



CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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dengan cara apapun tanpa izin tertulis dari penerbit.

FOREWORD

All praise and gratitude be to Allah SWT on all occasions. Blessings and greetings, and prayers, we send to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Praise be to God, by His grace and blessings, the author has completed this book, Cross-Cultural Communication in Public Relations.

This book discusses the Introduction To Cross-Cultural Communication In Public Relations, the Basics of Culture and Communication in Public Relations (PR), Public Relations Strategies in a Cross-Cultural Context, Technology, and Intercultural Communication.

The writing process for this book was successfully completed thanks to the collaboration of the author team. For better quality and reader satisfaction, we welcome constructive suggestions and input from readers.

The author would like to thank all parties who have supported the completion of this book, especially those who have assisted in the publication of this book and who have entrusted, encouraged, and initiated its publication. Hopefully, this book will be beneficial to the Indonesian people.

Padang, July 2025

Author

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

1.1 Introduction

In the era of globalization and accelerated communication flows, organizations and Public Relations (PR) practitioners face new challenges in communicating effectively across cultural and geographical boundaries. Communication no longer takes place only locally, but extends internationally and involves multicultural audiences. In this situation, the ability to understand and adapt messages to the audience's culture becomes a determining factor in communication effectiveness and organizational reputation (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017; L'Etang, 2008).

Public Relations, as a strategic communication profession, requires cross-cultural understanding so that messages and communication campaigns are appropriate, relevant, and positively received in various contexts. If differences in values, language, and social norms are ignored, messages risk being misunderstood and may even generate negative sentiment in the eyes of the public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Moreover, cultural sensitivity is even more vital in Indonesia as a multiethnic and multilingual country. For example, research by Maulana and Hermansyah (2019) demonstrates that PR practitioners in multinational companies in Indonesia must be able to adapt communication strategies to bridge cultural differences between employees and audiences, thereby making campaign messages more readily accepted.

In line with technological advancements and increasing global interactions, cross-cultural communication has become an essential component of public relations strategy. Intercultural communication competence enables PR practitioners to design messages and communication media inclusively, particularly in Indonesia, where

cultural differences between regions and tribes are pronounced and significantly impact public perception (Suryani & Wicaksono, 2021). As such, a cross-cultural communication approach is not just an ethical obligation, but also an opportunity to strengthen organizational relationships and reputation in the eyes of both global and local publics.

This chapter explains the fundamental concepts of communication and culture, and then outlines the challenges and opportunities associated with cross-cultural communication in public relations. Additionally, the chapter will present key principles to enhance the effectiveness and sensitivity of PR communication to cultural differences.

The Development of Globalization and Its Impact on Cross-Cultural Communication

Globalization is the process of increasing interconnectedness and interdependence among individuals, organizations, and countries worldwide. The development of information and communication technology, increased mobility, and global trade flows intensify cross-cultural interactions (Tomlinson, 1999). In the context of public relations, practitioners must be able to understand and adapt messages to fit the values and culture of the audience, both locally and globally (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017).

The Impact of Globalization on Cross-Cultural Communication

1. Intercultural Interaction Is Becoming More Frequent

Multinational companies, government agencies, and the tourism industry must communicate with the multicultural public. PR practitioners need to possess intercultural communication competencies so that messages are more easily received and there is minimal risk of miscommunication (Hall, 1976).

2. Diversity of Meanings and Interpretations of Messages

In global communication, symbols, language, and meanings can be interpreted differently, leading to varying understandings. For example, the use of color or body language should be adjusted to avoid cultural stereotypes and misunderstandings (Samovar et al., 2013).

3. The Use of Technology and Social Media as Cultural Links

The digital era makes it easier to share messages to remote parts of the world. However, practitioners must be mindful to keep messages relevant and polite across diverse cultures, avoiding potential conflicts and maintaining the organization's reputation.



Figure 1.1. The Development of Globalization and Its Impact on Cross-Cultural Communication
(Source: *processed by the Author, 2025*)

Examples of Real Cases in Indonesia

1. Multinational Company: PT Unilever Indonesia Tbk.

Unilever must manage its global communications to suit local cultures. The "Sharing Ramadan Stories" campaign emphasizes the value of cooperation and kinship, making the company's message more meaningful and in line with the values of the Indonesian people (Kurniawan & Wijaya, 2020). This approach ensures their global message is positively received and strengthens Unilever's reputation as a company that values local culture.

2. Government Agency: Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf)

In promoting the "Wonderful Indonesia" tourist destination to the international world, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy must produce content in various languages and visual symbols according to the preferences of global tourists. In addition to highlighting the beauty of culture and nature, this campaign must also consider cultural differences in each target country, ensuring that Indonesia's tourism message is accepted and appealing to the foreign public (Suryani & Wicaksono, 2021).

3. Regional Tourism Sector: Promotion of Tourism Villages in Bali and Yogyakarta

Tourist villages in Bali and Yogyakarta are now using social media to reach global tourists. Managers must be able to create engaging content that respects local culture. For example, Penglipuran Village in Bali utilizes authentic visuals and stories rooted in local wisdom, enabling foreign tourists to understand the significance of their traditions. It reflects the importance of cultural sensitivity in all forms of communication, ensuring that tourist destinations remain sustainable and continue to be beloved by international tourists.

1.2 Principles of Cross-Cultural Communication in PR

In the world of Public Relations, cross-cultural communication is a crucial foundation for building effective relationships, especially in an increasingly multicultural environment driven by globalization. Communication in PR is not only about conveying information, but also shaping perceptions, images, and long-term relationships between the organization and its public. When communication is carried out across cultures, differences in values, norms, languages, and symbols become challenges that must be carefully managed (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017).

According to Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, and Roy (2013), cross-cultural communication is the process of exchanging information between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds, each of which carries a unique value

system, symbols, and way of thinking. PR practitioners who fail to understand the cultural context can cause the message they convey to be misinterpreted, even leading to resistance from the intended audience. This is reinforced by Hofstede's (2011) findings, which demonstrate that differences in cultural dimensions, such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and avoidance of uncertainty, have a significant impact on communication styles and perceptions of authority and messages within a society.

In Indonesia, the challenges of cross-cultural communication have become increasingly complex due to the country's diverse ethnicities, religions, regional languages, and local value systems. Research by Suryani and Wicaksono (2021) emphasized that low intercultural communication competence among PR practitioners in government institutions can lead to public communication programs not running effectively. Therefore, understanding the principles of cross-cultural communication is crucial, not only in the international context, but also in interregional communication relations within the country.

With this in mind, this section will systematically discuss the principles of cross-cultural communication in the context of Public Relations. The discussion includes the basic concepts and principles, the key factors that shape the dynamics of multicultural communication, and the importance of intercultural competence in supporting the success of PR communication.

1.2.1 Basic Concepts and Principles of Cross-Cultural Communication

Intercultural communication is the process of exchanging messages between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds to foster mutual understanding and build relationships (Samovar et al., 2013). In the context of Public Relations, cross-cultural communication is a crucial foundation because Public Relations is tasked with conveying messages strategically to a culturally diverse audience, both locally and

internationally. Key principles of cross-cultural communication include:

1. Respect for cultural differences,
2. Openness to other perspectives,
3. Adaptation of communication styles to the audience, and
4. Awareness of using symbols, language, and social norms.

According to Gudykunst and Kim (2017), cross-cultural communication necessitates an awareness of the potential for differences in perception and interpretation of messages, as well as the need to adapt messages to make them acceptable in various cultural contexts.

1.2.2 Key Factors in Multicultural Communication

Several key factors affect the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication, especially in the context of Public Relations:

1. Language: not only a matter of grammar, but also implicit meaning, tone, idiom, and context (Hall, 1976).
2. Social Values and Norms: For example, collectivist cultures, such as those in Indonesia, emphasize social harmony more than individualist cultures (Hofstede, 2011).
3. Customs and Etiquette: In Javanese culture, the use of acceptable language (upload-ungguh) is crucial for effective communication (Anderson, 2021).
4. Symbols and Visuals: Symbols can have very different meanings in different cultures; for example, the colour white has different meanings in East and West Asia.

1.2.3 The Role of Intercultural Competence in Public Relations Effectiveness

Intercultural competence refers to a person's ability to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals from other cultures (Chen & Starosta, 2000). In Public Relations practice, these competencies include:

1. Audience cultural Knowledge (cultural awareness)
2. Adaptive and empathic communication skills
3. Awareness of personal biases and stereotypes

4. Ability to listen and interpret contextually

Local research by Suryani and Wicaksono (2021) indicates that PR practitioners in government institutions with high intercultural competence are more successful in establishing relationships with multicultural communities.

1.3 Definition and Scope of Communication

Communication is a key cornerstone in Public Relations practice, as all activities depend on the process of conveying messages and building relationships between the organization and its public. Within this framework, a comprehensive understanding of the meaning, elements, forms, and nature of communication is crucial for developing effective, ethical, and culturally adaptive communication strategies.

1.3.1 Definition of Communication and Its Basic Elements

In general, communication can be defined as the process of exchanging information, ideas, and meanings between individuals or groups through the use of symbols, both verbally and nonverbally (Miller, 2005). Communication is not just about delivering a message, but also involves a mutual understanding between the sender and the recipient of the message.

