

CHAPTER 7

International context of public relations



Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- define international and global public relations
- identify the driving forces behind the internationalisation of practice and theory
- conceptualise international public relations
- recognise the environmental factors that affect the implementation of an international campaign.

Structure

- Defining international public relations (IPR)
- Factors and driving forces behind internationalisation
- International public relations agency networks
- Global or local approaches to international public relations
- Structures of international public relations
- Special areas of international public relations
- Public relations for a supranational organisation: the European Union
- Critical voices in IPR
- Professionalism on a global level: public relations as a global profession

Introduction

Consultancies with an international network as well as multinational companies' in-house public relations departments often communicate with consumers, media, shareholders or employees who are situated in another country or sometimes even continent. Mergers, acquisitions and outsourcing are taking place on an international scale and result in new organisations, corporate cultures and working practices. International public relations (IPR) practitioners need to identify and understand views, opinions and behaviours of foreign publics in order to communicate effectively with them and to implement public relations campaigns that cross national boundaries.

Several companies with an international interest position themselves as global companies rather than as German, Japanese or British organisations (see Mini case study 7.1 about British Airways). These organisations invest heavily in developing a global image. Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as Greenpeace, Red Cross, Save the Children or Amnesty International, cannot be associated with a particular country either. When they engage in public relations activities to recruit volunteers or raise awareness of a particular issue, they communicate with a variety of peoples and countries all over the globe.

Not only multinational organisations but also countries and their governments frequently engage in international public relations to create a positive reputation and image of the particular country abroad or a receptive environment for achieving foreign or economic policy goals. The Bush administration's fight for the 'hearts and minds' of the Arab people during and after the Iraq War in 2003 and 2004 involved a lot of 'public relations-like' activities both in the Arab countries and in the rest of the world, with the help of several public

relations consultants and agencies. A more peaceful example is the Belgian government, which commissioned a public relations agency to restore the country's image and reputation in the European Union (EU) following high-profile child pornography and corruption scandals in 1998. Russian president Vladimir Putin used the services of an international public relations agency in preparation for the presidential elections in 2000. An international media and advocacy campaign was developed to explain policies on the war in Chechnya and his approaches to economic and social reforms to western opinion leaders.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, many newly emerged central and eastern European countries relied on public relations to create and communicate a 'sellable' identity to the rest of the world. Examples are Estonia or the Czech Republic, which successfully positioned themselves as independent, democratic and dynamic countries.

Intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), such as the European Union, the International Monetary Fund or the United Nations, also rely on international public relations to communicate with the often unlimited number of publics. Mini case study 7.2 highlights some of the United Nations' 'image problems'.

This chapter examines public relations theory and practice in an international context. It conceptualises international public relations and its main dimensions. We examine how international public relations as a global practice has emerged and its current state. Special attention will be given to the environmental factors that affect the planning and implementation of international campaigns.

mini case study 7.1

British Airways

British Airways (BA) went global in 1996. In June 1997 the airline unveiled a new £60m corporate identity as a part of a three-year £6bn programme that saw the airline investing in new aircraft, services, products and network partners in the build-up to the millennium. British Airways also unveiled a £1m global advertising campaign with the slogan: 'The World is Closer Than You Think.' The new identity was based on 50 'world images', commissioned from ethnic artists around the world and 15 of the designs were presented at a press conference at Heathrow. This involved satellite broadcast linking 150 separate events in 64 dif-

ferent countries and an audience estimated at 30,000 for the 30-minute presentation. The new identity was introduced over the following three years across the company on aircraft, ground vehicles, airport signs and stationary, to establish BA as an 'Airline of the world, for the world'.

BA's plan to fly world images instead of the Union flag backfired, however: the press, UK passengers, staff and even Margaret Thatcher heavily criticised the new identity. Eventually, the airline had to retreat and repaint its planes in 2001, bringing back the Union flag (despite the fact that 60% of non-British passengers liked those world images).

mini case study 7.2

The United Nations (UN)

The UN's reputation and credibility suffered seriously during 2004 and 2005 when a series of scandals shook the organisation and its Secretary General, Kofi Annan. There were accusations that US peacekeepers in Congo had raped women; there were corruption allegations about its 'oil for food' programme in Iraq during Saddam Hussein's reign; Kofi Annan's son was paid

by a Swiss firm that held a UN food contract; and in February 2005 a senior officer resigned after sex abuse allegations. An experienced PR and political consultant was appointed as chief of staff to restore the UN's battered reputation and its staff morale, while managing and coordinating the biggest ever tsunami disaster aid operation in Asia.

Defining international public relations (IPR)

As stated in the preface, one of the intentions of this book is to produce a textbook that can be used by students and practitioners in different countries. Until recently, American textbooks have dominated PR literature both in the USA and worldwide, despite the fact that most of them make no or very little reference to other countries or how PR is practised in an international context. For some American writers, international PR is simply about how to overcome barriers that are created by other cultures, including language, laws or cultural issues, which are often identified as ‘problems’ (Wilcox et. al. 2001), rather than opportunities or the manifestation of diversity.

The first question one might ask is whether *international public relations* exists at all and, if it does, how to define it. Today, very few practitioners would agree with the US PR executive who argued that ‘there’s no such thing as international public relations’ (Angell 1990: 8). Practitioners and scholars alike would rather support Pavlik’s view, who as early as the 1980s considered IPR ‘one of the most rapidly growing areas of the profession, and one of the least understood’ (Pavlik 1987: 64).

IPR is now the new buzzword of the twenty-first century and a rapidly growing area of PR practice. However, PR theory and research has been slow to keep abreast, lagging behind marketing, human resources or management disciplines, which have long developed theories and models of their practices in the international context. It is only recently that PR has ‘gone global’ and new regions of the world, such as eastern Europe, Asia or Latin America, are being ‘discovered’ by PR academics. Even in academic literature, the terms IPR and global PR are being used interchangeably and in several contexts. In this chapter, global PR will refer to the *internationalisation of the profession*, which is being practised in more and more countries throughout the globe, while IPR will refer to the planning and implementation of *programmes and campaigns* carried out abroad, involving two or more countries (usually referred to as parent and host countries).

One of the most widely quoted definitions of IPR is that of Wilcox et al. (2001: 283), who defined IPR as ‘the planned and organised effort of a company, institution or government to establish mutually beneficial relations with the publics of other nations’.

Definitions of PR emphasise mutual understanding as well as relationship building between an organisation and its publics (see Chapter 1). Relationship building and strengthening are vital factors in building global brands and global reputation. Interestingly enough though, consumers or other publics would

hardly define or perceive their connections with a company as relationships. Conceptualising how individuals or certain publics ‘understand’ an organisation may present some difficulties, especially in an international arena.

Wakefield’s (2003: 180) definition also avoids these concepts and is more tangible. IPR is: ‘a multinational program that has certain co-ordination between headquarters and various countries where offices and/or publics are located, and that has potential consequences or results in more than one country’.

Definition: *International public relations* is the planned communication activity of a (multinational) organisation, a supra- or international institution or government to create a positive and receptive environment through interactions in the target country which facilitates the organisation (or government) to achieve its policy or business objectives without harming the interests of the host publics.

IPR activities can be *preparative*, with the aim of creating and cultivating a favourable environment, or *situational*, when often a single issue or situation drives communication – like international pressure group activities. Finally, IPR can be simply *promotional*, when product or service promotion is the centre of the programme and PR is supporting the global marketing function, or in an ideal case, integrates and drives communication. IPR is thus the glue of globalisation: it facilitates multinational corporations to reach new publics and markets. (See Box 7.1 and Think about 7.1, overleaf.)

Factors and driving forces behind internationalisation

Globalisation

Globalisation refers to the growth of worldwide networks of interdependence. It has many dimensions, including environmental, military, social and economic globalisation. Globalisation is often equated with Americanisation, especially by its critics. Although it is true that American companies are central to globalisation, the USA itself is affected by this phenomenon. Whether you oppose or support globalisation, it is happening, so the main issue is how organisations or countries respond to it.

Environmental issues, health problems, diseases, human rights, migration, organised crime or organised weapons of mass destruction and terrorism are global issues that cannot be resolved and managed by one country without significant (global) public support. An emerging *global public sphere* is where these and many other issues can be articulated and

**box
7.1**
The main players and their motives in international public relations

The following are groupings or organisations involved with IPR that share similar characteristics:

- *Multinational organisations* (MNOs) with a variety of global business objectives such as increased global sales or creating global brands and raising brand awareness.
- *Nation-states and governments*. Images of nations are important to attract investment, to boost tourism or to achieve foreign policy goals. Reputation is one of the most valuable currencies in international politics and governments often compete for credibility.
- *Intergovernmental organisations* (IGOs) are those whose members are national states. They can be (*inter regional*), such as the European Union (EU), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), League of Arab States, the European Space Agency or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) or *global* such as the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organisation (WTO), UNESCO and World Health Organisation (WHO). These organisations make collective decisions to manage particular problems on the global agenda.
- *International non-governmental organisations* (Oxfam, Red Cross, Greenpeace, Amnesty International). NGOs represent every facet of political, social and economic activities and their worldwide number is around 30,000. They claim to be the 'global conscience' and often mount IPR campaigns against large for-profit organisations or governments, 'naming and shaming' them (see also Chapter 29).
- *Public relations consultancies* with an international network (Edelman, Shandwick, Hill and Knowlton, Burson-Marsteller).
- *Virtual communities* that develop on the internet, ignoring the limitations of space and time.

discussed, mostly through the mass media (see also Chapters 9 and 11 for more about the public sphere). Concentration of media ownership, however, may hinder this process since commercial communication can replace public communication. PR and public affairs are often criticised for making public debates and discussions a 'faked version' of a genuine public sphere by displaying power rather than facilitating debates (Thussu 2000).

Many national as well as international surveys confirm the decline in trust in businesses. Citizens and consumers tend to trust non-governmental organisations

(NGOs) rather than global brands and they entitle them to act on their behalf. A study of opinion leaders in eight countries from three continents by Edelman (PR agency) found that in France, Germany and the UK, the four most trusted brands are NGOs: Amnesty International, World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace and Oxfam (then Microsoft, Bayer and Ford).

The picture is rather different in the USA, where Johnson & Johnson, Coca-Cola and Microsoft are the most trusted brands. Figure 7.1 details the extent to which respondents trust business, government, media and NGOs in western Europe, the USA and China.

think about 7.1 Transparency and accountability

There is increased pressure on the organisations mentioned in Box 7.1 to be transparent and accountable. PR should facilitate both transparency and accountability towards stakeholders. Is this always the case? Could PR be used to hinder transparency and distract attention?

Feedback Unfortunately, PR is sometimes used as 'cosmetic surgery' or as a method of distracting attention or managing perceptions. PR consultancies or practitioners serve and protect the interests and reputations of their clients which may not always be in accordance with the interest of other groups.

