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Recruiting local public relations professionals for global public relations practice: A comparative analysis between Australian and Indian public relations recruitment advertisements

Chandni Gupta & Jennifer Bartlett

Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Abstract

The aim of this exploratory study was to gain an insight into Asian and Western public relations practices by investigating them through job advertisements and thus reflecting on what organisations expect from their public relations professionals. Grunig's (1984) four models of public relations and the concept of relationship management were used as the foundation for this study. Australia was used to represent the Western region and India was used to represent the Asian region. Sample sets of public relations recruitment advertisements from both countries were examined against Grunig's one-way communication, two-way communication and relationship management attributes.

Introduction

The public relations profession exists across the world within different cultures and organisations. As a profession, its objective is to maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics. The public relations profession as practised today is based on the theoretical foundation built by academics in the western society. However, practitioners from some parts of the world struggle to often put into practice theories such as the two-way symmetrical communication developed by Grunig (1984) that their western counterparts seem to implement so effortlessly (Verčič, van Ruler, Bütschi & Flodin, 2001).

Understanding the practice of public relations globally goes beyond acknowledging the theories (mostly

westernised) developed in this field. It is about understanding the practice at ground-level and being aware of influences that shape the profession. One way to understand the practice is to examine the first point of the profession – recruitment of the public relations professional. In this project, a comparative analysis has been conducted between Australian (Western) and Indian (Asian) recruitment advertisements for public relations professionals. The aim of this pilot study was to examine the differences between the Australian and Indian ideal public relations professional. This in turn will help explain why there is a difference between the western and eastern way of practicing public relations and how this difference influences business practices worldwide.

Literature review

Application of Grunig's four models

Grunig (1984) developed the four models of public relations (press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical). Public relations scholars in the western regions such as Australia, often prescribe the two-way symmetrical model as the ideal communication model that should be implemented by all public relations practitioners. Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) suggest that public relations can have an impact in shaping mutually beneficial relationships necessary for organisational survival and success, and two-way symmetrical communication is a key foundation in achieving this. Statements such as these exemplify public relations as a dominant and powerful industry, having the influence to

shape business practices and the societies surrounding it. However, Yungwook and Childers (1998) found that although two-way symmetrical is hailed as being the most effective, western corporations mainly practise the two-way asymmetrical model. Thus, even in western regions, two-way symmetrical communication is a normative model and is rarely practised.

When the two-way symmetrical model is examined in Asia, the conclusions are not so positive. Current research confirms that within Asia, one-way communication models such as press-agentry/publicity and public information are by far the most popular models. Park (2003) also claims that although Asian practitioners understand the four models, implementing two-way symmetrical model for them is no more than wishful thinking. Lim, Goh and Sriramesh (2005) studied Singapore's practitioners and found that 82% of respondents believed that publicity was the main purpose of public relations. There is distinct division on the practicality of the two-way communication models between western and Asian regions.

By purely examining the regions through the lens of the four models of public relations, an array of differences have already emerged. It is important now to unravel the differences even further. Given that a number of differences can be identified with both regions having a preference to particular models, the practice of public relations within each of these regions needs to be considered more carefully.

Relationship management

It has also been determined that although the use of two-way communication models is not so apparent in Asian countries, relationship management is inherent in all parts of the work they do. Johansson (2007) suggests that interpersonal relationships and communication as yet have not attracted too much attention, even though the public relations profession today must comprise sophisticated relationship building and communication initiatives with both internal

and external publics. Bruning, DeMiglio and Embry (2006) concur by suggesting that those relationships that are managed well can provide organisations with a meaningful competitive advantage. To further complement this argument, Ni (2006) suggests that networks and relationships offer the kind of unique competitive advantage that is difficult to imitate. Dozier, Grunig and Grunig (1995) have also confirmed the value of relationships within the public relations profession and suggest that the benefits of relationship management are best seen when they can assist an organisation during crises.