According to Berlo (1960), communication consists of four basic elements:

1. **Source:** the person or organization that sent the message.
2. **Message:** the content or information communicated.
3. **Channel:** media or means of conveying messages (oral, written, visual, digital).
4. **Receiver:** the individual or group who receives and interprets the message.

In Public Relations practice, understanding these elements is essential for designing the right message, choosing effective channels, and understanding how audiences interpret the message.

1.3.2 Forms and Channels of Communication in the Context of Public Relations

In the context of Public Relations, communication can be classified into several forms, including:

1. One-way and two-way communication

One-way communication is used in the delivery of information, such as press releases. In contrast, two-way communication is essential in modern PR to build mutually beneficial relationships and listen to feedback from the public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

2. Internal and external communication

Internal communication is aimed at employees and internal partners of the organization, while external communication targets the media, the public, the government, and other external stakeholders.

3. Formal and informal communication

Formal communication typically utilizes the organization's formal structure and channels, whereas informal communication is spontaneous and often occurs in non-formal settings, such as social media platforms.

Communication channels are also diverse, ranging from traditional media (television, radio, print) to digital media (websites, email), as well as social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. PR practitioners must tailor the channel to the characteristics of the intended audience for the message to be effective (Effendy, 2003; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006).

1.3.3 Communication as a Symbolic and Transactional Process

Communication is not a static process, but a dynamic and symbolic one. From a symbolic perspective, communication occurs through a system of signs and meanings that are understood collectively within a culture (Burgoon et al., 2010). Words, images, sounds, and even body movements are symbols used to convey meaning, and these meanings can differ depending on the social and cultural context.

In addition, communication is **transactional**, meaning that the sender and receiver of the message influence each other simultaneously. In the transactional model, there is no completely passive communication role; all parties in the interaction contribute to the creation of meaning (Barnlund, 1970). It is a crucial foundation for Public Relations in fostering dialogue and participatory communication, particularly in cultivating long-term relationships with the public.

Table 1.1. Summary of the Concept and Scope of Communication in Public Relations

Aspect	Explanation	Source
Definition of Communication	The process of exchanging messages between individuals/groups to create a common understanding through symbols.	Miller (2005); Samovar et al. (2013)
Basic Elements of Communication	1) Source, 2) Message, 3) Channel, 4) Recipient.	Berlo (1960)
Forms of PR Communication	- One-way (information) - Two-way (dialogue/participation) - Internal and external - Formal and informal	Grunig & Hunt (1984); Cutlip et al. (2006)
Communication Channels	- Traditional media (TV, radio, print) - Digital media (email, website) - Social media (Instagram, TikTok, Twitter)	Effendy (2003); Cutlip et al. (2006)
Communication as Symbolic	Communication is built from the use of symbols (verbal and nonverbal) that are meaningful in a particular cultural context.	Burgoon et al. (2010)
Communication as a Transaction	Communication is a reciprocal process in which the sender and receiver mutually assign meaning and influence each other simultaneously.	Barnlund (1970)
The Role of PR in Communication	Become a facilitator between organizations and the public, craft culturally appropriate messages, and maintain transparency and long-term relationships.	Grunig & Hunt (1984); Suryani & Wicaksono (2021)

Source: Processed by Author, 2025

1.4 Understanding of Culture and Diversity

In the context of cross-cultural communication, understanding one's own culture and that of others is the primary foundation for building effective and meaningful interactions. Culture encompasses a set of values, norms, languages, symbols, and social practices that are collectively inherited and shape the way individuals think, act, and respond to a message (Samovar et al., 2013; Hofstede,

2011). Cultural diversity presents both challenges and opportunities in Public Relations (PR) practice, where communication strategies must consider the cultural aspects of the audience to ensure the message conveyed is relevant, unbiased, and non-offensive.

As a highly multicultural country, Indonesia presents complex communication dynamics for PR practitioners. Variations in regional languages, local values, and customary norms influence the way the public receives and interprets messages. In a study by Suryani and Wicaksono (2021), it was found that a lack of cultural sensitivity in the communication of government agencies can lead to societal resistance or misunderstanding. Therefore, a deep understanding of cultural variables is crucial so that PR communication is not only informative but also inclusive and adaptable to the socio-cultural diversity of society.

1.4.1 Cultural Meaning and Its Characteristics

Culture is a socially inherited system of meaning that is used to understand the world and direct behavior. According to Geert Hofstede (2011), culture is "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one group from another."

Culture is not just a custom, but encompasses the **values, symbols, language, social rules, and ways of thinking** that develop within a society. Samovar et al. (2013) add that culture is "an overarching lifestyle that is learned by members of society and passed down from generation to generation."

Main characteristics of culture:

1. Learned, not innate.
2. Collective and dynamic.
3. Shaping communication patterns and perceptions.
4. Embedded in value systems and beliefs.
5. It can be explicit (in language or clothing) or implicit (in one's way of thinking or beliefs).

1.4.2 Cultural Variables

Some important variables that determine the dynamics of cross-cultural communication in the context of Public Relations:

1. Language: The primary medium of conveying meaning. Language not only reflects culture, but also shapes ways of thinking (Sapir & Whorf, 1956). In Indonesia, differences in regional languages can affect the effectiveness of PR messages.
2. Values: Principles that are considered important by a society, such as collectivism vs individualism (Hofstede, 2011). For example, the value of cooperation in Indonesia can serve as a foundation for effective communication, emphasising unity and togetherness.
3. Norms: Unwritten rules of social behavior, such as politeness, etiquette, or a form of greeting. Misunderstandings of norms can lead to communication conflicts, especially in crisis PR.
4. Beliefs: Religious or spiritual systems that form an emotional reaction to a message. For example, a PR campaign that is insensitive to religious beliefs can cause controversy (see, for instance, the case of formula milk advertising that violates the value of breast milk in Indonesia, Kominfo, 2022).
5. Symbols: Visual representations (colors, logos, fashion) that are meaningful in a particular culture. For example, the colour red in Chinese culture is considered to bring good luck, but in Western culture, it symbolises danger.

Table 1.2. Cultural Variables and Their Influence on PR Communication

Cultural Variables	Description	Impact on PR Communication	Example in Indonesia
Language	A system of verbal and nonverbal symbols used in a society.	Misuse of terms can lead to double meanings or misunderstandings.	The use of foreign terms in the campaign without translation, for example "booster" vaccines.
Values	Fundamental beliefs about what is good/bad, right/wrong in society.	PR must tailor the message to align with the target public value.	An environmental campaign based on Islamic values: "Cleanliness is part of faith."
Social Norms	Unwritten rules about acceptable behavior.	Insensitivity to local norms can trigger public conflict.	Liquor advertising controversy that appears in public media.
Beliefs	Belief systems that affect perception and emotions.	The PR message should be sensitive to local religions and beliefs.	Communication of halal products to reach the majority of Muslims.
Cultural Symbols	Visual representations (colors, logos, fashion) that carry meaning.	Inappropriate symbols can be misinterpreted or offensive.	The black color on the banner is considered inhospitable in some local traditions.

Source: Processed by Author, 2025

1.4.3 Culture as a Factor Shaping the Way to Communicate

Culture influences the way individuals convey and interpret messages. In cross-cultural communication, misperceptions are often not due to the content of the message but to differences in the symbolic code, context, and expectations of communication.

Edward T. Hall (1976) divides culture based on the context of communication into:

1. High-context cultures (such as Indonesia and Japan) tend to rely on implicit communication, which is more nuanced and relies on nonverbal cues and context.
2. Low-context cultures (such as the US and Germany) tend to use more explicit and direct communication.

In the practice of homework in Indonesia, understanding the local culture is crucial to ensure that communication is not perceived as offensive or misunderstood. For example, the use of foreign symbols or terms without localization may lead to public resistance.

Concrete example: In the COVID-19 vaccination campaign in Indonesia, an approach involving religious leaders and local wisdom has proven to be more effective than scientific communication alone (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021). It indicates that communication aligned with **local cultural values and structures will be more accepted and trusted** by the community.

1.5 Cross-Cultural Communication and Its Relationship to Public Relations

In globalization and multicultural societies, cross-cultural communication has become a crucial element in Public Relations (PR) practice. The diversity of cultural backgrounds, languages, values, and norms among the audience means that messages and communication strategies can no longer be universally applicable. PR practitioners are required to possess cross-cultural competence so that the message conveyed is not only understood semantically but also socially and culturally accepted by a diverse audience (Samovar et al., 2013; Chen & Starosta, 2000).

Indonesia, a country with over 700 regional languages and hundreds of ethnic groups, presents a complex terrain for PR communication. Communication not only occurs across cultures in the international context, but also between communities within a country. In this context, understanding the characteristics of local culture is crucial for building inclusive and harmonious relationships. Research by Suryani and Wicaksono emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity in designing PR communication strategies in government agencies to avoid public resistance and ensure the effectiveness of messages.