The Chinese government, for example, employed an international PR consultancy to improve the country's image in the west after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. In May 2004 a terminal building at Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport caved in and killed four people. Tony Blair's then spin doctor David Hill saw the tragedy as a chance to undermine the Paris bid for the 2012 Olympics and an opportunity to brief about the failings of the French transport system. It had strong overtones of the Jo Moore scandal in the UK when the government communications advisor sent out email to colleagues on the day of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 saying that it was 'a good day to bury bad news'.

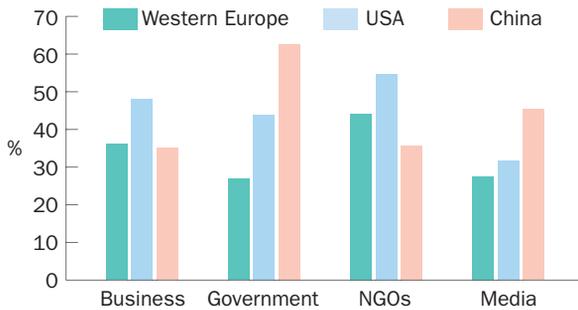


FIGURE 7.1 Trust in business, government, NGOs and media (source: adapted from Sixth Annual Edelman Trust Barometer 2005, © Daniel J. Edelman, Inc.)

Mini case study 7.3 is a good example of a global PR campaign launched by Oxfam, which aimed to influence decisions regarding the global coffee market.

Information revolution

Another driving force behind internationalisation is the *information revolution*, which is the result of rapid technological advances in computers, software and communication. It has dramatically changed every aspect of everyday life, resulting in an international information society. The global network society refers to the notion that new communication technologies result in a fundamental shift in social organisation.

Nation-states are no longer in control of power, which is shifting from individual countries to global networks.

The internet has made both interpersonal and mass communication instantaneous. In 1997 the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Jodie Williams for helping to create a treaty banning land mines despite the Pentagon's strong opposition. She organised her campaign mostly on the internet. The information evolution has resulted in lower costs of processing and transmitting information. The amount of information that can be stored and transmitted on the net has no limits. In 1993 there were only some 50 websites; by 2000 this number was well over five billion. Command over information has become a major asset in organisations.

A new global culture is emerging parallel to a global consumer society. Interactions between cultures are significantly influenced by the globalising cultural forces, including the international media. The media have also become a multinational corporation with ownership concentration: news that crosses borders gathered and distributed by a few, transnational companies. CNN and the BBC are the two most influential sources of television news, broadcasting 24 hours, seven days a week, although, of course, information does not only flow through the media. Figure 7.2 (overleaf) highlights the most important channels and types of international information flow (see also Think about 7.2).

mini case study 7.3

Oxfam International

In 2002 Oxfam International, a global non-profit organisation, launched the Coffee Rescue Plan, an initiative that encouraged cooperation among governments, large coffee roasters and other stakeholders to help solve the coffee price crisis. To coincide with the launch, Oxfam released a report entitled *Mugged: Poverty in Your Coffee Cup* that described and documented the problems in the global coffee market.

The Coffee Rescue Plan pointed out that the 'Big Four' coffee roasters – Sara Lee, Procter & Gamble, Nestlé and Kraft (owned by Philip Morris) – buy nearly half of the world's coffee crop. They thus dominate the \$60b global coffee industry and their healthy profit margins range between an estimated 17% and 26%.

Oxfam contended that the Big Four's business strategy is short-sighted and ultimately self-destructive, as

their practices put coffee farmers out of business. Furthermore, the Big Four risk alienating consumers, who are gaining awareness of the social and environmental costs of coffee production. Oxfam pointed to the rise in sales of fair trade coffee, which promotes paying coffee farmers a living wage price, as evidence of growing consumer concern.

The Coffee Rescue Plan calls on large coffee roasters and international governments to increase the market for fair trade coffee. The plan also encourages roasters' governments to bring the current oversupply of coffee back into line with demand and to help ensure that coffee farmers earn a decent living.

Source: <http://www.SocialFunds.com>

think about 7.2 Channels of international information flow

Figure 7.2 was developed before the internet age. How could you complete the wheel in the light of the information revolution?

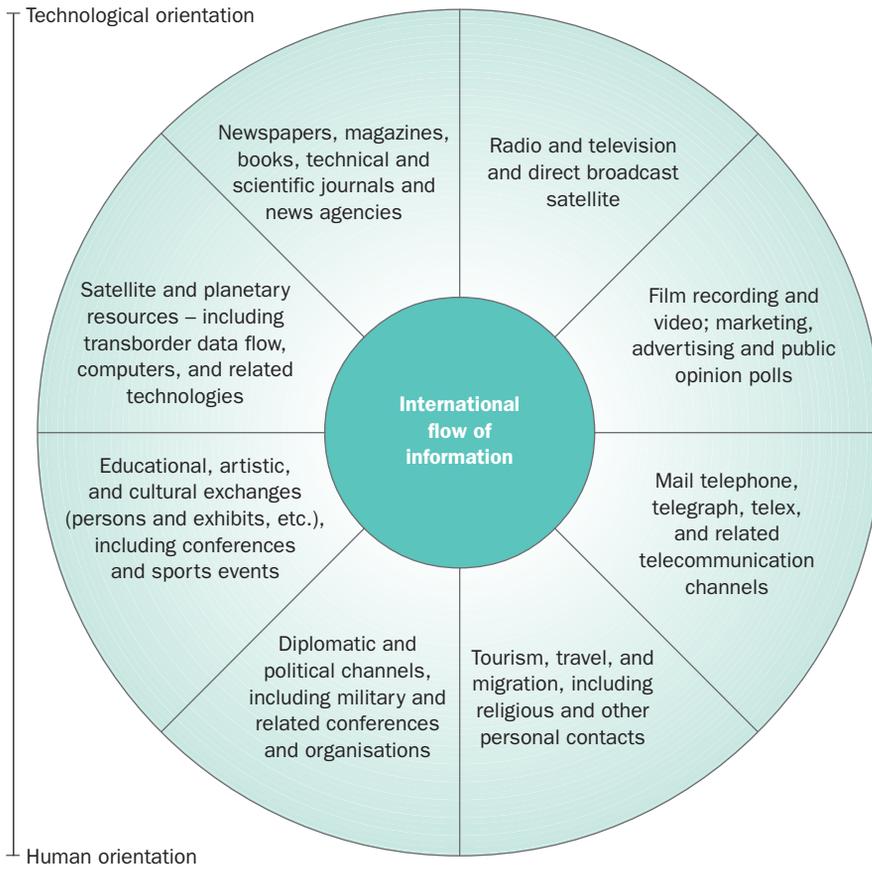


FIGURE 7.2 Channels and types of international information flow (source: Mowlana 1986: 2)

The international media outlets (especially TV and news channels) often serve as mediums to reach a global audience in an IPR campaign. Corporations, governments and the media are competing for customers, voters and viewers on a global scale.

Agenda setting

Agenda setting is the process by which the media communicate the relative importance of various issues to the public (Rogers and Dearing 1988). The media agenda is influenced by news values and the media agenda affects the public agenda. The third agenda is the policy agenda influenced and articulated by pressure groups and political actors. Based on the increasing influences of the multinational corporations, Watson (2003) suggested a fourth agenda: the corporate agenda (Figure 7.3). His model of agendas takes into account the dynamic, and often imbalanced, relationship between the public, policy, corporate and media agendas. He places the public agenda in the centre since governments, corporations and the media all try to exert influence on the public. These agendas are related and influenced by

each other as well as by external factors such as PR. PR practitioners constantly influence the media agenda through media relations while the policy agenda can directly be influenced by lobbying. Alongside with PR practitioners, several different groups (including pressure groups) are competing to set and influence these agendas. (See Activity 7.1.)

The internet is changing newspaper readership and TV viewing. As research in 2004 (JupiterResearch,

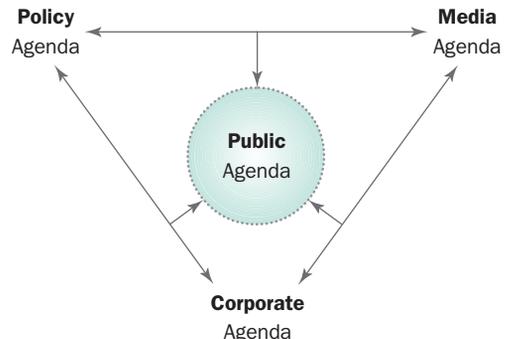


FIGURE 7.3 Tripolar model of agendas: policy, corporate and media (source: Watson 2003: 131)

activity 7.1**Observing the news**

Watch two news programmes on the same day (e.g. national evening news such as the BBC News at 10 or ITV News at 10.30pm in the UK). How many news items were presented during the programme? How many of them dealt with:

- for-profit organisations
- multinational organisations
- overseas (foreign) news
- environmental, corporate or other types of crisis?

Can you identify any differences in the number and nature of news items between the two channels? Do you think that any of these news items could have been the result of PR activities? If yes, why? What kind of overseas stories were included? Did they conform or challenge your view of the country mentioned?

You can repeat the same activity for a national or regional daily newspaper.

<http://www.JupiterResearch.com>) found, TV is the medium most threatened by the internet, as 27% of European internet users say that they have reduced the time watching TV in favour of the web. These people belong to a young age group, between 15 and 24. Eighteen per cent of internet users across Europe

are reducing the time they spend reading print newspapers in favour of the net, an increase of 5% since 2001. This is not only affecting younger generations; the international business community is also changing its readership and viewing habits. A survey of top business executives found that the *Financial Times* lost 12,000 readers during three years. Table 7.1 summarises the average issue readership of international publications in 2004 among 431,000 top European senior executives. (See Mini case study 7.4, overleaf.)

International public relations agency networks

International PR agencies, not surprisingly, play a significant role in the practice of IPR. These networks have offices in many different countries. The local offices' knowledge (including the language and culture), expertise and their relations with the media give more credibility to communication actions as well as strengthening the legitimacy of the campaigns. Hiring PR practitioners means that messages are 'localised' and tailored towards the needs of the publics in the host country. In this sense, multinational

TABLE 7.1 Average international publication issue readership (source: European Business Readership Survey 2004, Ipsos Media)

| Title | Readership (2004) | Readership (2002) | Reach % (2004) | Reach % (2002) |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| All international titles | 185,854 | 200,095 | 43.1 | 47.3 |
| Dailies | | | | |
| <i>Financial Times</i> | 56,517 | 68,586 | 13.1 | 16.2 |
| <i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i> | 46,571 | 54,994 | 10.8 | 13 |
| <i>International Herald Tribune</i> | 14,605 | 11,348 | 3.4 | 2.7 |
| <i>Wall Street Journal Europe</i> | 11,571 | 14,204 | 2.7 | 3.4 |
| <i>USA Today</i> | 6,037 | 7,615 | 1.4 | 4.8 |
| Weeklies | | | | |
| <i>Business Week</i> | 20,072 | 18,908 | 4.7 | 4.5 |
| <i>The Economist</i> | 33,200 | 35,659 | 7.7 | 8.4 |
| <i>Newsweek</i> | 14,231 | 18,184 | 3.3 | 4.3 |
| <i>Time</i> | 20,722 | 21,826 | 4.8 | 5.2 |
| Fortnightlies | | | | |
| <i>Forbes</i> | 23,554 | 18,193 | 5.5 | 4.3 |
| <i>Fortune</i> | 16,498 | 16,579 | 3.8 | 3.9 |
| Monthlies | | | | |
| <i>CFO Europe</i> | 13,971 | 10,671 | 3.2 | 2.5 |
| <i>Eurobusiness</i> | 4,312 | 5,922 | 1.0 | 1.4 |
| <i>Euromoney</i> | 6,815 | 9,215 | 1.6 | 1.8 |
| <i>Harvard Business Review</i> | 24,148 | 24,536 | 5.6 | 5.8 |
| <i>Institutional Investor</i> | 6,143 | 7,169 | 1.4 | 1.7 |

mini case study 7.4

Bhopal haunts after 20 years

The speed with which information and news spreads, the fight for exclusivity by the major news corporations and the lack of time for checking the reliability of sources are well demonstrated by this BBC World report about Bhopal on the twentieth anniversary of the catastrophe, in December 2004.