There are two relationship management models that seem to dominate the practice of public relations in Asian countries – personal influence and cultural interpreter models. The personal influence model involves the development of key and meaningful contacts and the cultural interpreter model plays a vital role in multi-national corporations, where public relations practitioners are hired to interpret cultural norms to these foreign companies (Grunig, Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995).

Sriramesh, Kim and Takasaki (1999) suggest that throughout Asia, there is a quid pro quo relationship between public relations practitioners and key personnel from government regulators to media persons. Research by Lim, Goh and Sriramesh (2005) established that 70% of practitioners in Asia developed and maintained key relationships with media, economists, analysts, government officials and industry experts. Toth (2000) identified that practitioners using the personal influence model are doing so with those individuals/stakeholders who are linked with the organisation and to some extent are an active public. Hence by building a relationship with these publics, whether it is by requesting favours or by providing them, they are notionally engaging and working with the public in relation to organisational issues. So, while the western practitioners are building mutually beneficial relationships with their publics through two-way asymmetrical communication or two-way symmetrical communication, Asian practitioners are instead

building these same mutually beneficial relationships with targeted, key, strategic and influential individuals within their community.

Various models have been examined for both regions by considering an array of region-specific public relation practices in Asia and the West. In order to understand the differing practices, there is a need to examine an element such as business practices.

Business practices within Asia

As shown earlier, public relations practice differs significantly in Asia. This section will highlight the link between business practices and the practice of public relations. Coombs, Holladay, Hasenauer and Signitzer (1994) indicated that public relations being an organisational function is impacted by the way the business operates. This substantiates the view that public relations cannot be practiced in isolation or deviate from current corporate structures and cultures. The Asian region brings its own unique practices to the corporate environment, having an effect on other domains within the business. Below is a comparative analysis of business practices between the Asian and western regions:

Shareholder influence

In a western region such as Australia, dominant stakeholders are often external shareholders. However, in Asia, community and family networks influence business structure. The board of management is forever mindful of the family and government network, usually at the expense of minor investors (Kimber & Lipton, 2005). This identifies the clear disparity of power and presence of inequality in the Asian region, in comparison with the West.

Workplace environment

Independent trade unions and associations often represent employees in western regions. However, in many Asian countries, employees are closely aligned to a caste community or to business owners. Trade unions exist but are easily influenced via

loyalty to the company (Kimber & Lipton, 2005).

Personal influence

Personal influence model plays a key role in the Asian region. In the western regions, there is a clear distinction between personal and business relationships, but in most Asian countries, the relationships are often blurred (So & Walker, 2005). While in western regions, family relationships are often hidden during business negotiations to avoid conflict of interest, in Asian regions, any perceivable relationship with the other party is identified and emphasised (Reynolds & Valentine, 2004). Sriramesh (as cited in Grunig et al., 1995) states that it is not uncommon to, "invite key individuals to family celebrations such as marriages" (p. 180). This shapes the basis for practitioners to implement such unique relationship management models such as the personal influence model for public relations-based activities, as only then the public relations strategies will work well in such a society.

Cultural practices

The region-specific business customs seen in the paper so far provide legitimate reasoning for the variation in the public relations practice in the three regions. However, to understand this legitimacy further, it is essential to examine the culture - the initial influence of elements such as business and society. Reynolds and Valentine (2004) suggest that culture, "creates a worldview, a unique perspective of reality, a distinctive set of beliefs, values and attitudes" (p. 1). Schepers (2006) adds to this and proposes that culture has a strong influence on an individual's awareness and reasoning. This suggests that the influence can then transcend to the wider community and filter through each element within that culture.

Cultural dimensions and topoi are often referred to in public relations literature, where culture is discussed as a key influence on the practice. The relevant research conducted by Hofstede (2001) on cultural dimensions and Leichty and Warner (2001) on cultural topoi is

used to analytically compare the culture within the two regions and identify the most dominant dimensions and topoi existing within each region.