1.5.1 Definition of Cross-Cultural Communication and Practical Examples

Intercultural communication is the process of exchanging messages between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds, where differences in language, symbols, values, and interpretations can affect the meaning of

messages (Samovar et al., 2013). In Public Relations practice, cross-cultural communication occurs not only in an international context but also in interactions across diverse ethnic, religious, and local communities.

A practical example in Indonesia can be seen from the "Wonderful Indonesia" tourism campaign, which strategically tailors the message to the target culture, such as using Chinese and Chinese cultural symbols when targeting tourists from China. The campaign also promotes local uniqueness, such as batik, regional dance, and culinary, in a way that is relevant to the values of international audiences, while still respecting local culture (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2020).

1.5.2 The Role of Cross-Cultural Communication in PR Strategy Planning

In public relations strategy planning, cross-cultural communication plays a crucial role in bridging differences and building trust between heterogeneous organisations and the public. According to Cutlip, Centre, and Broom (2006), an effective communication strategy must be based on a thorough understanding of the cultural characteristics of the target audience.

Some key roles of cross-cultural communication in PR:

1. Culturally based audience segmentation: for example, crafting different messages for urban communities and indigenous peoples.
2. Selection of credible spokespersons in the context of local culture.
3. Determination of communication channels that align with people's habits (e.g., community radio in rural areas is more effective than social media).

Research by Wiryanti and Suryani (2020) shows that local culture-based PR strategies have higher effectiveness in shaping public perception in areas with strong socio-cultural attachments.

Table 1.3. Comparison of PR Communication Strategies in High-Context vs Low-Context Cultures

Communication Aspects	High-Context Culture (e.g., Indonesia, Japan)	Low-Context Culture (e.g., US, Germany)	Implications of PR in Indonesia
Message Delivery Style	Indirect, implicit, relying on implicit meaning and context	Direct, explicit, the message is conveyed verbally and straightforwardly	The PR message should be subtle and consider cultural symbols
Language Use	Full of manners, not blunt statements	Terbuka, to the point	Use friendly language, avoiding direct confrontation
Reliance on Symbols	Very high; Gestures, colors, and visuals contain important meanings	Relatively low, relying more on verbal and data	Campaign visuals should be adapted to local norms
Message Structure	Not directly to the main problem	Direct and systematic	Start the message with a narrative or contextualization
Relationship vs Information Focus	Social relations are more important than information content	Information and efficiency are prioritized	PR in Indonesia needs to build relationships first
Response to Conflict	Tends to avoid conflict directly, using mediation	Dealing with conflict openly and rationally	Use a negotiation and harmonization approach in a PR crisis

Source: Processed by Author, 2025

1.5.3 The Importance of Cultural Sensitivity in Message Preparation and Communication Media

Cultural sensitivity is the awareness and ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences in communication. In the context of PR, cultural sensitivity is crucial to ensure the message does not cause misunderstandings, conflicts, or even rejection within the community.

Some aspects to consider:

1. Word and term choices: Avoid terms that have negative connotations in certain cultures.
2. Visuals and symbols: Use colors, images, or iconography that correspond to local cultural values.
3. Communication tone: In a high-context culture like Indonesia, an overly direct tone can be considered harsh.

Case in point: In 2019, a global beverage brand faced backlash after its ads in Indonesia featured visual content deemed insensitive to local dress codes and cultural norms. This incident serves as proof that PR communication that fails to

consider cultural sensitivities can harm the brand's overall image.

1.6 Challenges and Opportunities of Cross-Cultural Communication in PR

In the digitalisation that is accelerating across information borders, the role of cross-cultural communication in Public Relations (PR) is critical for organisations that not only interact with the public from homogeneous cultural backgrounds but must also effectively convey messages to multicultural and multilingual audiences. Cultural differences can pose serious challenges in the communication process, especially when values, norms, symbols, and message interpretations are not aligned between the sender and receiver of the message (Samovar et al., 2013; Gudykunst, 2004).

However, behind these challenges lie also great opportunities. PR practices that bridge cultural differences not only expand the reach of the message but also build trust and a positive image at the global level (Cutlip et al., 2006). In Indonesia, for example, public communication campaigns that utilise local wisdom and contextual cultural approaches have proven to be more effective in reaching grassroots communities (Suryani & Wicaksono, 2021). Therefore, PR practitioners need to comprehend the barriers to intercultural communication while developing the intercultural competencies necessary to create communication strategies that are not only adaptive but also transformative in responding to cultural diversity.

1.6.1 Barriers to Intercultural Communication

Cross-cultural communication in PR practice does not always run smoothly. Various **psychological, cognitive, and cultural barriers** can prevent messages from reaching their intended recipients. Some common barriers include:

1. **Stereotypes:** Views that generalise other cultural groups, which can lead to bias in the drafting of PR messaging. For example, the assumption that all local communities are less

- digitally literate can render social media campaigns less inclusive (Gudykunst, 2004).
2. **Ethnocentrism:** The belief that one's own culture is superior to another. In the context of PR, this can be reflected in the use of language or communication symbols that are irrelevant or even offensive to cross-cultural audiences (Neuliep, 2017).
 3. **Cultural bias:** A tendency to interpret messages through one's cultural lens without understanding the context of other cultures.
 4. **Symbolic misinterpretation:** The use of colors, gestures, or terms that have different meanings in other cultures. Example: the use of a thumbs-up symbol that in some cultures is considered offensive.

In Indonesia, a failure to understand the local cultural context has occurred in a campaign to advertise foreign products that feature cultural elements considered taboo locally, leading to public protests (Kominfo, 2020).

1.6.2 Opportunities in Building a Global Image and Reputation

On the other hand, cross-cultural communication also opens **up great opportunities** to expand reach and **strengthen organisations' image globally**. Organisations demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity; they not only build a positive reputation but also create an emotional closeness with an international audience.

According to Cutlip, Centre, and Broom (2006), a communication strategy that respects local culture can build **trust, loyalty, and advocacy** among the global public. It is essential in the digital context, where PR messages can spread across countries in seconds.

Case in point: Coca-Cola's "Taste the Feeling" global campaign employs a visual and narrative approach tailored to local culture, including in Indonesia, by featuring local figures and messages that highlight togetherness, aligning with the values of community collectivism.

1.6.3 Intercultural Competency Development for PR Practitioners

To maximise cross-cultural communication opportunities, **intercultural competencies** are the primary key for PR practitioners. According to Chen & Starosta (2000), this competence includes three aspects:

1. Recognising that cultural differences affect perceptions and behaviours.
2. Cultural sensitivity – being able to recognise and respect other values, norms, and beliefs.
3. Intercultural communication skills – able to adapt language, communication style, and media according to the target culture.

Research by Suryani and Wicaksono (2021) shows that organisations in Indonesia that train their PR staff with cross-cultural competencies experience an increase in the effectiveness of communication and public response, especially in campaigns on social issues such as vaccination and behaviour change.

1.7 Strategies and Effective Approaches to Cross-Cultural Communication in Public Relations

Cross-cultural communication in Public Relations practice requires not only an understanding of cultural diversity but also the ability to develop communication strategies that are responsive and adaptive to differences. The success of PR communication in a multicultural context is primarily determined by the extent to which practitioners can apply a flexible, empathetic, and culturally sensitive approach (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Gudykunst, 2004). It is becoming increasingly important in the era of information disclosure, where errors in cultural communication can quickly damage an organisation's reputation.

An effective cross-cultural communication strategy minimises the potential for miscommunication while also opening up space to build bridges of understanding among organisations and audiences from different backgrounds. In Indonesia, a culture-based approach rooted in local culture has

proven to be more accepted, particularly in PR campaigns targeting local communities or specific social groups (Suryani & Wicaksono, 2021). Therefore, this section discusses practical and theoretical ways of managing cultural differences through scalable, adaptive, and contextually relevant PR communication strategies.

1.7.1 Minimize Cross-Cultural Miscommunication

Cross-cultural miscommunication often occurs due to differences in the interpretation of symbols, verbal and nonverbal expressions, and value frameworks. To minimize this, several important strategies can be implemented:

1. **Use of simple, culturally neutral language** — Avoid jargon, idioms, or technical terms that may be unfamiliar or have different connotations in other cultures.
2. **Message testing with cross-cultural audiences** — *Pre-testing* messages before they are widely disseminated for potential ambiguity or negative interpretations.
3. **Involve local representatives in the drafting of the message** — It is essential to ensure that the message is culturally sensitive and does not violate local norms (Gudykunst, 2004).

According to Neuliep (2017), it is imperative to realise that meaning is not only transmitted, but also formed through cultural contexts. Therefore, clarity, feedback, and openness to feedback are essential in reducing miscommunication.

1.7.2 Application of the Principles of Adaptability and Flexibility of Communication

In cross-cultural communication, **adaptability** refers to the ability of PR practitioners to tailor communication strategies to specific cultural values and expectations. **Flexibility** refers to the ability to adjust the style, channel, or approach of communication in response to the audience's reaction.

According to Chen and Starosta (2000), adaptability and flexibility are the main components of intercultural communication competence. PR practitioners must be willing to:

1. Adjust **the format of the message** (e.g., formal vs. informal),
2. Changing **communication media** (e.g., print media in areas with limited internet access),
3. Adapt visual **and symbolic content** to match local meanings (colors, clothing, icons).