A BBC World reporter was researching the disaster that resulted in the death of 18,000 people after toxic gas leaked in 1984. The reporter consulted a website of Dow Chemical, the company that now owns the infamous Indian factory and was offered an exclusive interview to be broadcast live from Paris on the anniversary. At 9am, the 'spokesman' of the company announced the launch of a \$12bn fund 'to finally at long last compensate the victims including the 120,000 who may need medical care'. An hour later the news was the leading bulletin on News 24 and many other BBC, Indian and international news channels. As a result of news of this huge compensation package, Dow Chemical's

share price sharply decreased in Frankfurt as well as in New York. The real company was quick to react after hearing the news: at 10am the real Dow spokesperson contacted the BBC and demanded a retraction of the story since it was untrue. It appeared that the BBC reporter was looking for a spokesperson who could be interviewed on the occasion. He ended up on www.Dowethics.com, which is a mimic of the real company's website, set up in 2002 by Yes Men, an anti-corporation pressure group. He contacted a spokesperson, who was none other than one of the main campaigners of Yes Men. The story ended with the BBC apologising for the misinformation.

This case study highlights another tendency, which is a challenge for global companies: pressure groups and anti-corporation activists often set up rogue sites to challenge or damage organisations. These sites can be easily found and can reach vast international audiences.

organisations (MNOs) adapt to the culture of the host country through PR and *international* PR becomes *domestic* PR. Through their networks, international PR agencies localise international campaigns and at the same time contribute a great deal to the globalisation of the practice.

Figure 7.4 summarises the different options facing a multinational organisation or a government engaged in IPR. In the parent country, it can commission the local branch of an international PR agency, which has an office in the target country (1), but it can also hire a local PR agency in the host country to work on its behalf (2). If the organisation has an office in the host country, its in-house practitioners can also engage in PR (3). An organisation can directly target the publics of the host country (4) (governments tend to use this option, in the form of public diplomacy). Direct targeting is also possible from the parent country through a PR agency commissioned by the MNO (5).

Another cost-effective approach is when some of the 'key publics' of the target countries are brought to the parent country (6). Trentino, a province in Northern Italy, invited journalists from 10 European countries to enjoy the natural beauties and the hospitality of the region. After returning home, these non-travel journalists wrote extensively about the characteristics of the region from different perspectives. Another strategy is to invite international journalists to the corporate headquarter of a multinational organisation.

Only the interactions that take place in the 'international PR space' can be considered truly international

PR practice. This often means that IPR boils down to inter-consultancy or inter-departmental communication (1, 2, 3) in the form of:

- programme coordination (with the help of a lead PR agency or the headquarters of the multinational company)
- getting programme elements 'approved' by head office or lead agency
- programme and performance evaluation (effectiveness of the campaign, PR consultants' performance, return on investment)
- financial issues (costs, fees).

A multinational organisation can directly speak to its foreign publics through its website. When we first want to find out information about a foreign organisation or country we are likely to 'Google' that organisation and try to check out its website. This means that the internet is central to any IPR programme. See Activity 7.2.

activity 7.2

Multinational company websites

Select a multinational telecommunications company and check out the company's websites in different countries. You are unlikely to understand the languages of these websites but try to identify their common visual features. Do they have an English version and is it updated? Does the company use the same identity throughout these websites?

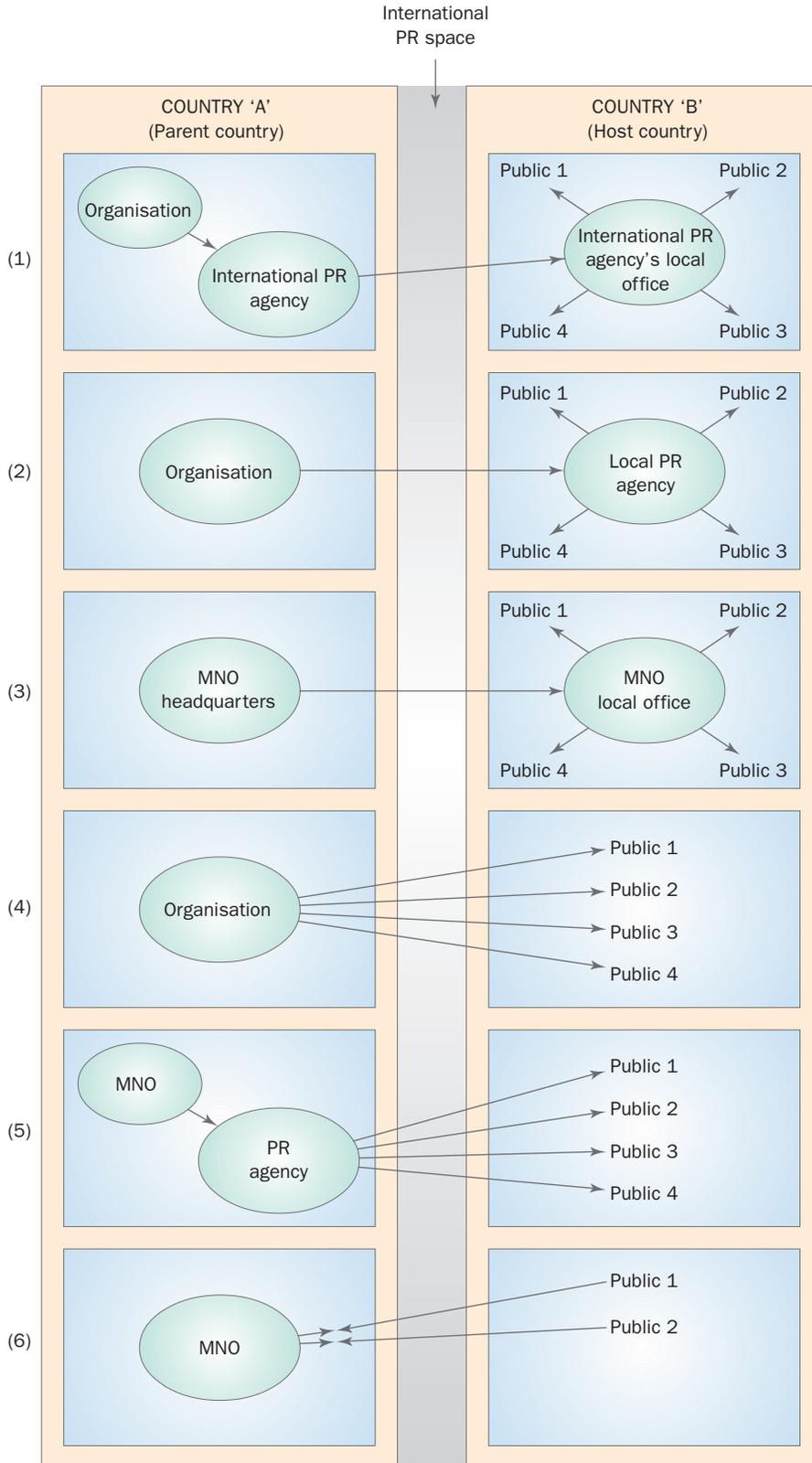


FIGURE 7.4 International public relations 'space' – forms of international public relations

Global or local approaches to international public relations

IPR stretches the boundaries of both practice and theory. The next section examines how universal the principles and concepts of PR theory are and to what extent PR strategies and techniques can be standardised and centralised. See Figure 7.5.

Theory, concepts and models

Practitioners and scholars alike have been interested in whether PR theories and concepts are universal and which factors can influence the practice of PR in an international context. Since the theoretical foundations of PR evolved in the USA and UK, the question is whether these theories are applicable in other parts of the world and if they are, to what extent.

Several studies have focused on the practice of two-way symmetrical communication in a country-specific context, trying to demonstrate the universal use and adaptability of Grunig's models (see Chapters 1, 8 and 9). They test excellence theories and whether US approaches work in other countries. Research conducted in Greece, India and Taiwan identified two additional models: according to the 'personal influence' model, PR practitioners are expected to develop relations with important and influential people while in the 'cultural interpreter model' practitioners interpret local cultures and practices for a multinational organisation. In a study among South African practitioners, Holtzhausen et al. (2003) found no evidence that participants grouped PR practices according to the principles of symmetry and asymmetry. Based on their findings they challenged the application of general principles, based on the excellence project (see Box 7.2), and Grunig's models to international research settings.

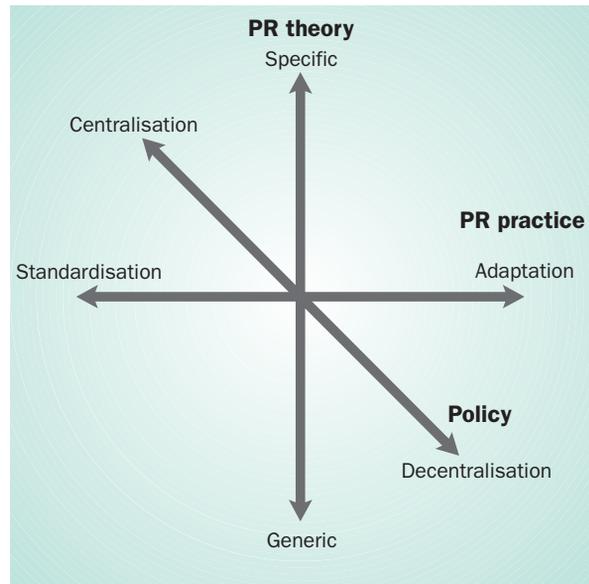


FIGURE 7.5 Multidimensional feature of international public relations theory and practice

The excellence theory has significantly influenced theory and research although the number of its critics is on the increase. Excellence and effectiveness are culture-bound concepts which means that both concepts can be defined in different ways in different cultures. Excellence theory is, however, often used as a benchmark against which the practice of PR is tested in other nations. Importing western theories into other cultures may not always be appropriate.