For the purposes of this literature review, the following dimensions and topoi will be discussed: collectivism vs individualism, fatalist topoi, hierarchy and power distance. Table 1 summarises the results for each of the regions and portrays the most dominant dimensions and topoi for both regions. According to the study conducted by Hofstede (2001), the Asian region

predominantly had significantly higher power distance than the western region and dimensions such as collectivism were prevalent throughout its countries. The major cultural topoi present in Asia were fatalist and hierarchical. This is the complete opposite of the results acquired by the western region, which topped in individualism and had relatively low power distance. This already begins to explain the vast difference between the Asian and western region's approach to business practices.

Table 1: Most prevalent cultural topoi and dimensions for each region*

Region	Cultural topoi	Cultural dimensions
Asian	Fatalist Hierarchical	Collectivism Large power distance
Western	Autonomous individualist Competitive individualist	Individualism Small power distance

*Source: Developed by authors, based on research by Hofstede (2001) and Leichty and Warner (2001)

Collectivism vs individualism

Collectivism is very prominent in almost all Asian countries, while individualism is the major feature of western countries. Even in Leichty and Warner's (2001) cultural topoi, the West predominantly showcased autonomous individualist and the competitive individualist topoi. Leichty (2003) suggests that especially the "...competitive individualist's voice is a powerful voice in the dominant public relations coalition" (p. 296).

Harmony is another aspect of collectivism that is readily used in the Asian region. Rhee (2002) defines harmony as "...overcoming individuality to maintain harmony in the family" (p. 162). Family is often seen as the prototype of social organisations. So and Walker (2005) also suggest that often in Asia individuality is set aside to avoid disturbing family harmony and often people will place family priorities above their own. These features of the Asian region provide the

rationale for family-oriented businesses to still dominate the region.

Fatalist

The fatalist cultural topoi is specific to the Asian region. Leichty (2003) explains the fatalist phenomenon as follows:

Fatalist culture does not consider public relations to be a self-defining and self-regulating system. Public relations is whatever top management says it is: a marginal organizational function that is not seated at the management roundtable (p. 283)

The fatalist culture links directly to the personal influence model. Leichty and Warner (2001) describe the culture's decision principle as "let fate decide" (p. 66). This echoes the observation made by Maiti (2002) that regardless of India's advancement in education and technology, the majority of people rely heavily upon astrology for guidance in business and personal endeavours. This is certainly not the viewpoint taken on by the West, yet Asian

public relations practitioners are potentially idealising communication models that clearly do not sit comfortably within their culture.

Hierarchy and power distance

The West scores relatively low in power distance as managers rely more on personal experience rather than authority for decision making (Hofstede, 2001). Reynolds and Valentine (2004) discussed that hierarchical structures helped maintain harmony in Asia, hence portraying the clear link between hierarchy and collectivism. Such thinking transfers to the business world where structurally hierarchy is preferred, despite the inequality amongst managers and workers. Holtzhausen, Peterson & Tindall (2003) suggest that within the Asian region, "...hierarchical and Confucianism would make two-way symmetry culturally impractical and unacceptable" (p. 310).

It has been identified that culture impacts on not only individuals in the society but also organisations, which in turn will affect the functions with the organisation, such as finance, human resources and even public relations. Coombs et al. (1994) suggest that organisational behaviour is directly impacted by culture and since public relations is a form of organisational behaviour; it too will be affected by culture. Another function that is bound to be impacted by the varying cultural and business practices is recruitment.

Research gaps

Asia brings an array of unique cultural, business and social aspects to influence the practice of public relations within its society. However, the need to understand the public relations profession within this region goes beyond merely appreciating the diversity. The current major research gap is in relation to the lack of recent literature that specifically focuses on particular countries within Asia. Asia is often discussed in literature only in its entirety. For example, any indepth studies on India are at least 10 years old. There is also a lack of defined linkages between public relations and business functions such as recruitment, even

though public relations itself is defined as a business function.

Research method

For the purposes of this exploratory study, India and Australia were chosen to represent the Asian and western regions respectively for pragmatic reasons. The following research question was used to understand the link between business and public relations in these regions: What can we learn about the difference between the Indian and Australian public relations professions by examining the recruitment advertisements for a public relations professional of both countries?