In practice in Indonesia, this approach is evident in the PR strategies of government agencies when conveying the message of the vaccination campaign. In one region, it uses formal Indonesian, while in another, it employs the regional language visualization, tailored to the local culture (Suryani & Wicaksono, 2021).

1.7.3 Brief Case Study: Cross-Cultural Communication in PR

Case Study: PR Communication Strategy of the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) in Handling COVID-19

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, BNPB faced communication challenges with multicultural communities. To reach indigenous peoples, inland tribes, and local communities that have their cultural norms, BNPB:

1. Using **local community radio** as the primary information medium,
2. Translating campaign materials into **regional languages** (e.g., Batak, Bugis, and Javanese),
3. Involving **traditional leaders and religious leaders** to convey messages so that they are more trusted and accepted.
4. This approach demonstrates that the practical application of cross-cultural communication in PR necessitates a synergy between mass communication strategies and local cultural understanding. This study also reinforces Hall's (1976) view that the cultural context significantly influences how messages are received and interpreted by audiences.

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CHAPTER 2

BASIC OF CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC RELATIONS (PR)

2.1 Introduction: The Interplay of Culture and Communication in Public Relations

Public Relations (PR) is often described as the art and science of building relationships between organizations and their publics (Ferguson, 2018; Theunissen, 2019). In an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, PR practitioners are no longer dealing with homogeneous audiences. Instead, they are expected to navigate diverse cultural landscapes where values, traditions, languages, and communication styles vary widely. This chapter introduces the critical connection between culture and communication in PR and sets the stage for understanding why cultural awareness is essential for successful public relations practice (Labarca & Ampuero Ruiz, 2021; Samson, 2018).

Public Relations has been defined in numerous ways, reflecting its diverse applications across different contexts. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) defines PR as “a strategic communication process (“Encyclopedia of Public Relations,” 2014) that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.” Meanwhile, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) emphasizes the importance of reputation management and communication. Traditionally, PR practices were shaped by Western paradigms focusing on mass media, corporate messaging, and crisis management. However, as organizations operate in multicultural environments and engage with global audiences, PR has evolved into a discipline that requires sensitivity to cultural nuances. For instance, what works as an effective campaign in the United States may not resonate with audiences in Indonesia, Japan, or Nigeria. A global perspective in PR demands professionals

who understand cultural diversity and can adapt strategies to local contexts.

2.1.1 Why Culture Matters in Communication

Culture is often described as the “software of the mind” (Triandis & Hofstede, 1993), influencing how individuals perceive the world, interpret messages, and behave in social interactions. It encompasses shared beliefs, norms, values, language, and symbols that guide a community’s way of life. When PR professionals communicate across cultures, they must recognize that their messages pass through cultural filters that affect how these messages are encoded (created) and decoded (interpreted).

Consider the following real-world example: In 2018, a global fashion brand faced backlash in China over an advertising campaign that featured chopsticks in a way perceived as culturally insensitive. While the ad may have seemed creative in its country of origin, it clashed with Chinese cultural values and led to public outrage (Cohen, 2005). This case illustrates how a lack of cultural awareness can result in PR crises and damage to brand reputation.

Understanding culture’s role in communication helps PR professionals avoid such missteps. It also allows them to build messages that resonate authentically with diverse publics, fostering trust and goodwill.

2.1.2 The Role of Communication in Public Relations

Communication is the cornerstone of PR (Wolfgruber et al., 2022). Every PR function—whether it is media relations, community outreach, or internal communication—relies on the ability to send and receive messages effectively. PR practitioners act as intermediaries between organizations and their stakeholders, shaping perceptions and influencing behaviors.

In cross-cultural settings, communication becomes even more critical and complex. Verbal messages may be misunderstood due to language differences, while nonverbal cues—such as gestures, eye contact, or physical space—can carry different meanings in different cultures. For example, a gesture of approval in one culture might be offensive in another. Effective

communication in PR requires understanding these differences and tailoring strategies to align with the cultural expectations of the audience (Ayman et al., 2020; Yuningsih, 2006). This includes choosing appropriate language, media channels, and storytelling techniques that align with local values.

2.2 Fundamentals of Culture

Culture is one of the most complex and influential forces shaping human life, and it plays a vital role in how people communicate (Krull et al., 1999; Z. Li & Benson, 2022). For public relations professionals, understanding culture is not just an added advantage—it is a necessity. As organizations increasingly operate in multicultural environments, the success or failure of communication efforts often depends on how well they align with cultural expectations and practices. This chapter explores the fundamental concept of culture, its defining characteristics, major theoretical frameworks, and its implications for communication in PR practice.

Culture has been defined in various ways by scholars across disciplines. Edward T. Hall in Rogers & Hart (2002), a pioneer in intercultural communication, described culture as communication itself, emphasizing its pervasive and often invisible influence on human interaction. Geert Hofstede, whose work remains foundational in cultural studies, referred to culture as “the collective programming of the mind” that distinguishes one group or category of people from another. These definitions highlight the idea that culture is not merely about art, music, or customs, but encompasses the underlying values, beliefs, and patterns of behavior shared by a community. Culture determines how individuals perceive reality, how they relate to others, and how they interpret messages in communication processes.

One of the key features of culture is that it is shared. It binds individuals together by providing a common framework for understanding the world. Culture is also learned rather than innate. From early childhood, individuals acquire cultural knowledge and practices through socialization, learning the appropriate behaviors, language, and symbols of their society

(Hamedani et al., 2023). This learning process continues throughout life as people encounter new cultural influences, especially in our globalized era. Furthermore, culture is dynamic. While it preserves traditions and values, it is also subject to change as societies evolve and interact with others. Yet much of culture remains invisible, operating below the level of conscious awareness. It often becomes noticeable only when someone encounters a culture different from their own and experiences a sense of disorientation, commonly known as culture shock. A practical example can be seen in the field of PR, where cultural misalignment has often led to communication failures. In 2018, a major international fashion brand launched a campaign in China featuring an advertisement that portrayed Chinese cultural elements in a way perceived as stereotypical and offensive. What the brand's creative team intended as humor was interpreted as a lack of respect for Chinese culture, leading to widespread public outrage and boycotts. This incident underscores how easily cultural insensitivity can escalate into a public relations crisis, damaging brand reputation and stakeholder trust.

Edward T. Hall's concept of high-context and low-context cultures provides a valuable framework for understanding these differences (Broeder, 2021; Kittler et al., 2011). In high-context cultures, such as Japan, Indonesia, or Arab countries, much of the communication is indirect. Meaning is derived from the surrounding context, nonverbal cues, and shared cultural understandings rather than from explicit words. Relationships, hierarchy, and trust are central to communication in these societies. By contrast, low-context cultures like the United States, Germany, and Scandinavian countries favor direct and explicit communication. In these contexts, clarity and efficiency are prioritized, and messages are expected to be self-contained, requiring little interpretation from context. The implications of this distinction for PR are profound. A campaign that relies on subtle symbolism and nuanced storytelling may resonate strongly in a high-context culture but fail to engage audiences in a low-context environment where clarity and straightforwardness are valued. For example, in a Japanese

market, a brand might achieve greater impact by weaving messages into emotionally rich narratives that reflect cultural traditions and group values. Meanwhile, in the United States, the same brand would likely succeed by presenting clear, action-oriented messages with explicit calls to action.

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory extends this understanding by identifying six dimensions along which cultures vary. Power Distance, for instance, refers to the degree to which societies accept and expect inequalities in power distribution. In high power distance cultures, such as Malaysia or Mexico, hierarchical relationships are respected, and communication often reflects deference to authority. Public relations efforts in such settings must carefully consider status symbols, titles, and organizational hierarchies when crafting messages or engaging stakeholders. Conversely, in low power distance cultures like Denmark or New Zealand, egalitarian values dominate, and PR professionals may find audiences more responsive to messages that emphasize inclusivity and equal participation. Another critical dimension is Individualism versus Collectivism (Arapaci et al., 2018; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). In individualistic cultures, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, personal achievement, independence, and self-expression are highly valued. Campaigns in these contexts often celebrate individual choice and empowerment. In collectivist cultures, like Indonesia, Korea, or much of Latin America, group harmony, family ties, and social obligations are prioritized. Here, successful PR campaigns emphasize community benefits, shared values, and social cohesion. A Western fast-food company once struggled in Indonesia because its initial marketing focused on individual customization of meals—a concept aligned with individualism. After refocusing on themes of family togetherness and shared dining experiences, the company saw significantly improved audience engagement.

Uncertainty Avoidance, another dimension, reflects how comfortable a society is with ambiguity and risk. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, such as Greece and Portugal, prefer structured environments, clear rules, and predictable outcomes.

PR messaging in such contexts benefits from providing detailed information and assurances. In contrast, cultures with low uncertainty avoidance, like Singapore and the United Kingdom, are more accepting of ambiguity and innovation, allowing for more flexible and experimental approaches in communication. Time orientation also varies across cultures and influences PR practices. Monochronic cultures, including Germany and the United States, view time as linear, valuing punctuality and strict adherence to schedules. Polychronic cultures, such as those in Latin America and the Middle East, see time as more fluid and are comfortable managing multiple activities simultaneously. Understanding these cultural attitudes toward time helps PR practitioners schedule campaigns, meetings, and events in ways that respect local expectations.