Structures of international public relations

IPR departments can choose whether they *centralise* communication policy or *decentralise*. Centralisation

box 7.2

Nine generic principles of public relations practice

- Involvement of PR in strategic management
- Empowerment of PR in the dominant coalition or a direct reporting relationship to senior management
- Integrated PR function
- PR as a management function separate from other functions
- Role of the PR practitioner
- Two-way symmetrical model of PR
- A symmetrical system of internal communication
- Knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical PR
- Diversity embodied in all roles

**box
7.3**
Planning international programmes – standardisation vs adaptation

| | Full standardisation | Full adaptation |
|------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Objectives | * | |
| Messages | | * |
| Channels | | * |
| Tactics | | * |
| Evaluation | * | |

(or control) means that the parent company's PR team is responsible for planning campaigns and for developing communication policies, procedures and strategies and that the PR departments in the host country are to follow these policies. Timing of events is another example of centralisation. In the case of decentralisation, policy making and planning lie with the organisation's PR departments in the host countries with partial or full autonomy. In reality, centralisation and decentralisation can vary to different degrees and a balance between the two approaches should be maintained. Whether or not an organisation follows a centralised or a decentralised approach, what is crucial is the *coordination* of the communication efforts. This is a point where many multinational companies fall short and only when a crisis hits do they pay more attention to coordination.

Pharmaceutical, IT and telecommunications companies are among the most common clients of international PR agencies. These types of companies often use a combination of centralised and standardised approaches, since their services and products are rather standardised and less culture specific than clothing, food or household products.

According to Jeffrey Lenn (1996), centralisation or decentralisation depends on the following factors:

- corporate strategy and structure
- corporate size – smaller MNCs are more likely to centralise their decision making
- scope of the PR function
- quality and availability of the PR staff
- types of programme and issue.

The *standardisation* versus *adaptation* debate is prevalent in many communication disciplines, including the different elements of the marketing mix. Standardisation means a uniform approach in the different countries, while adaptation is a culture-specific approach. The first question to ask is *what* should be standardised in PR throughout the different countries involved or adapted to the local culture. Objectives of

a campaign, messages, channels of communication, tactics and evaluation (see Chapter 10) can be placed on a continuum, full standardisation (the same objective, messages in each country) and full adaptation (the environmental factors determine them) being two extremes (see Box 7.3).

Programme objectives as well as evaluation principles are often standardised but message development and choice of channel are subject to adaptation. According to the level of centralisation and standardisation, Figure 7.6 (overleaf) places the different areas of PR in an international context.

The corporate identity of a multinational company like McDonald's is fully centralised and standardised. The company's corporate social responsibility programme's central policy and concepts could be centralised in the corporate head office but interpretation and implementation may be localised. Media relations are very likely to be fully decentralised and adapted to the specific circumstances in the host country since the ways of 'getting publicity' can vary from country to country. Internal communication is influenced by McDonald's corporate culture (see Chapter 17), which follows the US model, while interpersonal communication is culture bound (i.e. affected by the local norms and values).

Adaptation is determined by environmental factors, which will be discussed in the next section.

A word of caution: centralisation and standardisation should not result in the dominance of the MNO's organisational or societal culture; the diversity of the culture and sensitivity to special features of the host culture must be borne in mind at the very beginning of the planning process. This can be achieved by thorough research into the host culture as well as by involving practitioners or communication experts from the targeted countries at an early stage of planning (this is rarely the case, unfortunately). Thorough and systematic research is the cornerstone of any IPR campaign; its absence can easily result in the failure of the entire campaign.

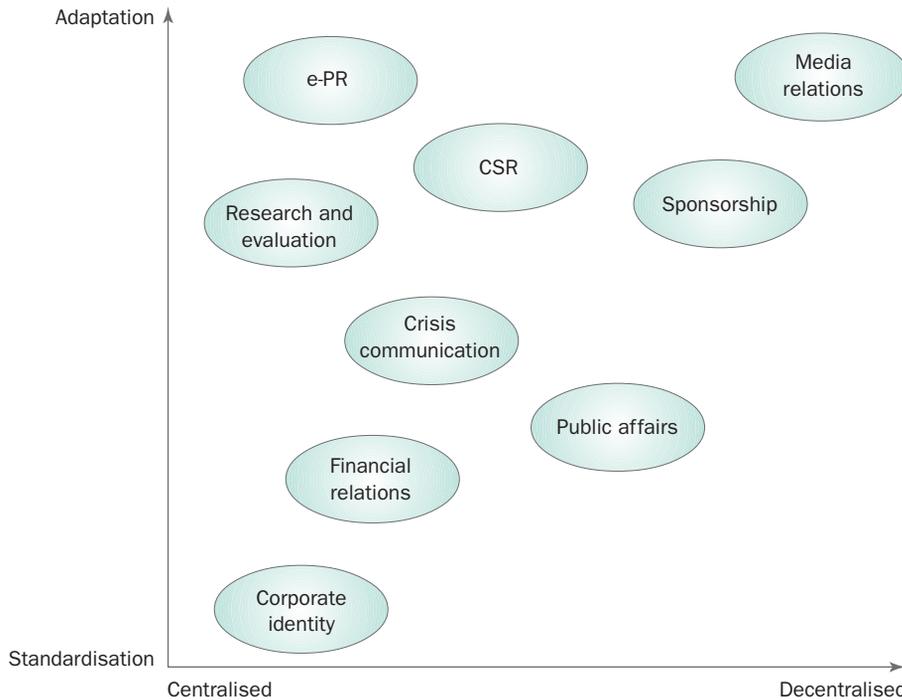


FIGURE 7.6 Dimensions of public relations specialisations in the international context

Mini case study 7.5 highlights an important issue: some US and UK-based multinational companies' PR departments and practitioners tend to believe that they possess specialist PR knowledge that can just be transferred to another country without adaptation. See also Mini case study 7.6.

Culture and environmental factors

Culture influences communication and communication influences culture. If PR is about symmetrical communication between an organisation and its publics with the aim of establishing and maintaining mutual understanding, then culture is central to the practice of PR. For many scholars (Verčić et al.

1996; Banks 2000; Sriramesh 2000; Sriramesh and Verčić 2003), however, culture is important only insofar as programme effectiveness is concerned and culture is often restricted to a simple variable. Effectiveness is always defined with regard to the organisation's perspectives, ignoring the publics' views and interpretation of effectiveness. In this sense the aim of 'understanding' other cultures is simply to direct and control behaviour that is to influence publics' attitudes and behaviours in ways that are advantageous for the organisation. To build trust with a variety of stakeholders and create 'shared understanding of meaning' among different cultures require deeper understanding and appreciation of other cultures by more cooperation and dialogue.

mini case study 7.5

A centralised approach

A US corporation specialising in measurement and monitoring, with over 20 offices worldwide, is an example of this approach. The company's headquarters in the USA pushed their 'American ways of thinking and conducting PR' on other global offices located in Beijing, Cologne, London and Tokyo, among others. Design, planning and preparation for the implementa-

tion of PR campaigns were handled in the USA, including the creation of press releases, press presentations and product information documents, giving little chance for contribution from local countries. The head office documentation content was presented to the local regions to perform in the same format but to the different press audiences.

mini case study 7.6

HSBC, The world's local bank

FT

In 2002 a Mexican bank, Bital, was bought by HSBC Bank but nothing happened until January 2004 when Bital's branches were turned into HSBC branches literally overnight. The new identity, including the name and logo, appeared 'out of the blue' on the sides of taxis, buses, plastic bags, airport carts and even on Mexican flower stalls. The new signs said HSBC in bright red, with its hexagonal logo replacing the name of Bital. The initials HSBC are difficult to pronounce in Spanish, so large posters were dropped down the side of tall buildings around Mexico City with nothing but a pronunciation

guide: 'Hache, Ese, Bé, Cé'. The company's decision to change the name and not to keep the old name was due to strategic reasons and based on customer research. Customers were more concerned with the convenience aspects of banking rather than about the brand. A more difficult and complex task was the change internally. A new senior management team was installed within two months of the formal takeover with the purpose of 'control and transfer of HSBC's values'.

Source: adapted from 'The difference a day makes', *Financial Times* 6 May 2004, p. 14

To plan and implement international campaigns and to adapt campaign elements to the local culture, the PR practitioner must be familiar with:

- environmental factors that influence the practice of PR
- the cultural profile of the country
- its effects on communication
- the 'public relations culture', including the way PR is practised in the country.

Definition: 'Culture is the property of a group. It is a group's shared collective meaning system through which the group's collective values, attitudes, beliefs, customs and thoughts are understood. It is an emergent property of the members' social interaction and a determinant of how group members communicate' (Barnett and Lee 2002).

Definition: *Intercultural communication* is communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event.

Definition: *Cross-cultural communication* is communication between people from different cultures. Intra-cultural communication is communication between members of the same culture, including racial, ethnic, and other co-cultures (Samovar et al. 1998).

Definition: *International communication* refers to the cultural, economic, political, social, and technical analysis of communication patterns and effects across and between nation-states. It focuses on global aspects of media and communication systems and technologies (McPhail 2002: 2).

The following discussion refers to *national* cultures but the *organisational* culture of a multinational organisation can also influence the practice of IPR. The third dimension of cultural differences is the *individual* level.

To understand culture's influence on the communication function of PR, American communication scholar, Zaharna (2001) summarises the basic components of IPR based on *intercultural communication*. Using Hall's concepts of 'in-awareness' he identifies culture's influence on the practice of PR. In-awareness refers to the explicit and observable of a culture. The *country profile* and the *cultural profile* help expose the potential cultural and national differences between the parent and the host country. Both profiles identify variables that must be borne in mind when practising PR on an international scale.

Country profile

The country profile includes the host country's political, economic, legal and social structures as well as the level of development of its infrastructure and the structure and characteristics of mass media. Sriramesh (2000) further conceptualised the media environment by proposing a framework that should facilitate effective media relations practice in the host country:

- *Media control* refers to ownership and control of media organisations and control over editorial content.
- *Media outreach* means the ability of the media to diffuse messages, the extent of media saturation. Illiteracy and poverty can hinder outreach of the media to a wider audience.
- *Media access* refers to the extent to which organisations or any segments of society can access the media to disseminate messages.

The country profile can be complemented by level of activism (Sriramesh and Verčić 2003) that would have a bearing on the implementation of a PR campaign. Activism on a global level is on the increase, while PR plays a crucial role in creating activism as well as responding to it (see Chapter 29). (See also Activity 7.3, overleaf.)

activity 7.3

Media consumption in Europe

Figure 7.7 is a result of a study into media consumption in Europe in 2004. Analyse and interpret the findings. How could these results and tendencies influence the planning and implementation of a campaign that targets publics in central and eastern Europe?

Cultural profile

As Zaharna (2001) notes, country profiles outline what may be *feasible* within a particular country; culture profile is about what may be *effective* in that country.

Hall (1976) distinguished between *high-context* and *low-context* cultures, depending on the degree to which meanings come from the settings or from the words being exchanged.

