resolution in the domain of multinational organizations involves the challenging task of communicating across cultures.



The Excellence Theory

5. *Media Systems.* There is no doubt that the type of media system prevailing in any society affects the way public relations is handled and practiced. The degree of freedom of expression allowed in the media, as well as the level of development and sophistication of the media system certainly affect the ability of public relations practitioners to perform their job professionally and to communicate effectively with their respective publics. Different interest groups and activists manipulate the media to achieve their goals and objectives and to make sure that their voices and demands are



The Excellence Theory

After providing this brief overview of these five qualifying principles by which to consider global principles of excellent public relations, it is important to mention that when Wakefield tested their validity in the three research studies which he conducted cross-culturally, he also added a sixth principle, which is "language differences".



The Excellence Theory

.....the importance of adding this sixth principle was because language has an obvious effect on how public relations could be conducted, especially since many nations have multiple official languages and differing dialects, which, in turn, complicates the task of executing public relations successfully in the international domain.