Religious and belief systems further shape cultural values and communication preferences (Chavez et al., 2024; Swihart et al., 2022). In Muslim-majority countries, for example, sensitivity to religious norms, such as halal certification or modesty in advertising, is essential for maintaining credibility and trust. In India, incorporating cultural festivals and traditional symbols into PR campaigns often enhances audience connection. These examples demonstrate how deeply cultural values and worldviews permeate communication and decision-making processes. The importance of cultural understanding for PR cannot be overstated. In multicultural societies and global markets, the ability to recognize and adapt to cultural differences determines whether messages are received as intended or misunderstood entirely. Successful practitioners develop cultural intelligence—the capacity to interpret unfamiliar cultural contexts, adapt communication strategies, and act appropriately in intercultural interactions. This competence enables organizations to build authentic relationships, avoid costly missteps, and strengthen their reputations worldwide.

Thus, culture forms the bedrock of human communication and directly influences every aspect of public relations. A thorough understanding of cultural theories and frameworks allows PR professionals to navigate the complexities of

multicultural environments with greater confidence and effectiveness. As organizations expand their reach across borders, the need for culturally intelligent communication strategies becomes ever more critical. The next chapter will build on this foundation by examining the theoretical underpinnings of communication itself and exploring how these theories inform public relations practice in diverse cultural settings.

2.3 Communication: Theoretical Foundations

Communication is the lifeblood of public relations (Archetti, 2022; VanDyke & Lee, 2020). Every message sent, every story crafted, and every campaign implemented depends on the principles of communication. Understanding how communication works, the processes it involves, and the theories that explain it is essential for public relations professionals. Without this foundation, practitioners risk delivering messages that fail to connect with their audiences or, worse, provoke unintended consequences. This chapter explores major communication theories and models, showing how they inform effective PR strategies in diverse cultural and social contexts.

Communication, at its most basic level, is the process by which information, ideas, and feelings are transmitted from one entity to another. However, this seemingly simple process is influenced by countless factors, including culture, context, power dynamics, and the medium of transmission. The earliest attempts to conceptualize communication focused on linear models, treating communication as a straightforward transfer of information from sender to receiver. Over time, scholars recognized that communication is far more complex, involving feedback, interpretation, and social interaction (Ali & Sonderling, 2017; Shakeri & Khalilzadeh, 2020). One of the most influential early models is the Shannon and Weaver Model of Communication, developed in 1949. Originally designed for engineering purposes to improve telephone and radio communication, this model conceptualizes communication as a linear process with five key elements: a source, a transmitter, a channel, a receiver, and a destination. It also introduced the

concept of "noise"—any interference that distorts or disrupts the message during transmission. In public relations, this model helps practitioners recognize potential barriers to communication, such as misinformation, media distortion, or audience distractions. However, the Shannon and Weaver model has limitations. It does not account for the active role of the audience in interpreting messages or the feedback loop essential to most communication processes.

Building on this, Wilbur Schramm introduced a more interactive model of communication in the 1950s. Schramm emphasized the role of feedback, framing communication as a two-way process where the sender and receiver continuously exchange roles. His model highlighted the importance of the "field of experience," which refers to the shared knowledge and cultural background necessary for effective communication. If the sender and receiver do not share enough common experiences or cultural references, messages may be misunderstood or misinterpreted. For PR practitioners, this underscores the necessity of audience analysis—understanding their values, knowledge, and expectations to ensure the message resonates appropriately. Another significant contribution comes from Berlo's SMCR Model (Source, Message, Channel, Receiver), which focuses on the skills, attitudes, knowledge, and cultural systems of both the sender and receiver. This model highlights that effective communication depends not only on the clarity of the message but also on the compatibility between the sender's and receiver's communication skills and cultural frameworks. For example, when a multinational corporation communicates with stakeholders in a different country, it must consider language nuances, cultural symbolism, and local communication practices to avoid misinterpretation.

Beyond these models, several communication theories provide deeper insights into how messages are produced, interpreted, and acted upon. One such theory is the Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in the 1970s. This theory suggests that while media may not tell people what to think, they do influence what people think

about. In other words, media shape public agendas by selecting which issues receive attention. For PR professionals, this means understanding how to position their organization's messages within media narratives to influence public discourse effectively.

Related to this is the Framing Theory, which examines how issues are presented or "framed" in communication. The way a message is framed—through specific language, metaphors, or imagery—can significantly affect how audiences interpret and respond to it. For instance, a campaign advocating for environmental conservation may frame the issue as a matter of "preserving our children's future" rather than "limiting industrial growth." The former evokes emotional engagement and aligns with family-oriented cultural values, while the latter risks alienating business stakeholders. Another key perspective is the Two-Step Flow Theory, which emphasizes the role of opinion leaders in mediating communication. According to this theory, media messages often first reach opinion leaders, who then interpret and relay those messages to their networks. In PR, this highlights the importance of identifying and engaging influencers, community leaders, and trusted figures who can amplify messages within their cultural and social spheres. For example, during public health campaigns, engaging local religious leaders or social media influencers often proves more effective than direct messaging alone.

The Spiral of Silence Theory, proposed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, adds another dimension by focusing on social pressure and public opinion. It suggests that individuals may withhold their opinions if they perceive them to be unpopular, leading to a dominant public narrative that may not reflect private beliefs. PR practitioners must be aware of this dynamic, especially in sensitive or controversial issues, where creating safe spaces for dialogue can help surface diverse perspectives and prevent marginalized voices from being silenced. Cultural communication theories also play a critical role in PR (Weder, 2022). Hall's High-Context and Low-Context Communication, discussed in the previous chapter, reveals how different cultures rely on implicit or explicit communication styles. Similarly,

Hofstede's cultural dimensions remind practitioners that communication strategies must adapt to cultural norms regarding authority, individualism, and uncertainty tolerance. For example, in collectivist societies, public relations messages may need to emphasize community benefits and social responsibility, while in individualistic societies, personal achievement and freedom may resonate more.

Nonverbal communication further complicates the process (L. Li & Wang, 2023; Nahwiyyah & Dewi, 2020). Elements such as body language, eye contact, gestures, and even silence carry different meanings across cultures. A gesture of approval in one country may be offensive in another. PR professionals must be vigilant to these nuances, particularly in global campaigns that use visual media. For instance, advertising imagery that depicts certain forms of physical intimacy may be acceptable in Western cultures but considered inappropriate in conservative societies. Understanding these theories equips public relations practitioners with tools to navigate complex communication environments. It also reinforces the idea that communication is not merely about transmitting information but about creating meaning in ways that are culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate. Effective PR strategies require an appreciation of the audience as active participants who interpret messages through their cultural, social, and personal lenses.

Therefore, communication theories provide essential insights into the dynamics of message creation, transmission, and reception. They reveal the complexities of engaging diverse audiences and highlight the importance of feedback, cultural sensitivity, and strategic framing. For public relations professionals, mastery of these theoretical foundations enables the design of more effective campaigns, the anticipation of potential communication barriers, and the fostering of meaningful relationships with stakeholders across cultural and geographical boundaries. The following chapter will delve into how culture directly shapes public relations practice, exploring case studies and practical strategies for success in multicultural environments.

2.4 Culture and Public Relations Practice

Culture does not exist in isolation from professional practice (Grunig et al., 1995). For public relations professionals, cultural awareness is not merely theoretical; it forms the very foundation of how campaigns are designed, messages are framed, and relationships are built. As organizations expand across borders and engage with multicultural publics, understanding cultural contexts becomes a core competency for effective public relations. This chapter explores how culture influences PR practice, highlighting both challenges and best practices, and illustrating these with case studies from global campaigns. In the contemporary landscape, organizations interact with audiences that are increasingly diverse—not only in terms of nationality or ethnicity but also in values, beliefs, and communication styles. A campaign that resonates in one cultural context may fall flat or even provoke backlash in another. This reality requires PR practitioners to approach their work with cultural intelligence, a sensitivity to differences, and an ability to adapt their strategies accordingly. Cultural intelligence involves more than knowledge of customs or traditions; it requires an appreciation for the deeper systems of meaning that shape how audiences perceive and respond to messages.

A striking example of cultural misalignment occurred when an American fast-food giant attempted to expand into India. The company's initial advertising campaigns featured beef-based products prominently, failing to account for the fact that beef consumption is taboo for a significant portion of the Indian population due to religious and cultural norms. The result was a public outcry and weak market penetration. It was only after the company restructured its menu to include vegetarian and chicken-based options and reoriented its marketing to highlight family togetherness and community values that it began to gain acceptance. This case underscores the importance of cultural adaptation in PR strategies.