- In *high-context cultures* such as China, Japan or South Korea, communication relies on the physical context: information is provided through gestures, the use of space and most of the relevant information or meaning is already known by the receiver.
- In *low-context cultures* such as Germany, Switzerland, Sweden or Canada, more meaning is placed in the language code since the population is less homogeneous. A low-context message therefore requires clear description and unambiguous communication.

These contexts are important with regard to what people pay attention to and what they ignore. Hall proposed that cultures organise time in either a *monochronic* or *polychronic* way. According to the monochronic approach, time is manageable and time commitments, such as deadlines and schedules, are taken seriously and time should not be wasted. Germany, Austria, Switzerland or the USA are examples of this approach while Asian or Latin American cultures represent the polychronic approach. People from these cultures may be engaged in different activities at once and time is less tangible, resulting in a more unstructured and spontaneous lifestyle. These concepts have implications for keeping and observing deadlines or timing events or PR tactics.

Cluckhohn's classification of cultures (cited in Zaharna 2001) includes time and activity orientation and social relationships:

- *Past-oriented cultures* emphasise history and tradition (e.g. China, Great Britain, eastern European countries).
- *Present-oriented cultures* value the moment (e.g. Mexico, Latin America).
- *Future-oriented cultures* emphasis change, innovation and envision the future (e.g. the USA).

Activity orientation is the way culture views activity:

- *Being orientation* refers to spontaneous, activity, and spiritual rather material values are important (e.g. Asian cultures).
- *Doing orientation* emphasises achievements, visible accomplishments and thrives on action (e.g. the USA).

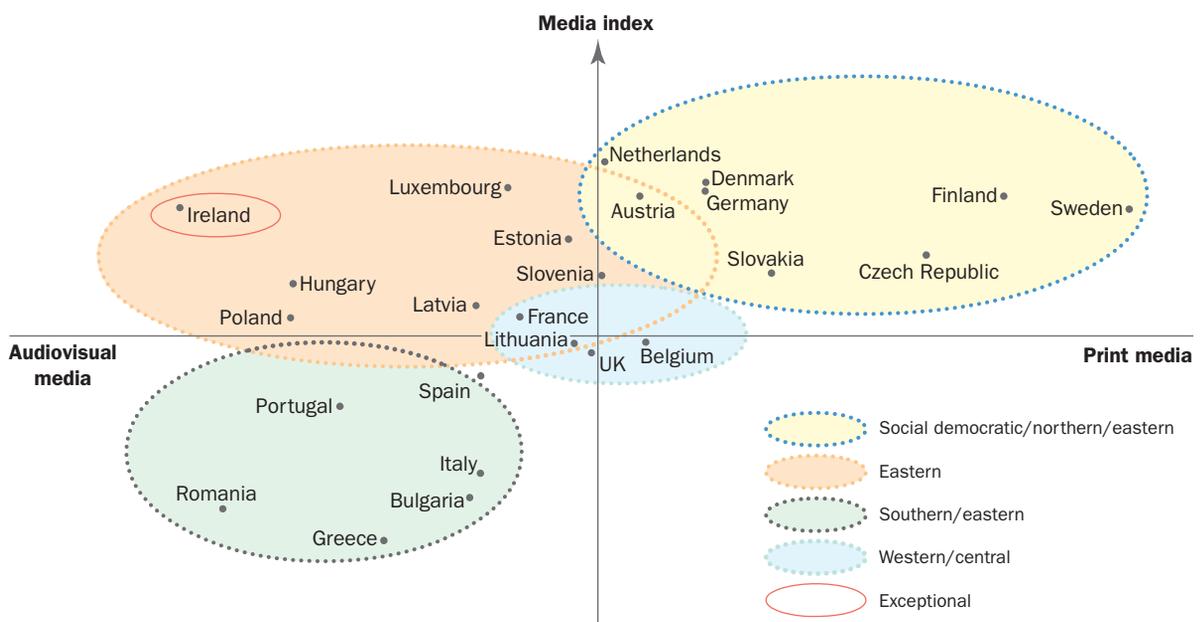


FIGURE 7.7 Media consumption in Europe, 2004 (source: courtesy of Future Foundation 2004)

Relational orientation was not mentioned by Zaharna but the concept of relationship is important in PR. Relational orientation is concerned with the ways in which people perceive their relationships with others. Many Arab cultures believe in *authoritarian relationships*, while *collective* cultures (China, Mexico, Latin America) see groups as the most important social entity. *Individualistic relationship* is based on equal rights for all people (USA).

A *linear culture* stresses the beginnings and ends of events, has unitary themes and relies on empirical evidences. A *non-linear* culture would deal with multiple themes and relies on oral communication. These dimensions are important in planning and coordinating PR activities.

Hofstede investigated the differences in collective behaviour and found five dimensions of societal culture (see also Chapter 17):

- 1 *Power distance* is the extent to which inequality and/or unequal distribution of power is tolerated in society. In high power-distance countries (India, Brazil, Greece) people accept power and authority as facts of life. In organisations it means greater centralisation of power. In low power-distance countries (Finland, Norway, the UK) inequality is often minimised.
- 2 *Individualism* emphasises individual freedom and independence from others, while in a *collective* society people remain attached to tight groups, like family, community or organisation.
- 3 *Masculinity* is the degree to which dominant values are male oriented while cultures that value *femininity* favours caring and nurturing behaviours.

- 4 High *uncertainty avoidance* cultures strive to avoid ambiguity, risk and uncertainty, and fear by establishing formal rules and seeking consensus (Greece, Portugal, Japan). For low uncertainty avoidance cultures, risk and uncertainty are inherent in life (Scandinavian countries, the USA).
- 5 The fifth dimension is about *long-term* versus *short-term orientation*: the time perspective in a society for the gratification of people's needs. Long-term orientation stresses virtuous living in this world, short-term orientation focuses on gratifying needs 'here and now'.

Zaharna's final profile is *communication components*: how cultural differences affect specific, individual PR practices. Verbal and non-verbal communication, visual communication and rhetorical style (the construction of logical arguments and persuasive messages) belong to this profile. The communication matrix consists of the various components of communication and how they relate to each other. Table 7.2 summarises the key dimensions and factors in international programme planning and implementation, based on Zaharna's approach.

It is important to note that research on national cultures has been primarily carried out with western methodologies and biases. The emergence of many new nation-states in eastern Europe as well as in Central Asia, and the opening of China require more research to be carried out with more focus on these countries, including oriental approaches.

While it is true that knowledge about the host country and its culture (including the above mentioned environmental factors) can result in more

TABLE 7.2 An in-awareness approach to international public relations (source: adapted from Zaharna 2001: 144)

| Country profile | Cultural profile | Communication components |
|---|--|--|
| What are the structural features that influence the design and implementation of PR projects? | What are the cultural variations that influence the design and implementation of PR projects? | What are the basic communication components that may be influenced by national or cultural features? |
| <i>Ways of looking at countries</i> Political structure Economic structure Mass media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● control ● outreach ● access Infrastructure Legal structure Social structure Level of activism | <i>Ways of looking at cultures</i> Low/high context Monochronic/polychronic Individualism/collectivism Uncertainty avoidance Masculinity/femininity Power distance Short-term/long-term orientation Activity/being oriented Future/past oriented Linear/non-linear Relationship orientation | <i>Ways of looking at PR activities</i> Verbal communication Non-verbal communication Visual communication Rhetorical style Communication matrix Group dynamics Decision-making practices |

think about 7.3 The importance of language

IPR practitioners need to bridge cultural as well as linguistic gaps. The language of business is English and many organisations throughout Europe or Asia adopt the 'English only' policy. IPR agency network members communicate in English too but the communication between the offices in different countries may be the only intercultural dimension of IPR. Speaking 'the same language' is pivotal in every sense.

English-language slogans are often used in non-English speaking countries. Table 7.3 highlights some well-known multinational companies that also operate in Germany and have used the original slogan without translation, even though only a small number of Germans could actually understand or translate these slogans accurately. Note that even some German companies have used English slogans in Germany.

success, it is also crucial to understand and appreciate the publics' attitudes and opinions in the host country about the parent country in which the MNO is situated or its products are produced.

An often cited aim of PR is *trust* building both nationally and internationally. As we have seen earlier, trust in government, politicians, journalists, media and in businesses varies from country to country. Credibility of these opinion formers and leaders and the institutions they work for may well be different across cultures. The level of trust and credibility may influence the choice of channel being used in the campaign or selecting people to endorse an issue or cause. (See Think about 7.3.)

Public relations culture

Trust in, and credibility of, PR practitioners may differ from country to country, so another factor that can influence PR in an international context is the PR culture of the host country. This is closely related to

the practice and state of the art of the profession and is concerned with:

- the functions of PR in the given country
- the images of PR and PR practitioners among journalists or the general public
- the ethical standards of PR and the level of development of the practice
- the status PR practitioners hold
- the extent to which PR has become professionalised.

Using some of the aforementioned factors in Table 7.2, three main research sources (Sriramesh and Verčić, 2003; van Ruler and Verčić, 2004; Sriramesh, 2004) provide a country-by-country description of how environmental factors have framed practice: the evolution and current state of the art of the profession.

Some interesting questions emerge at this point that need further research:

- Can we say that PR is more developed or sophisticated in certain countries than in others?

TABLE 7.3 Understanding corporate slogans (source: data from Endmark International Namefinding, August 2003, from www.wuv.de/daten/unternehmen/charts/092003/779/)

| Rank | Slogan | Organisation | Fully understood (%) | Believed they had understood (%) |
|------|------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Every time a good time | McDonald's | 59 | 65 |
| 2 | There's no better way to fly | Lufthansa | 54 | 62 |
| 3 | Come in and find out | Douglas | 34 | 54 |
| 4 | Powered by emotion | Sat.1 | 33 | 49 |
| 5 | We are drivers too | Esso | 31 | 44 |
| 6 | Stimulate your senses | Loewe | 25 | 34 |
| 7 | Share moments, share life | Kodak | 24 | 29 |
| 8 | Driven by instinct | Audi TT | 22 | 30 |
| 9 | Where money lives | Citibank | 21 | 34 |
| 10 | Drive alive | Mitsubishi | 18 | 28 |
| 11 | Be inspired | Siemens mobile | 15 | 19 |
| 12 | One group. Multi utilities | RWE | 8 | 15 |

- Is professionalism a good measure of development?
- Will there be a point in time when PR will reach a point of saturation?

PR practice in different countries is at different stages of 'PR's lifecycles'. Central and eastern European as well as Central Asian countries can provide good opportunities to observe the evolution of PR practice, since in most of these formerly communist countries PR was not practised during the centrally planned communist system and modern PR practice is a recent arrival.

Special areas of international public relations

Countries, regions or even cities, as well as multinational organisations, can engage in IPR. The rivalry between London and Paris in 2005 to host the 2012 Olympics is a good example, as both cities competed to impress and convince the International Olympic Committee – and indeed the world – that their capital is better able to host the games. The 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing has not only cast the spotlight on China but has also fuelled the growth of the Chinese PR industry. Mega events, such as the Olympics, are often a focus for international PR activities (Harahousou et al. 2004).