Sample

A purposeful sampling approach was used in this study as a targeted sample was required. The sub-sampling approach was quota sampling and included 10 public relations recruitment advertisements from each country. All Australian advertisements were sourced from Seek (www.seek.com.au), which is Australia's largest job site. All Indian advertisements were sourced from Naukri.com (www.naukri.com), which is India's largest job site.

The sites were visited daily for a period of two weeks to source advertisements that were deemed relevant for this study. Relevance was determined by the following:

- The advertisement must contain at least three attributes in the form of duties, experience required or qualifications.
- The title of the job must contain one or more of the following terms – public relations, communication, media or public relations.
- If the title contains the communication term, it must not contain the term marketing communications, as this does not relate to the public relations profession.
- The job must exist in the country it was being advertised. For example, a job based in London but advertised on Seek would not be accepted in the sample.

By the end of two weeks, 10 public relations recruitment advertisements were finalised using the above criteria.

Data and analysis approach

Data was mapped in two stages of data collection and data mapping. For the data collection phase, a data sheet was developed to capture the public relations attributes listed in each advertisement. Once data sheets were completed for all advertisements, they were mapped on an analysis sheet which was

developed specifically for this study. The data were then mapped across three models – one-way communication, two-way communication and relationship management.

To showcase the data analysis approach, **Figures 1 and 2** (below) are examples of advertisements (Indian and Australian) with marked examples of the three models:

Figure 1: Indian advertisement with sample attributes from each of the three models

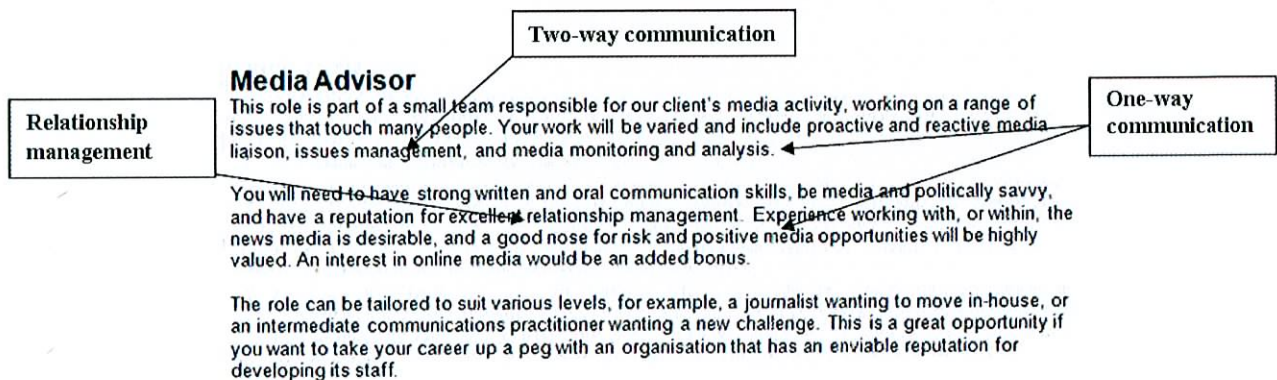


Figure 2: Australian advertisement with sample attributes from each of the three models



Results and discussion

On the surface, the ideal attributes of public relations professionals in India and Australia seem relatively similar, as shown in Table 2. All advertisements (n=10) from both countries had attributes relating to one-way communication and relationship management,

yet they had radically low evidence of two-way communication attributes in comparison with the other two models. This is a clear indication that heavy use of one-way communication is not exclusively to India but is still quite prevalent in a western region such as Australia.

Table 2: Number of advertisements covering attributes for each model

Country	One-way communication attributes	Two-way communication attributes	Relationship management attributes
Australia	10	4	10
India	10	5	10

Even in a westernised region such as Australia, only 40% of the advertisements covered two-way communication attributes, which was a lower percentage than India, which scored 50%. Even with various business and cultural differences between the two regions, two-way communication still seems to be a model that practitioners across the globe are finding difficult to implement. This confirms doubts raised by Yungwook and Childers (1998) who suggest that even western regions struggle to implement the full breadth of the model.