Cultural considerations influence nearly every aspect of public relations practice. Message framing, for instance, must reflect local values and sensibilities (Rittenhofer & Valentini,

2015). In individualistic cultures, messages emphasizing personal achievement, freedom of choice, and self-expression tend to resonate strongly. By contrast, in collectivist cultures, PR campaigns are more effective when they highlight community benefits, social harmony, and collective goals. For example, a Western technology company launching a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative in Japan shifted its focus from individual empowerment to community-based environmental projects, aligning with Japanese cultural priorities around harmony and group welfare. The choice of media channels is also culturally determined. In some societies, traditional media such as television and newspapers still dominate public discourse, while in others, digital platforms and social media influencers hold greater sway. In China, for instance, WeChat and Weibo are integral to digital communication, and successful PR campaigns often rely on partnerships with local key opinion leaders (KOLs). In contrast, in many Western markets, Twitter (now X) and Instagram serve as primary platforms for engaging younger demographics. Understanding these preferences allows PR practitioners to reach audiences effectively and avoid wasting resources on less relevant channels.

Nonverbal communication and symbolism present additional layers of complexity. Colors, images, gestures, and even numbers carry culturally specific meanings. A color associated with celebration in one culture might signify mourning in another. For instance, white is traditionally associated with weddings in Western cultures but represents mourning in many Asian cultures. A multinational corporation launching a branding campaign in Asia had to redesign its promotional materials after realizing that the dominant use of white created unintended associations with funerals. Such oversights can be costly but are avoidable with thorough cultural research and sensitivity. Ethical considerations further complicate PR practice in multicultural environments. What is deemed acceptable corporate behavior in one country may be viewed as unethical in another. For example, aggressive lobbying and direct critique of governmental policies might be standard in

some Western countries but considered disrespectful or even illegal in others. Similarly, humor in advertising, while effective in certain cultures, can easily cross lines of propriety in more conservative societies. PR professionals must navigate these ethical landscapes carefully, adhering to global standards while respecting local norms.

Crisis communication offers another dimension where cultural awareness is critical. In times of organizational crisis, the way a company responds can make or break its reputation. Cultural expectations influence how apologies are crafted, whether responsibility is admitted directly, and how stakeholders are engaged (Huang & Kim, 2018; Thurlow et al., 2017). In collectivist societies, public apologies often take the form of group responsibility and focus on restoring social harmony. In contrast, individualistic societies may expect clear accountability and direct statements from organizational leaders. When a major Japanese company faced a product recall, its executives held a public press conference in which they bowed deeply—a gesture of apology and humility deeply rooted in Japanese culture. This act was widely praised domestically but might have been perceived as excessive or performative in other cultural contexts. To succeed in these complex environments, PR practitioners can adopt several best practices. First, conducting rigorous audience analysis is essential. This involves understanding not only demographic characteristics but also cultural values, beliefs, and preferred communication styles. Second, engaging local partners, consultants, or cultural advisors can provide invaluable insights and help avoid costly missteps. Third, investing in cultural training for PR teams ensures that sensitivity to cultural nuances becomes an integral part of organizational practice, not just an afterthought.

An exemplary case of culturally sensitive PR is Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign. Initially launched in Australia, the campaign replaced the Coca-Cola logo on bottles with popular first names, inviting consumers to find and share bottles with friends and family. When the campaign expanded globally, it was adapted to each market by using locally relevant names and

languages (Avidar, 2009). In China, where individual names are less commonly used in public contexts, the campaign shifted its focus to affectionate nicknames and terms of endearment. This localization strategy allowed Coca-Cola to maintain the core idea of personalization while respecting cultural norms, leading to widespread engagement and positive brand associations. The interplay between culture and public relations is complex and multifaceted. Practitioners must recognize that culture shapes not only how messages are received but also how organizations themselves are perceived within different societies. Cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and ethical awareness are no longer optional skills; they are fundamental to building and maintaining trust with global audiences. Thus, culture profoundly influences every aspect of public relations practice—from message design and media selection to crisis response and ethical decision-making (Patterson et al., 2023; Yeo & Pang, 2017). Successful practitioners are those who approach their work with humility, curiosity, and a commitment to learning about the cultural contexts in which they operate.

2.5 Intercultural Communication in PR

In a world marked by globalization, migration, and the rise of digital platforms, public relations professionals are increasingly called upon to communicate across cultural boundaries. Intercultural communication lies at the heart of this challenge (Yeomans, 2016). It is not enough to understand one's own cultural perspective; effective PR requires the ability to recognize, respect, and navigate the diverse cultural frameworks of global audiences. This chapter explores the nature of intercultural communication, its significance in public relations, and the competencies practitioners need to succeed in culturally diverse environments.

Intercultural communication refers to the exchange of messages between people from different cultural backgrounds, where cultural differences influence the way messages are sent, received, and interpreted (Minyar-Beloruicheva & Sergienko, 2022). In PR, this often involves crafting campaigns for audiences

whose values, norms, and communication styles differ from those of the organization or its primary stakeholders. At the core of intercultural communication is the idea that culture acts as a lens through which people interpret the world. This lens filters not only what is said but also how it is said, what is considered appropriate, and how meaning is constructed. For example, consider the difference between direct and indirect communication styles. In many Western cultures, especially those characterized by low-context communication such as the United States and Germany, directness and clarity are prized. Audiences expect PR messages to be straightforward, with key points clearly articulated and action steps unambiguous. However, in high-context cultures like Japan, Indonesia, or Saudi Arabia, indirect communication is more common. Here, messages are often nuanced, relying heavily on context, nonverbal cues, and the shared understanding of social hierarchies (Bakumenko et al., 2023). A PR campaign that is perceived as too blunt or confrontational in such settings risks alienating audiences rather than engaging them.

The concept of **face**—a person's social value or reputation within their community—illustrates another important aspect of intercultural communication. In many Asian cultures, preserving face is paramount. PR practitioners must therefore avoid messaging that could cause embarrassment or public loss of honor, whether for individuals, organizations, or governments. When a multinational technology firm faced a product defect issue in South Korea, its initial strategy of issuing a direct public apology and offering refunds was poorly received. South Korean consumers viewed the apology as insufficiently humble and the refund as transactional rather than relational. The company's later efforts to engage community leaders, express collective regret, and outline steps for long-term quality assurance proved more effective in restoring trust. Nonverbal communication also plays a crucial role in intercultural contexts. Gestures, eye contact, physical proximity, and even silence carry different meanings across cultures (Ni et al., 2015). In the Middle East, prolonged eye contact can signal sincerity and respect, while in

some East Asian cultures, it may be seen as disrespectful or confrontational. Similarly, physical touch during greetings varies widely; what is considered friendly in Latin American cultures might be inappropriate in more reserved Northern European societies. PR professionals must be attuned to these differences, particularly when designing visual materials, staging events, or engaging in face-to-face interactions with stakeholders.

Digital communication adds yet another layer of complexity. Social media platforms have become vital tools for PR, but their use and cultural significance differ from one region to another. In China, where platforms like Facebook and Twitter are restricted, WeChat and Weibo dominate, with their own unique conventions for engagement. In contrast, in Western countries, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) are often central to PR strategies. Moreover, digital etiquette—such as the use of emojis, hashtags, and memes—varies culturally and can influence how messages are perceived. A campaign that uses humor effectively in one context might appear tone-deaf or offensive in another. To navigate these challenges, PR practitioners must develop intercultural competence, a skill set encompassing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that enable effective and appropriate communication across cultures. Intercultural competence begins with **cultural self-awareness**—the ability to recognize one’s own cultural biases and assumptions. Without this awareness, PR professionals risk projecting their cultural values onto others, leading to ethnocentrism and communication failures.

Equally important is **cultural knowledge**, which involves understanding the customs, values, and communication styles of other cultures (Slyusar et al., 2024). This knowledge must be dynamic, as cultures are not static but continually evolving in response to social, political, and economic changes. For instance, younger generations in many societies are increasingly influenced by global digital culture, creating hybrid communication patterns that blend local traditions with global trends. Finally, intercultural competence requires **adaptability**—the willingness and ability to adjust one’s

communication style to align with cultural expectations. This might involve modifying the tone of a message, choosing different media channels, or adopting culturally appropriate symbols and imagery. Adaptability also entails listening carefully to local stakeholders, engaging in dialogue, and being open to alternative perspectives. A case in point is the “Dove Real Beauty” campaign by Unilever. Initially successful in Western markets, the campaign faced criticism in some countries for its portrayal of beauty standards. In response, Unilever localized the campaign in various regions, incorporating diverse representations of beauty aligned with local cultural norms and engaging community voices in co-creating content. This adaptive strategy strengthened the brand’s global resonance while respecting cultural diversity.

Building intercultural communication skills also involves organizational commitment. PR teams benefit from training programs, cross-cultural workshops, and the inclusion of diverse voices in decision-making processes. Organizations that prioritize cultural diversity internally are often better equipped to engage with diverse external publics authentically (Pheung & Yun, 2023). In crisis situations, intercultural communication skills become even more critical. A misstep in language, tone, or symbolism can exacerbate a crisis, while a culturally sensitive response can mitigate harm and restore trust. For instance, during a global product recall, a European automobile manufacturer tailored its apology messages to align with cultural expectations in each affected market. In Germany, the messaging emphasized technical details and accountability, while in Japan, it focused on expressions of regret and reassurance about future improvements. This culturally nuanced approach was credited with helping the company maintain credibility in multiple regions. Thus, intercultural communication is central to effective public relations in a globalized world. It requires an ongoing process of learning, reflection, and adaptation. PR practitioners who cultivate intercultural competence are better positioned to build authentic relationships, navigate cultural complexities, and create campaigns that resonate across diverse cultural landscapes.