These examples (including the ones in Mini case study 7.7) belong to the promotional dimension of IPR and are closely related to *place branding*. Media relations and events management are of crucial importance in these cases.

Depending on the subject of communication, Table 7.4 summarises the several specialisations of IPR for countries.

The media play a crucial role in each of these specialisations but become more active and participatory as we move from destination branding to perception management (see Figure 7.8, overleaf). Countries can engage in these specialisations to different extents and the emphasis may also vary. What is crucial, however, is the strategic approach to, and the coordination of, these specialisations since a variety of actors can be involved (government, ministry of foreign affairs, ministry of culture, national tourist board, embassies, trade associations, etc.). The aggregate of these dimensions (including the media) will result in country reputation and images.

Images of nations

All these specialisations are closely related to images of different countries. Nations throughout the world have always engaged in image cultivation which often relied on propaganda, especially during wartime (see more on this in Chapter 14). One of the major factors that contributed to the 'reinvention' of PR for nation-states in Europe is the end of the Cold War, which resulted in the emergence of new nation-states throughout central and eastern Europe. These countries have quickly realised the importance of creating new, 'Euro-conform' identities and distanced themselves from the old image of 'eastern Europe', a synonym for communism. Latvia, Croatia, Slovakia and Slovenia are among the newly emerged countries that relied heavily on PR to put the country on the map of Europe and to attract foreign investors, boost tourism or prepare the ground for their most important foreign policy goal: to become members of the European Union, which became a reality for eight eastern European countries in 2004. Image making in these countries soon became institutionalised (e.g. the Latvian Institute or the Country Image Centre in Hungary) and these institutions have been important

mini case study 7.7

Use of international public relations for towns and regions

According to a nationwide survey in 2004, Luton was considered as the ugliest town in the UK. Its council decided to use PR to persuade locals to love their town as well as to promote it abroad, with special regard to its international airport.

The reputation of Bradford suffered in 2001 when street violence broke out triggered by false rumours of attacks on British Asians. The riot was covered extensively in national as well as international media, the

result of which was investors leaving Bradford, with businesses suffering as well as its university (applications for university places dropped because of the problems).

The Öresund Bridge between Denmark and Sweden was inaugurated in 2000. This region was promoted as a transnational region and PR played a crucial role in the formulation and communication of the region.

Table 7.4 Specialisations of international public relations

| Subject | Specialisation | Aim | Examples |
|---|---|--|--|
| Tourism | Destination branding | Attract visitors; boost tourism | Croatia – ‘A small country for a great vacation’, Latvia – ‘The land that sings’, New Zealand – ‘100% Pure New Zealand’ |
| Economic policy | Country (region) branding | To create a ‘country brand’ that will sell products abroad as well as advance commercial interests abroad; to attract investors; to gain competitive advantage; regeneration of regions; export development; to advance ‘country-of-origin’ effect | Estonia – ‘Positively transforming’ Poland – ‘Creative tension’ Scotland – ‘Scotland means business’ Tunisia, Cambodia; European Regional Development Funds |
| Culture (heritage, language, education, sports, films, etc.) | Cultural relations (cultural diplomacy) | Promote culture, language learning; educational exchange; create a favourable opinion about a country; to change negative or false stereotypes | Polish year in Sweden; Erasmus exchange programmes; Olympic Games; Budapest Spring Festival; Cool Britannia; Eurovision Song Contest, BBC World, Deutsche Welle |
| Foreign policy | Public diplomacy | To create a receptive environment for foreign policy goals; to advance these goals; to get countries to change their policies towards others; treaty negotiations; raising international profile of presidents, politicians, countries | US foreign policy; becoming full members of the EU (e.g. Cyprus; Turkey); Germany’s opposition to the war in Iraq; Putin’s presidential election in 2000; head-of-state visits |
| Military policy and operations Anti-democratic regimes’ policies | Propaganda, perception management | To exert strategic influence, coercion, justify military actions, ‘sell’ wars; change regimes; discredit regimes, countries; create crisis situations | US wars in Iraq, Afghanistan; Chinese government’s image campaign after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 |

with regard to national identity and defining how these nations want to be seen by foreign publics. See Box 7.4.

Another driving force behind international governmental PR was the attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, which made the US government realise that its foreign policy objectives and values are not understood by many nations. ‘Why do they hate us?’ was a question many Americans asked. America’s response was multifaceted. Different task forces and ‘think-thanks’ were set up to communicate

US values, policies, ‘images’ to the world mostly, however, as a one-way communication. ‘Branding US’ was one of the responses, which involved the failed advertising efforts in Arab countries. The failure demonstrated that branding in itself is not sufficient, especially if the ‘product’ itself is problematic. The other reason for failure was the lack of systematic research into Arab cultures at the planning stage. The US government had to realise that it was not engaging in two-way symmetrical communication at all. During and after the attacks on Iraq, PR was involved

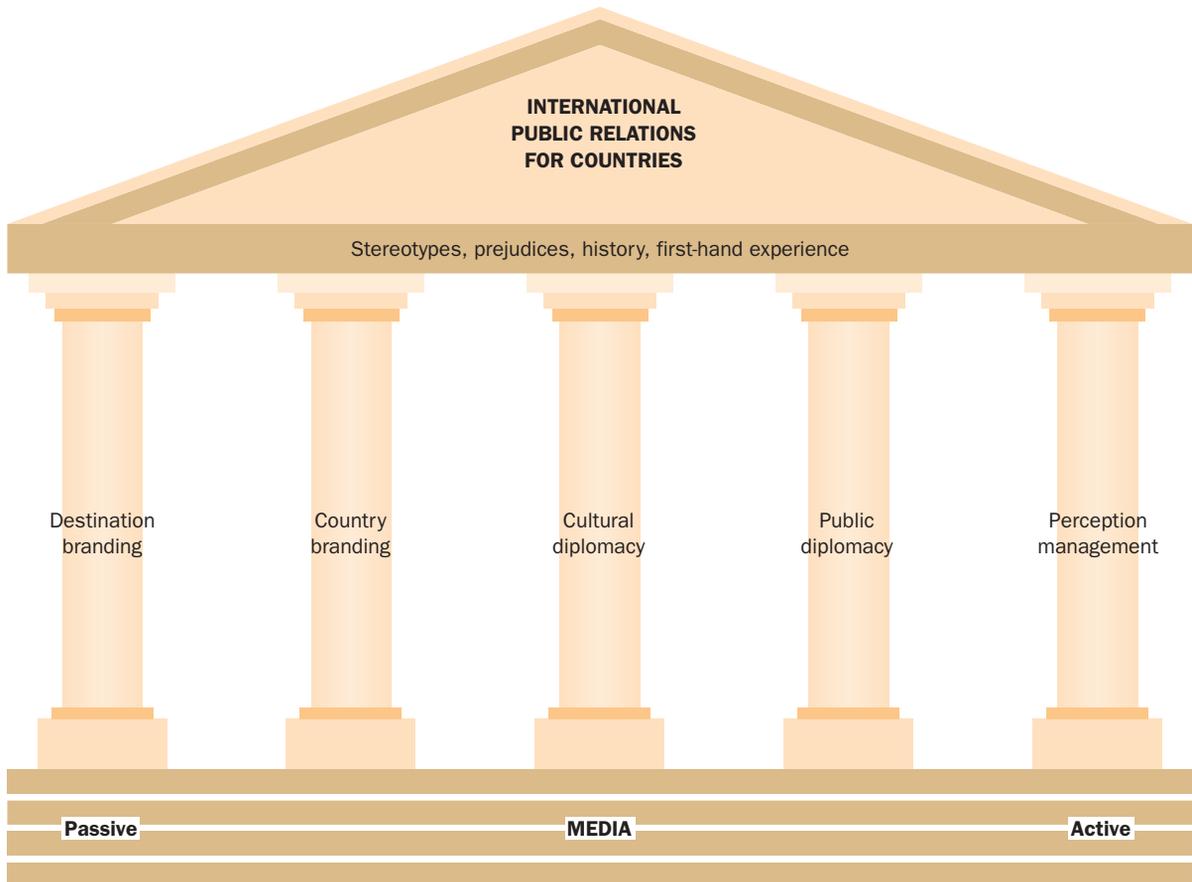


FIGURE 7.8 'Pantheon' of international public relations for countries (source: Szondi 2005)

box 7.4

How to brand a country

Wally Olins, a British branding expert, provided the following seven-step plan to brand a country:

- 1 Set up a working party with representatives of government, industry, the arts, education and the media to start the programme.
- 2 Find out how the nation is perceived both by its own people and by nations abroad through qualitative and quantitative research.
- 3 Develop a process of consultation with opinion leaders to look at national strengths and weaknesses, and compare them with the results of the internal and external studies.
- 4 Create the central idea on which the strategy is based with professional advisors. This needs to be a powerful, simple idea that captures the unique qualities of the nation and can be used as a base from which the entire programme can be developed.
- 5 Develop ways of articulating the central idea visually, including logos.
- 6 Look at how the messages required for tourism, inward investment and export can be coordinated and modulated so that they are appropriate for each audience.
- 7 Create a liaison system through the working party to launch and sustain the programme in government activities and to encourage supportive action from appropriate organisations in commerce, industry, the arts, media and so on.

Source: Olins 1999

in promoting the war effort to the US and UK publics, which was more successful than ‘selling’ or spinning the war for the rest of the world. The USA is said to be the world leader in communication but still has failed to communicate its values. As Ambassador Holbrook asked: ‘How can a man in a cave [referring to Osama Bin Laden] out-communicate the world’s leading communication society?’

After the invasion of Iraq, many people from European and Arab nations expressed their disapproval by negative attitudes and distrust towards American global brands. Consumers ‘voted with their feet’ against the unilateral policy of the USA as their buying behaviour became politicised. In Egypt, for example, several US brands were subjected to boycotting campaigns through leaflets, the internet and text messages. See Activity 7.4.

activity 7.4

The effects on image of the Iraq War

How do you think the war on terror and the war in Iraq have changed the USA’s/Britain’s image abroad? What is the image of the UK in the print media of different countries? Use the web or contacts and try to look at the print media’s view of the UK from other country perspectives. *The Guardian* website offers access to media from different countries at www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/

Public diplomacy

Foreign policies are indeed common objects of IPR for nation-states and the number of PR practitioners and agencies involved in policy communication is on the increase (for example Ketchum, an international PR agency, offers *public diplomacy* as a service as advertised on its website: www.ketchum.com). Public diplomacy is a term used in many different contexts and often as a positive ‘alter ego’ of IPR.

Definition: *Public diplomacy* is a government’s process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding about its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies (Tuch 1990).

Despite its name, public diplomacy hardly ever addresses the ‘general public’ of nations but rather the elite, the opinion formers and decision makers of the target country. Ironically, the Arab terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center were educated and trained in the USA and were subject to the US’s public diplomacy efforts. Many American foreign policy

experts interpreted the 9/11 attack as a failure of US public diplomacy efforts.