Although, at a glance, the requirements of an

ideal public relations professional look similar, once attributes in each model were examined, differences started to emerge. For both countries, one-way communication attributes included writing press releases, developing communication and promotional collateral, and managing press conferences. Advertisements from both countries also included aspects of marketing communications. However, the recurrent presence of some attributes in each country varied significantly. Table 3 provides a breakdown of some of the key one-way communication attributes present in each country.

Table 3: Presence of one-way communication attributes

Country	Marketing communications	Media work	Public information
Australia	4	8	5
India	9	9	4

The presence of marketing communications and media attributes in the Indian recruitment advertisements was relatively high, with both existing in at least 90% of the advertisements. In the Australian advertisements, media attributes were the dominant feature within the one-way communication model, with at least 80% of the advertisements featuring one or more findings relating to this attribute. Public

information activities also played a substantial role in at least half of the advertisements from Australia.

The heavy use of marketing communications attributes in Indian advertisements was evenly distributed across three major attributes – advertising, image and brand management, and promotional events. Table 4 shows the breakdown of activities in both Indian and

Australian advertisements. In comparison with the Indian advertisements, the Australian advertisements did not feature marketing communications attributes as significantly, with only 40% of the advertisements showing any attributes in the marketing communications

section. The advertisements that did show marketing communications attributes consisted mainly of promotional events such as trade shows and exhibitions or managing the organisation's brand and image.

Table 4: Breakdown of the marketing communications attribute

Country	Advertising	Image and brand management	Promotional events
Australia	0	3	4
India	5	6	3

One significant omission from the Australian advertisements featuring marketing communications attributes was the presence of advertising-related activities or qualifications. None of the Australian recruitment advertisements referred to any element of advertising as part of the job. However, 50% of the Indian recruitment advertisements referred to either the management of advertising activities or the requirement of previous skills or qualifications in the advertising field. This confirms Sriramesh's (1992) observation from over 15 years ago, that Indian organisations

believe that advertising complements public relations. Even in 2008, the presence of advertising is quite significant in the Indian public relations profession.

An area where both countries had similar results was that of media work. As shown in Table 3, both countries had a high percentage of advertisements consisting of media attributes. However, when the attributes are broken down into specific media activities, slight differences begin to appear. Table 5 shows the breakdown of the media attribute for each country.

Table 5: Breakdown of the media work attribute

Country	Managing positive exposure in media	Developing press releases	Organising press conferences	Identifying media opportunities	Managing and informing media
Australia	25% (2 out of 8)*	62% (5 out of 8)	0% (0 out of 8)	25% (2 out of 8)	62% (5 out of 8)
India	22% (2 out of 9)	44% (4 out of 9)	44% (4 out of 9)	0% (0 out of 9)	66% (6 out of 9)

*Note: The actual value is shown in brackets under the percentage.

Both countries showed press release work and management of media as the top priority within the one-way communication model. However, in Indian advertisements, an equally top priority was the organisation of press conferences, which was equally at second place with development of press releases. Australia had no advertisements which referred to the organisation of press conferences, while over 40% of the Indian advertisements that featured media work had listed press conference work as

a requirement. The difference in the results may be an indication of business and cultural differences influencing the profession. As seen in the literature review, personal influence plays a significant role in Asian countries and personal influence is a model that is more widely practiced face-to-face rather than through written or other communication media. Also, culturally India is known for its collectivism-style society, which also confirms the need to have direct and face-to-face

opportunities for the organisation to inform its public.

However, the difference in cultural and business practices did not impact some of the media attributes. Both countries had very low results in managing positive exposure in media and identifying media opportunities. In fact, none of the Indian advertisements featured identifying media opportunities as a requirement. Thus, the two more proactive attributes were seldom present, while reactive media activities such as managing media and developing press releases dominated the advertisements. This shows that potentially much of the media work, regardless of business and cultural practices and advances in technology, may still be reactive and implemented on an as-needed basis.