2.6 Ethics and Cultural Sensitivity in Public Relations

Public relations operates at the intersection of communication, culture, and power. In this space, ethical considerations are inescapable. Every message crafted, every relationship cultivated, and every decision taken carries ethical implications, especially when crossing cultural boundaries (Idid & Arandas, 2016). As organizations extend their reach into diverse markets, cultural sensitivity becomes a cornerstone of ethical public relations practice. This chapter explores the interplay between ethics and cultural sensitivity, examining how PR professionals can navigate the moral complexities of global communication while respecting cultural diversity. Ethics in public relations is often defined as a commitment to truthfulness, transparency, fairness, and respect for all stakeholders. However, applying these principles in multicultural contexts is far from straightforward. What one culture considers ethical and appropriate may be viewed differently elsewhere. This variability creates challenges for PR professionals working in global environments where they must reconcile universal ethical standards with local cultural norms. For example, direct criticism of authorities may be acceptable and even expected in Western democratic societies but could be considered disrespectful or even dangerous in countries where hierarchy and deference to authority are cultural cornerstones.

Cultural sensitivity is integral to ethical public relations because it ensures that messages and actions do not inadvertently offend or alienate audiences. Sensitivity goes beyond avoiding cultural taboos or stereotypes; it involves understanding the values, beliefs, and communication styles of diverse publics and designing strategies that align with these cultural realities (Gonçalves & Ruiz-Mora, 2020). A lack of cultural awareness can lead not only to communication failures but also to ethical lapses. When a luxury fashion brand released an advertisement in China depicting a Chinese model struggling to eat Italian food with chopsticks, it faced accusations of racism and cultural insensitivity. The brand's initial defense—claiming artistic freedom—only deepened public outrage. This incident illustrates how cultural insensitivity can escalate into

ethical crises that damage organizational reputation and trust. One of the ethical dilemmas PR professionals often face in intercultural contexts is the tension between universalist and relativist approaches. Universalism holds that certain ethical principles, such as honesty and human rights, apply equally in all cultures. Relativism, on the other hand, suggests that ethics are culturally constructed and should be interpreted within the context of local norms and values. In practice, neither extreme offers an adequate solution. Universalism risks imposing one culture's moral framework on others, while relativism can excuse harmful practices under the guise of respecting cultural differences. A balanced approach, sometimes called ethical pluralism, recognizes the need to uphold fundamental ethical standards while also adapting to cultural contexts in ways that demonstrate respect and understanding.

Transparency is a universal ethical principle that gains additional layers of complexity in multicultural environments. In some cultures, openness and public disclosure are valued as signs of accountability. In others, discretion and indirect communication are preferred to maintain harmony and avoid conflict (Kolić Stanić, 2020). PR professionals must weigh these preferences carefully, especially during crises where transparency is critical but cultural norms may discourage direct confrontation. A global energy company navigating an environmental disaster in Southeast Asia faced criticism for its initial silence, which was interpreted internationally as evasiveness. However, in the local context, the company's cautious approach aligned with cultural values emphasizing consensus-building and respect for governmental authority. The eventual success of its crisis communication strategy depended on balancing international expectations for transparency with local cultural practices. Respect for diversity is another ethical imperative. PR campaigns must avoid perpetuating stereotypes or using cultural symbols inappropriately. Misappropriation of cultural elements for commercial gain, often termed "cultural appropriation," has sparked public backlash in many high-profile cases. For instance, a global fashion house faced criticism for incorporating Indigenous designs into its collections without

acknowledging or compensating the original communities. Ethical public relations requires not only avoiding harm but also actively engaging with cultural communities in ways that honor their contributions and foster mutual benefit.

Moreover, PR professionals must be vigilant about power dynamics in intercultural communication (Jackson et al., 2022). Organizations, especially multinational corporations, often wield significant influence in shaping public discourse. Ethical practice demands that this power be exercised responsibly, ensuring that marginalized voices are heard and respected. Participatory approaches to PR, which involve local stakeholders in decision-making processes, can help mitigate imbalances and promote more inclusive communication strategies. Digital communication introduces additional ethical challenges. Social media platforms amplify messages across cultural and geographical boundaries, making it easier for content to be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Cultural nuances are often lost in the rapid and globalized nature of online interactions. PR professionals must therefore consider how their digital campaigns will be received by diverse audiences and anticipate potential ethical pitfalls. For example, the use of humor or sarcasm—common tactics in digital marketing—may be misread in cultures that value politeness and indirectness, leading to unintended offense.

Developing cultural competence is essential for ethical PR practice. This involves cultivating not only knowledge of other cultures but also empathy, humility, and a willingness to learn from mistakes (Fawkes, 2012). Organizations can support this development through training programs, diversity initiatives, and ethical guidelines that emphasize cultural sensitivity as a core professional value. When cultural sensitivity is institutionalized, it becomes part of the organizational DNA, guiding decision-making and communication practices at every level. An exemplary case is the Body Shop's ethical campaigns, which consistently demonstrate cultural respect and inclusivity. The company's campaigns on issues such as fair trade and environmental sustainability are informed by local partnerships and community engagement. By working with local suppliers and

respecting traditional knowledge systems, the Body Shop has built a reputation for ethical and culturally sensitive practice that strengthens its brand globally (Domm, 2016; Vissandjée et al., 2014). Therefore, ethics and cultural sensitivity are inseparable in the practice of public relations. As organizations engage with increasingly diverse publics, the need for culturally informed ethical frameworks becomes ever more urgent. Successful PR practitioners are those who can navigate the complexities of global communication with integrity, respect, and an unwavering commitment to building trust across cultural divides.

2.7 Developing Cultural Competence in Public Relations

In an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world, cultural competence is no longer a desirable trait for public relations professionals—it is a fundamental requirement (García-Izquierdo & Montalt, 2022). The ability to navigate cultural differences, build meaningful relationships with diverse audiences, and create communication strategies that resonate across borders defines the success of contemporary PR practice. This chapter examines what cultural competence means in the context of public relations, explores its key components, and offers practical strategies for developing and applying it in professional settings. Cultural competence can be defined as the capacity to understand, respect, and effectively interact with people from cultures different from one's own. It encompasses not only knowledge of cultural norms and practices but also the attitudes and skills necessary to engage constructively in intercultural situations. For public relations professionals, cultural competence means being able to anticipate how cultural factors will influence audience perceptions, adapt messages to suit diverse cultural contexts, and respond appropriately to challenges that arise in cross-cultural communication. At its core, cultural competence involves three interrelated dimensions: awareness, knowledge, and skills.

Cultural awareness is the starting point. It requires PR practitioners to recognize their own cultural assumptions, biases,

and communication styles. This self-awareness helps professionals avoid ethnocentrism—the tendency to view one’s own culture as the standard against which others are measured (Freitag, 2002). For example, a Western PR team developing a campaign for a Southeast Asian audience must recognize that the direct, assertive tone they consider normal may be perceived as aggressive or disrespectful in a culture that values harmony and indirect communication. By understanding their own cultural lens, practitioners can begin to see the world through the perspectives of others. **Cultural knowledge** builds on this awareness. It involves learning about the beliefs, values, customs, and communication practices of other cultures. This knowledge must extend beyond surface-level observations such as food, festivals, or dress. It should include deeper cultural dimensions such as attitudes toward hierarchy, concepts of time, approaches to conflict, and the role of family and community. For example, understanding that collectivist cultures prioritize group harmony over individual expression can help PR professionals design campaigns that emphasize community benefits rather than personal achievement.

Cultural skills refer to the ability to apply awareness and knowledge in practical communication settings. This includes adapting verbal and nonverbal communication styles, selecting culturally appropriate media channels, and building trust with diverse stakeholders. Effective PR professionals are able to “code-switch”—to adjust their communication behaviors to align with the cultural expectations of their audience without losing authenticity (Boyd-Swan & Molina, 2018). They are also skilled at active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution, which are essential for managing relationships in multicultural environments. Developing cultural competence is an ongoing process, not a one-time achievement. It requires continuous learning and reflection as well as exposure to diverse cultural experiences. One effective strategy is **cross-cultural training**, which helps PR teams understand cultural differences and develop practical skills for intercultural communication. Training programs often include simulations, case studies, and role-

playing exercises that challenge participants to navigate complex intercultural scenarios.

Another key strategy is **immersive experience**. Working or living in a different cultural context provides first-hand insight into local norms and communication practices. Even short-term projects or collaborations with international teams can broaden a PR professional's cultural perspective (Fatima Oliveira, 2013). Organizations can facilitate this by encouraging employee exchanges or international assignments that foster intercultural learning. **Engaging local partners and stakeholders** is equally crucial. No amount of theoretical knowledge can substitute for insights from people who live and breathe a particular culture every day. By collaborating with local agencies, community leaders, and cultural consultants, PR practitioners can design campaigns that are more authentic and culturally attuned. For instance, when a global consumer goods company sought to launch a health campaign in rural India, it worked closely with local NGOs and health workers to ensure that messaging reflected local beliefs and addressed community-specific concerns. This partnership not only enhanced the campaign's effectiveness but also strengthened trust between the organization and the community.