During the war on terror, many Arab countries used public diplomacy to distance themselves from an image of terrorists and to dispel any associations or involvement in terrorism. Saudi Arabia, for example, published a position statement in the *Financial Times* in September 2004. The advertisement included the following statements:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is utterly opposed to acts of terrorism, all of which is forbidden by Islam . . . The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia believes that disputes between nations should be resolved by negotiation and, if negotiation fails, by reference to international law, not by acts of aggression or violence . . . Saudi Arabia believes that what unites the peoples of the world is ultimately far more important than what divides them and, despite opposition from those eager to promote a clash of civilisations, the Kingdom will continue to work for mutual respect and increased understanding.

(*Financial Times*, 23 September 2004, p.16)

Taiwan launched an international publicity campaign to get support for its bid to join the World Health Assembly in 2005. Noting that the international community showed sympathy for Taiwan in the wake of China’s enactment of its Anti-Secession Law, the government saw it as a good opportunity for Taiwan to translate the world’s sympathy into support for its efforts to enhance its international profile. Libya hired a lobbyist to help achieve the country’s ‘short-term and long-term goals in enhancing US-Libya relations’ in 2004. Many other governments have hired American PR agencies to represent them and their countries’ interests in the USA. In 1993 Kosovo, threatened by the Serbs, hired Ruder-Finn, an American PR agency to wage an intensive PR campaign in the USA in support of Kosovo and against the ‘evil’ Serbs.

According to Kunczik, a German scholar who has written extensively about images of nations, one of IPR’s main objectives is to establish (or maintain an already existing) positive image of a nation, that is, to appear trustworthy to other actors in the world system by planning and distributing interest-bound information (Kunczik 1997). He distinguishes between *structural IPR* which aims at correcting ‘false’ images previously created by mass media, and *manipulative IPR*, which tries to create a positive image that in most cases does not reflect reality. This latter approach implies ‘perception management’, the war on terror and Iraq being recent examples where the US army and government were creating and managing images of the battlefield and minimising ‘collateral damage’ with the help of Britain’s best-known spin doctor, Alistair Campbell.

**box
7.5**
UK and Germany: in each other's eyes

Following the major diplomatic rift between Britain and Germany over the Iraq War, the British Council and the Goethe Institute conducted one of the first opinion surveys of young people in both countries in 2003. The ambiguous relationship between Germany and the UK seems set to continue.

Nearly half of young Germans have a positive or very positive view of Britain, with the English language, the monarchy and the modern, multicultural nature of British society all being especially popular. Eighty-one per cent remember at least one British celebrity, with Robbie Williams, the late Princess of Wales and the Queen being most well known.

Only 11% of Germans have a negative or very negative view of Britain, with political issues being cited as the main reasons for the dislike, particularly the strong British relationship with the USA, a perceived British antipathy to the European Union and issues surrounding the Iraq War being quoted most often. Interestingly, more German youth dislike Germany (17%) than dislike Britain.

Thirty-seven per cent of British youth are positive or very positive about Germany, with German beer, schools and sports coming just ahead of an admiration for the perceived strength of the German economy and the quality of German cars.

Seventeen percent of British youth have a negative or very negative opinion of Germans; a persisting memory of German militarism, perceived right-wing extremism and a lack of German manners or humour are all strong factors. A lack of German trendiness was felt in the UK, with 64% of British respondents unable to name a single German celebrity, although Claudia Schiffer was known to a minority.

Britain features more strongly on the German radar than vice versa, with more than half of German young people having visited the UK. Only one-third of young Britons surveyed have been to Germany. Nearly 100% of young Germans have some knowledge of English, with 25% being fluent English speakers. Less than a quarter of their British counterparts claim to have any knowledge of German.

Source: www.britishcouncil.de

A lack of public diplomacy may well be labelled as a 'PR disaster'. *PR war* is another frequently used term between nation-states, mostly by journalists and in a negative context. It refers to the negotiation process and disagreement between organisations and their publics or between nations.

Cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy is concerned with promoting cultural 'products' such as books, films, TV and radio programmes, art exhibitions, concerts as well as languages abroad. The ultimate goal is to make foreign publics familiar with a nation, its people, culture and language and to create a favourable opinion about the country. The British Council, the Goethe Institute, the Institut Française or the Hungarian Cultural Institute are the leading institutions of cultural

promotions for Britain, Germany, France and Hungary respectively. The British Council's main objective is 'to build mutually beneficial relationships between people in the UK and other countries and increase appreciation of the UK's creative ideas and achievements'. These institutions conduct research about the perceptions of their own countries and peoples abroad and aim to improve this 'image', which is often based on prejudices or stereotypes. Read the research in Box 7.5 about how British and German young people perceived each other's country and people. See Think about 7.4.

The findings presented in Box 7.5 and the fact that only 1% of British people go on holiday to Germany are signs of lack of interest in, and knowledge of, Germany. In November 2004 Germany launched an IPR campaign in the UK to counteract the negative image British citizens hold about the Germans and German history and to attract more tourists. This

think about 7.4 Images of nations

Are you aware of any study or research that focuses on *your* country's images abroad? Have there been attempts to brand your country abroad? Were they successful?

Compare your image of a country before and after you or a friend visited it. What was your earlier image based on? Did it change? If so, why and how?

may be due to British history teaching, which focuses on the Nazi period. One of the strategies was to invite history teachers from Britain to Germany and 'to educate them about another Germany'. The British media have been accused of perpetuating a 'goose-stepping' image of Germany that was three generations out of date. Prince Harry's appearance as a Nazi officer at a fancy-dress party in January 2005 caused heated debates both in Germany and in the UK.

Germany's case demonstrates that each pillar of the pantheon (presented in Figure 7.8) plays a crucial role. Germany's strongest pillar in the UK is 'country branding': German products are associated with quality, reliability and high performance, the trade mark 'Made in Germany' speaks for itself. Germany as a tourist destination – destination branding pillar – remains the weakest one, while Germany's cultural diplomacy efforts are somewhere in between. In other countries, however, the picture may well be rather different. Germany's position on the war in Iraq (public diplomacy pillar) improved the country's perception in Russia. Research in 2004 confirmed that 62% of Russians surveyed said that their image of Germany improved as a result of its opposition to the war (see <http://www.dw-world.de>).

IPR campaigns can address only one of the four subjects at a time (for example, tourism or foreign policy) but in order to be successful and coherent the other dimensions must be taken into considerations too. The most important PR activities in IPR campaigns for nation-states are:

- (international) media relations, media monitoring
- events management
- public affairs, lobbying
- public opinion polls, opinion leader research

- image surveys
- advocacy advertisements
- international marketing PR
- (political) crisis management.

See Activity 7.5.

activity 7.5

Developing a country's image

The Hungarian government has approached you and your London-based PR firm to promote Hungary's image in the UK. What are the key issues that must be addressed by a PR campaign? What type of research would you need to conduct? What is the current image of Hungary in the British print media?

Feedback

Apply the pantheon of international public relations for countries (see Figure 7.8).

The number of communication-related professions (diplomacy, PR, advertising, marketing, lobbying) and professionals is increasing, and more and more of them communicate across cultures and with different peoples. These communication professions have started to 'cross-fertilise', testing the boundaries and the validity of each discipline and often encroaching on each other's territory. Public diplomacy is one example of a specialisation in IPR.

Public relations' influence on society

Many scholars maintain that PR is practised only in and by democracies, although there are examples

mini case study 7.8

The 'Latin American school'

The social role of PR is truly reflected in the special characteristics of the Latin American school of thought.

The social and economic imbalance in the countries of Latin America is a major factor in the development of the Latin American PR practice where PR practitioners are active agents of social and political transformation. The Latin American school:

- focuses on the community's interest
- contributes to the well-being of the human, urban and social environments in which organisations operate
- responds to the history and socio-economic reality of the region

- sees PR practitioners as agents of social transformation
- must be embedded in the idea of freedom, justice, harmony and equality
- establishes confidence without manipulation and uses communication to reach accord, consensus and integrated attitudes between an organisation and its publics
- fundamentally views PR as essential for integration and consensus.

Source: Molleda 2000: 520

mini case study 7.9

Evolution of public relations in eastern Europe

PR's evolution in central and eastern Europe has been rather rapid in comparison with western European or American practices. The political and economic changes between 1989 and 1992 enabled PR to gain grounding in the region. Turning centrally planned economies into free market economies in a very short period of time presented great challenges, not only for companies, but for the whole society as well. PR agencies played a significant role in the privatisation of state owned companies as a part of supporting market reforms after the fall of communism.

In many central and eastern European countries the local branches of the international agencies were initially often set up and headed by professionals who had been living and working in the USA or the UK. Another common practice was that American or western European PR practitioners headed the national offices of an international PR network (Szondi 2004a).

Polish PR scholar Ławniczak (2001) characterised the early years of central and eastern European PR practice as *transition public relations*. This has helped organisations to adapt to the change from a centrally planned economy to market economies. The main tasks of transition PR are:

- to build an image of 'capitalism with a human face' in order to secure public acceptance for economic reforms
- to create public awareness of the wide range of possible alternative market economy models
- to facilitate effective functioning of a market economy by promoting entrepreneurship and privatisation, attracting foreign investment and introducing market economy instruments and institutions.

when this was not the case (e.g. China's government, see Think about 7.1, earlier). Previously in this chapter, we have seen how PR can be used by governments and nation-states to influence overseas publics.

The effects and influence of PR practices on society at large can be manifold. PR can help to:

- maintain the status quo (western democracies)
- integrate a society (after the collapse of the Soviet Union many Russians remained in the Baltic States and PR has been used to integrate Estonians and Russians)
- transform a society (Latin America, see Mini case study 7.8) or economy (eastern Europe, see Mini case study 7.9)
- build nations (Malaysia, East Timor)
- disintegrate countries, regimes (e.g. Yugoslavia, or Hill and Knowlton's infamous case about using alleged Iraqi atrocities to mobilise public opinion for a war against Iraq in 1991).

Public relations for a supranational organisation: the European Union

PR for and in the European Union (EU) is a massive operation, a very complex and multifaceted process, which presents serious challenges for the PR practitioners involved. The Barroso Commission recognised

the strategic importance of communication and created a new post of 'Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy' in 2004. A Swedish politician, Margot Wallström, became the Commissioner, responsible for: press and institutional relations; Eurobarometer (which monitors EU citizens' opinions on a variety of issues); and representation offices, which represent the EU in different countries. She is often referred to as 'the Commissioner of PR'. In 2004, 10 new member states from central and eastern Europe joined the EU and EU leaders agreed on a European constitution, about which referendums were scheduled for 2005 and 2006.



PICTURE 7.1 Margot Wallström, EU Commissioner (Source: European Commission Audio Visual Library.)

'Internal communication' within the EU means the strategic function of communicating with the political elite of 25 member states as well as with their 'general publics'. It is a complex intercultural communication exercise to bring Europe 'closer to the people'. Apathy towards EU affairs is prevalent and manifested in the very low turnout in European elections and referendums (Szondi 2004b; see also Chapter 5 for more on referendums). The EU is seen by many as a gigantic bureaucratic organisation with grey 'eurocrats' who often speak in an unintelligible way, using 'eurospeak'.