The most noteworthy result from the analysis was the prominence of relationship management in both countries. This was expected in India, a country which has a strong business and social culture of collectivism, harmony and hierarchy. However, such a high result was not expected from the Australian advertisements, as it is a western region and is usually seen as an advocate for two-way communication models. It may certainly be an

indication of where the future of public relations is heading in the western regions.

Furthermore, relationship management did not just exist in isolation. Both Australian and Indian advertisements featured a strong link between one-way communication and relationship management attributes, especially in relation to media and stakeholder communications (Table 6). For example, if managing or developing media relations was an attribute in the relationship management section, then 60% of those Australian advertisements and 80% of those Indian advertisements covered attributes such as writing press releases and managing conferences in the one-way communication section. Also, if public information attributes such as collateral development or information sessions for stakeholders was an attribute in the one-way communication section, then 72% of those Australian advertisements and 60% if those Indian advertisements covered building relationships with stakeholders in the relationship management section. Such results beg the question whether one-way communication and relationship management work better hand-in-hand to support strategic and targeted public relations rather than two-way symmetrical communication on its own.

Table 6: Link between one-way communication and relationship management attributes

Country	Media work and media relations		Public information and stakeholder relationship work	
	(%)	(Actual value)	(%)	(Actual value)
Australia	60	6 out of 10	72	5 out of 7
India	80	8 out of 10	60	3 out of 5

The main difference between the advertisements in the two countries was the type of relationship management attributes that were seen as requirements for the ideal public relations professional. Ni (2006) refers to two types of relationships – personal and institutional. Personal relationships are those that public relations professionals would carry with them as they move from one organisation to another. These include attributes such as having an established list of media and stakeholder contacts or having their own

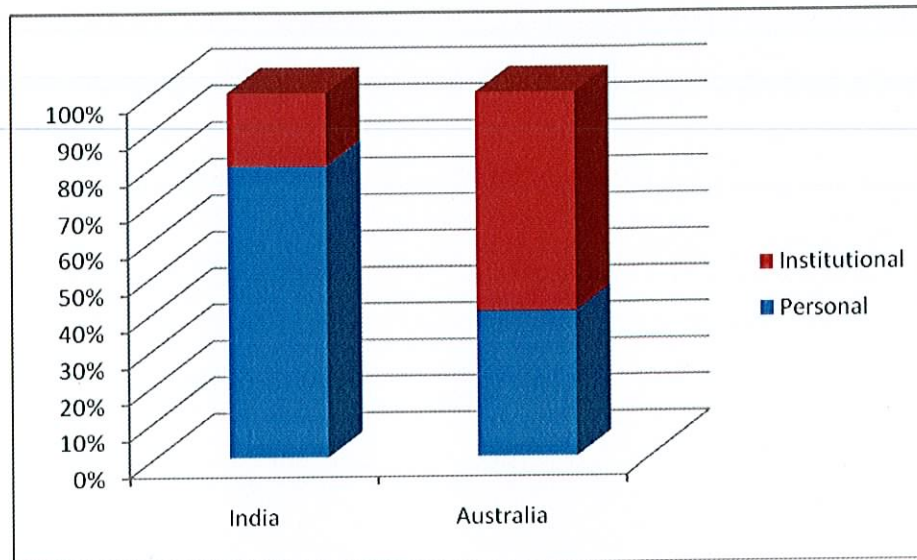
approach to working with government, media and other stakeholders. Institutional relationships are those that are linked to an organisation rather than an individual. Ni (2006) uses the example of media relations on behalf of the organisation, which can contribute to effective and accurate message delivery.

In relation to these two types of relationships, it was found that 80% of the Indian advertisements made reference to at least one type of personal relationship attribute. Only 40% of the Australian advertisements

referred to personal relationships (Figure 3). The results clearly indicate how business and

cultural practices can influence the public relations profession.

Figure 3: Frequency of both relationship types for each country



The high percentage of the personal relationship attribute within the Indian advertisements confirms the dominant presence of the personal influence model within its public relations profession, which explains why results from various previous studies portray such a difference in the two regions' approach to public relations. It also provides an explanation to the difference between Indian and Australian business practices. Ledingham and Bruning (1998, p. 57) state that, "...public relations professionals work in a buffer zone between organisation and its publics". Toth (2000, p. 213) confirms this by stating the following:

Neither asymmetrical communication focused on controlling the environment nor symmetrical communication focused on mutual understanding. The personal influence model focused on establishing and maintaining a personal relationship, sometimes aside from organisational boundaries and perhaps extending beyond the immediate employment of the public relations professional by a specific organisation.

The difference in how both countries manage their relationships also explains why certain cultural topoi and dimensions thrive in one region but not the other. The hierarchical, collectivist and fatalist nature of the Indian region provides the ideal setting for personal relationships to thrive. The need to keep other stakeholder's viewpoints and influence in mind while making decisions and being intuitive about which relationships matter and where and when they matter plays a significant role in business operations (Hofstede, 2001). According to the results, this also transpires to the Indian public relations profession as well.

The transfer of cultural norms into the public relations profession seems to be present in the western region as well. The individualistic approach to society in western regions means that institutional relationships can be easily applied and maintained as a personal connection is seldom made (Hofstede, 2001). The high percentage of attributes suggesting institutional relationships within the Australian recruitment advertisements suggests that culture does not only play a major role in the Asian region, but also the western region.

The results from this exploratory study have not only supported some of the claims made in current literature but have also extended on the discussion of international public relations. As seen in the literature review, the comparison of public relations practices in different regions often makes use of the four models of public relations as a foundation. By considering the models, but extending the study into the presence of relationship management in the recruitment advertisements, it has provided another valid basis for comparison. The differences that were seen between the two countries when looking at one-way and two-way communication clarified and confirmed what was different. However, examining the advertisements from a relationship management perspective has started to provide reasons for why such differences exist. Furthermore, linking the institutional and personal relationship element to business and cultural practices confirms the inter-relationships between culture, business and the public relations profession. In light of the results and the discussion above, it seems that all three models are present in both regions but how they are applied is remarkably different.

Conclusions and implications

Although on the surface the recruitment advertisements from both countries looked similar, detailed analysis indicated a significant difference between how the various models were practised in both regions. For example, media work had a high prevalence in both countries but the personal influence model played a far more significant role in India than in Australia. Detailed analysis of the relationship management attributes revealed that 80% of these attributes in Indian advertisements related to personal relationships, while 60% of relationship management attributes in Australian advertisements related to institutional relationships.

Examining the results in relation to the relationship management model revealed how both countries manage their relationships was significantly different, which could potentially explain the difference between their practise of

public relations. While Australian recruitment advertisements reflected the presence of institutional relationships, the Indian recruitment advertisements showed a dominant presence of personal relationships. This helped to clarify and confirm the relationship between business, cultural and public relations practices between the two regions.

This exploratory study is only the beginning for public relations practitioners and organisations to understand the diversity of public relations in non-western cultures. Therefore, although this research focused specifically on Indian and Australian public relations professionals, the implications of further research in this area could potentially have a ripple effect on public relations worldwide.

Such research creates an opportunity for Indian practitioners to consider developing unique public relations models that work for them and their publics. Furthermore, this research could be easily conducted between other Asian and western countries and if similar results are found, it could instigate practitioners to network and collaborate, and develop a set of models, techniques and systems that incorporate the unique nature of public relations in Asia.

It is hoped that such studies can raise awareness amongst public relations practitioners and organisations worldwide about why such differences occur in the public relations profession. It is possible that if new models and theories are developed as a result of such research, there is potential of them to be included in global public relations literature as part of public relations education worldwide. Public relations practitioners worldwide could use this information to better understand and appreciate the diversity of the profession and understand that public relations cannot exist in isolation.

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Author contact details:

Chandni Gupta
Ph +61 3 9290 1409
Mobile +61 434 533 107
Emails: c.gupta@alumni.qut.edu.au and
chandni4074@gmail.com

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