The main difficulties lie in the abstract and intangible nature of the EU and its institutions. EU communication has often been labelled as elitist and not directed towards the citizens. The communication deficit is a real challenge to be overcome. European values should be at the heart of EU identity as well as communication strategies. In spite of the fact that the EU's identity is still emerging, the EU has become a brand in itself. Creating and communicating an 'EU identity' is an evolving process that involves the expertise of PR practitioners as well.

The concepts of identity, images and reputation (see Chapter 13) can be applied to the EU, as an organisation as well, although these – and other concepts of PR – are still to be 'discovered' and fully utilised by the EU. Rem Koolhaas, a Dutch architect designed a logo for the EU, which struggles with an 'iconographic deficit': despite the fact that the EU is full of symbols (blue flag with the stars, anthem, passports) it cannot get across a more subtle message about Europe.

The 'EU brand' is not only relevant in an internal but also in an external context: how does the EU 'communicate' with other similar (supranational) organisations or with countries outside the EU? IPR – in the form of public diplomacy – plays a crucial role not only in creating an EU identity but also in communicating it and nurturing the image of the EU outside Europe.

Media relations remains by far the most popular strategy for the EU and its institutions and committees to communicate with citizens (see Box 7.6). A substantial number of journalists are based in Brussels. They attend press conferences, one-to-one briefings,

box 7.6

The European Union's media relations

The Directorate General Press and Communication (DG Press) works under the authority of the President. Its mission is to:

- inform the media and citizens of the activities of the Commission and to communicate the objectives and goals of its policies and actions
- inform the Commission of the evolution of opinion in the member states.

In order to accomplish its mission, DG Press:

- coordinates the activities of the representations in the member states
- centralises all contacts with the media
- seeks to ensure a coherent approach to communication and information issues within the Commission.

This involves contacts with Directorates General (DGs) and services within the Commission that have information units responsible for sectoral information. The DGs responsible for external relations provide information to citizens of third countries including information for the general public in applicant states.

As regards media activities, the role of the Press and Communication Directorate General is to:

- be available to journalists to explain and inform them on EU policies and the Commission's initiatives
- hold daily press briefings at midday in the Commission's press room
- organise press conferences for the Commissioners as well as technical briefings for high-level officials
- provide and distribute press material (press releases, background notes, etc.) and audiovisual material (photo, sound, video)
- hold interviews and bilateral briefings for journalists
- fix up interviews and briefings with Commissioners or officials
- organise accreditation for journalists, and TV crews and photographers
- inform national and regional media in the member states through the Commission's representations
- coordinate internet activities (Europa website).

read online press releases and strive for exclusive stories. It is rather difficult to ‘spin’ stories related to EU affairs; finding an interesting angle of an issue or policy is most crucial as oversimplification often prevails. If there is a success story, the member states are quick to attribute it to themselves while unpopular EU issues are attributed to ‘Brussels’.

Politicians usually use the media to get publicity for themselves but in the minds of the viewers or readers they are associated with the EU which can result in diminishing the credibility of EU communication. When journalists report from Brussels they usually show smiling politicians, the buildings of the different institutions or the flying flags of the member states that visually represent the EU because topics themselves can be detailed and lack colour.

Crisis communication and management is one of the most important areas in which the EU needs to develop a common approach. Political and military crises have received more attention but crises in the civil sphere will further challenge the EU. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster, natural catastrophes like floods, fires, heat waves, or health-related crises like the Coca-Cola case in Belgium and the CJD/mad cow disease are good examples of international communication – or PR – crises (see also Chapter 20). Of these cases, the most controversial was the CJD/mad cow disease, which called for more coordination and co-operation among the member states and better communication between the decision makers and the European publics.

The most practised strategy in the EU context is *lobbying* at the decision makers to pursue the interests of corporations. International PR agencies recognised early on the need to set up or move their European headquarters from London to Brussels, where about 15,000 registered lobbying practitioners are based (not counting individual firms, CEOs or law firms). The total number of people somehow involved in lobbying is estimated at 80,000 (see also Chapter 23).

Critical voices in international public relations

IPR – as the war on terror and Iraq demonstrated – could easily be propagandistic in nature or used to ‘quick-fix’ a tarnished image or justify actions retrospectively. More visibility and transparency will be demanded not only from MNOs but from PR practitioners as well in the future. According to Kunczik (1997), PR is often perceived as ‘the art of camouflaging and deceiving and it is assumed that for public relations to be successful, target groups . . . do not

notice that they have become the ‘victims’ of public relations efforts’.

Several pressure groups and some scholars view PR in a negative context: it helps multinational organisations maintain their dominance or justify their actions. The ‘lobbying machinery’ of Brussels, with its lack of transparency has been the subject of many critical voices. These voices accuse PR of ‘greenwashing’ corporate images to make them appear more environmentally friendly or socially conscious (Balanyá et al. 2003). See Activity 7.6.

activity 7.6

Monitoring critical voices

Visit the website of Spinwatch, an organisation that aims ‘to foster greater public and political awareness of spin and to campaign against the manipulations of the PR industry in the public interest’ (www.spinwatch.server101.com/index.php © 2004 spinwatch). Read some of the articles or case studies that have an international focus. What issues are being raised? What types of challenges are being made against the organisation(s)? Do you agree with them? If you represented the organisation, how would you respond? (See also Chapter 14 for discussion of propaganda.)

Professionalism on a global level: public relations as a global profession

Global PR refers to the *internationalisation of the practice*, namely that PR activities are carried out throughout the globe. This phenomenon is one of the direct consequences of IPR activities. PR is becoming a global profession.

The number of international and *global associations* is on the increase: the International Public Relations Associations (IPRA) promotes the practice of PR on a global scale; the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management unites national associations worldwide; the International Communications Consultancy Organisation (ICCO) is an umbrella association for more than 850 consultancies, through their trade associations in 24 countries.

IPRA adopted a formal *code of conduct* in 1961, and four years later an international code of ethics, the ‘Code of Athens’. ICCO’s professional code is called the ‘Rome Charter’, while Global Alliance developed the Global Protocol of Ethics, which was introduced in Rome in 2003 (see also Chapter 15).

Not only do these associations safeguard professional values through their guidelines, codes of conduct and activities, but they also contribute a great

deal towards professionalisation on a global level and aim to enhance the reputation of the PR profession worldwide.

Since American and British practices often serve as models for PR practitioners all over the world, Anglo-American practitioners' responsibility is even bigger. Practitioners worldwide will need to join efforts to fight negative practice and build a better reputation of the profession.

Accreditation and certification of PR practitioners by professional organisations have long been on the agenda, not only at national but at a global level as well. (See Activity 7.7.)

activity 7.7

National associations

Go to the website of one or two of the above mentioned associations and browse through them. What are the benefits of joining that particular association? Try to find out what the latest trends in IPR are.

Go to the website of PRIME, which is one of the very few international PR students' associations (www.prime-europe.org). Join the organisation.

As far as the *international body of knowledge* is concerned, theoretical concepts and models are being developed, tested and advanced. Unfortunately, there are only very few books that deal with international or global PR, but this is likely to change in the near future. Separate bodies of knowledge seem to be emerging in a European, South American and Asian context, complementing – or perhaps competing against – Anglo-American theory and practice.

A great deal of effort is made by European PR scholars to identify and clearly distinguish a European body of knowledge, which differs from that of its American counterpart (European Public Relations Body of Knowledge project, EBOK). The Latin American School of Public Relations turned away from the North American approach as early as the 1960s, as an expression of independence and emancipation from imported models (Molleda 2000).

In academic journals, like *Public Relations Review*, the *Journal of Communication Management* or the *Journal of Public Relations Research*, the number of articles with an international focus or relevance is on the increase. Professional and trade journals regularly cover international topics, case studies and practices. One of the latest initiatives has been a truly international PR journal (with a possible launch date in 2007), the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*.

There are international associations that are concerned with *research*, *education* or *academia* such as the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), which unites academics mostly from Europe but from other continents as well. The international body of knowledge is increased by research and is shared and stimulated by international conferences and forums, such as EUPRERA's annual conferences. Another important international conference that brings together educators from all over the world is the International Public Relations Research Symposium, which is held in Bled, Slovenia, every year (papers and details can be found at www.bledcom.com).

During the last couple of years, new courses and modules have been developed in IPR. These include undergraduate and postgraduate university degrees that have an international focus such as the Master in European Public Relations (MARPE), which is delivered in an English-language version jointly by Leeds Metropolitan University and the Dublin Institute in Ireland (see Box 7.7). German, French and Iberian lines are also under development (see MARPE's website: www.master-pr.org). See Activity 7.8.

activity 7.8

Dissertation topics

Many of you will have to think about a major research project, dissertation or thesis to write during your studies. Here are a few dissertation topic ideas related to IPR that may help you think about what is possible to research in this area. Your task is to think of more. Where are the gaps? What is not understood? Or what is under-researched?

- Does culture shape the practice of PR or PR efforts affect culture?
- What is the level of professionalisation in your country?
- Explore the public diplomacy activities: of a country; in your country; or what your country does in another one.
- What is the relationship between national culture and corporate culture of a multinational organisation (MNO)?
- To what extent can a company be global without losing its national identity? Does global branding always pay off?
- Using the agenda-setting model, analyse an international campaign, the ways it influenced the different agendas and its impact.
- Select an area of PR (internal communication, crises communication, corporate social responsibility, media relations) and using concepts from this and other chapters, explore its international dimensions (on behalf of a multinational for-profit organisation or NGO).

box
7.7
An example of an international MA programme, MARPE

The MARPE curriculum delivered by Leeds Metropolitan University and the Dublin Institute of Technology has a two-semester structure as follows:

Semester 1:

- Theories of Public Relations
- Media and the Public Sphere in the European Union
- Public Affairs and Lobbying in the European Context
- Research Methods.

Semester 2:

- Ethical Communication Management
- Corporate and Specialist Public Relations
- Options (e.g. International Marketing Communication, Brand Management, International Business Environment)
- Dissertation.

Source: www.leedsmet.ac.uk

Summary

This chapter has outlined the main dimensions and elements of IPR, an area still in its infancy. We have identified the main actors in IPR and analysed the different driving forces behind internationalisation and their impact on the practice of PR. PR for countries, regions, cities, as well as for international organisations, is crucial to build a positive reputation abroad. The EU as a supranational as well as a multinational organisation presents a variety of challenges for PR practitioners.

IPR for countries is rather fragmented in the forms of destination and nation branding or public diplomacy;

more strategic and coordinated approaches will need to be adopted in the future.

The emergence of new market economies and the ongoing democratisation of Asian countries (facilitated by western PR) will mean that western approaches and theory building will need to incorporate and understand oriental as well as African values, philosophies and practices. PR will become a truly global profession only if and when the world's different philosophies, economies and cultures are reflected and incorporated both in theory and practice.

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