Cultural competence also requires organizations to embrace **diversity and inclusion** within their own ranks. Diverse PR teams bring a wider range of perspectives and cultural insights, helping organizations avoid blind spots and develop more nuanced communication strategies. Companies that prioritize diversity in leadership and decision-making are often better positioned to understand and engage with multicultural audiences (Shwartz-Ziv & Strier, 2023). The role of technology in developing cultural competence cannot be overlooked. Digital platforms allow PR professionals to monitor global conversations, engage directly with diverse publics, and access cultural information in real time. Social media analytics, for example, can provide insights into audience preferences and cultural trends across regions. However, practitioners must remain cautious, as digital communication also carries the risk of

misinterpretation when cultural nuances are not fully understood.

An example of cultural competence in action is the “Like a Girl” campaign by Always. Initially launched in Western markets, the campaign sought to challenge gender stereotypes and empower young women. When expanding globally, the campaign adapted its messaging to align with local cultural attitudes toward gender and youth. In conservative societies, the focus shifted toward broader themes of self-confidence and education for girls, avoiding language or imagery that might provoke resistance. This adaptive approach helped the campaign achieve resonance across cultures without diluting its core message. Ultimately, cultural competence in public relations is not about mastering every cultural detail but about cultivating a mindset of curiosity, humility, and respect. It requires practitioners to ask questions, listen carefully, and remain open to alternative perspectives (Singh, 2020). It also involves a willingness to acknowledge and learn from mistakes, turning cultural missteps into opportunities for growth and deeper understanding. Thus, developing cultural competence is essential for PR professionals who wish to thrive in a globalized communication landscape. It empowers practitioners to design strategies that are not only effective but also ethical, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of diverse publics. As organizations increasingly engage with multicultural stakeholders, cultural competence will remain a defining characteristic of successful public relations practice.

2.8 Digital Media, Culture, and PR

The rise of digital media has revolutionized the field of public relations, transforming how organizations engage with audiences and how cultural dynamics shape communication practices. Social media platforms, online news outlets, blogs, and instant messaging apps have created unprecedented opportunities for PR professionals to connect with diverse publics across geographic and cultural boundaries (Arango et al., 2022). At the same time, the digital environment amplifies the complexity of cultural considerations, requiring new approaches

to audience engagement, message framing, and crisis management. This chapter examines the interplay between digital media, culture, and public relations, highlighting the challenges and strategies necessary for success in the digital age.

In the digital era, communication no longer flows in one direction from organizations to audiences (de Smaele, 2013). Instead, it operates within a networked ecosystem where publics actively participate in creating, sharing, and interpreting content. This participatory culture challenges traditional PR models that emphasized message control and top-down dissemination. Now, messages can be reshaped, critiqued, or even weaponized by audiences, often in real time. For PR professionals, this shift underscores the importance of agility, transparency, and cultural sensitivity in digital engagement. Cultural dynamics are especially pronounced in the digital sphere because online platforms are not culturally neutral. Each platform embodies specific cultural values, norms, and user behaviors that influence how messages are received and shared. For example, Twitter (X) has become a key platform for political discourse and rapid-fire commentary in Western contexts, while WeChat in China serves as an all-encompassing tool for personal, professional, and commercial communication. Similarly, in Indonesia, platforms like Instagram and TikTok are heavily visual and infused with local humor, slang, and cultural references that shape how PR messages gain traction.

Digital media also facilitates the emergence of “**glocal**” **cultures**—hybrid spaces where global and local cultural elements coexist and interact. PR campaigns that succeed in these spaces often strike a balance between universal themes and local cultural nuances. Coca-Cola’s “Share a Coke” campaign, for instance, gained global popularity by personalizing bottles with names, but its success depended on localizing the names and expressions used in different countries (Büffel, 2008). In China, the campaign shifted from individual names to affectionate nicknames, reflecting cultural norms around personal privacy and group orientation. However, digital media’s global reach also means that culturally insensitive content can provoke rapid

backlash across multiple markets. A single misstep—whether a poorly chosen image, a mistranslated slogan, or an overlooked cultural taboo—can spread virally and damage an organization’s reputation. For example, a global fashion brand faced criticism when its social media post included imagery perceived as reinforcing harmful stereotypes. Within hours, hashtags calling for boycotts trended worldwide, illustrating how digital publics can mobilize around cultural issues with unprecedented speed and intensity.

To navigate these risks, PR professionals must develop **digital cultural literacy**—an understanding of how cultural identities are expressed and negotiated online. This includes familiarity with local digital trends, popular influencers, and the evolving cultural codes that shape digital conversations (Ilyina et al., 2023; Vasilenko & Molchanova, 2023). For instance, memes and emojis have become powerful tools for online engagement, but their meanings often vary across cultures. The thumbs-up emoji, while positive in many Western contexts, can be interpreted as offensive in parts of the Middle East and South America. Misunderstanding these nuances can lead to unintended consequences. The role of **influencers** in digital PR further underscores the need for cultural sensitivity. Influencers act as cultural intermediaries, shaping how audiences interpret brand messages. Collaborating with local influencers can enhance cultural authenticity and help organizations engage with niche communities. However, PR professionals must carefully vet influencers to ensure alignment with brand values and to avoid controversies that can arise from influencers’ personal actions or statements.

Digital media also reshapes the ethical landscape of public relations. The immediacy and permanence of online communication demand heightened attention to transparency, accountability, and cultural respect (Chmielecki & Lisowski, 2014). PR professionals must resist the temptation to engage in manipulative tactics such as astroturfing (creating fake grassroots support) or exploiting cultural symbols for shock value. Instead, they should prioritize building genuine

relationships with digital publics, fostering dialogue, and demonstrating cultural humility. **Crisis communication** in the digital age requires particular agility. When a cultural misstep occurs, audiences expect swift, sincere, and culturally attuned responses (Archer, 2019; Block & Lovegrove, 2021). Apologies that seem formulaic or fail to acknowledge cultural concerns often exacerbate public anger. A notable example is when a multinational food company faced backlash over an ad in Southeast Asia. Its prompt response—issuing an apology in the local language, withdrawing the ad, and engaging in dialogue with community leaders—helped to de-escalate the situation and begin repairing trust.

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CHAPTER 3

PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES IN A CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

In the era of globalization and digital connectivity that transcends geographical boundaries, the role of Public Relations (PR) has evolved to become more complex, demanding a heightened level of cultural sensitivity. Organizations—whether local, national, or multinational—are now required to build strong relationships with audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds, values, and preferences (Arini Ulfa Satira & Rossa Hidriani, 2021). An effective PR strategy in a cross-cultural context is not merely about message delivery; it also reflects a deep understanding of the cultural dimensions in which the message is received (Mudrik & Fawwaz, n.d.).

The consequences of cross-cultural miscommunication can be highly significant (Kusumawati et al., 2015). A frequently cited example is the failure of a global automotive company's marketing campaign that overlooked the fact that its product name had an inappropriate meaning in the local language—resulting in public embarrassment and eventual product withdrawal. Conversely, the success of an Asian technology company in building customer loyalty in Latin America through a PR campaign that emphasized local values of family and togetherness demonstrates how culturally adapted messaging can strengthen the bond between a brand and its audience.

This chapter provides a comprehensive exploration of various PR strategies in cross-cultural contexts, ranging from ethnocentric, polycentric, to geocentric approaches in communication design. It also discusses the importance of conducting cultural research prior to campaign development, techniques for linguistically sensitive and inclusive adaptation, the selection of media that aligns with local

information consumption habits, and the crafting of messages that avoid cultural bias.

Global trends such as sustainability, diversity, and inclusion have increasingly positioned cross-cultural sensitivity as a foundational pillar of modern PR practice. Global audiences now demand not only transparency but also authentic engagement that is responsive to their socio-cultural realities. Thus, understanding the dynamics of cross-cultural communication is no longer a mere competitive advantage—it has become a strategic imperative in shaping an organization's image and reputation in an increasingly interconnected world.

This chapter aims to provide both a theoretical foundation and a practical framework for professionals and academics in designing PR strategies that are culturally relevant, globally communicative, and ethically implemented.

3.2 Understanding Cultural Dimensions in PR Strategy

An effective cross-cultural Public Relations (PR) strategy cannot be developed without a deep understanding of the cultural characteristics of the target audience. Culture shapes how individuals communicate, receive information, perceive authority, and engage in social life. Therefore, a systematic framework for understanding culture serves as a crucial tool for PR practitioners to ensure that the messages conveyed are not only understood but also well-received by audiences across different cultural contexts.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions: Implications for PR Practice

One of the most widely used frameworks for understanding cultural differences is Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, which consists of six key dimensions (Ariffin, 2020). Each of these dimensions has direct implications for PR communication strategies, as outlined below:

1. Power Distance

Societies with a high power distance score tend to respect authority and accept power inequalities as natural.
→ PR Implication: PR communication in high power distance

countries should highlight authoritative figures or organizational leaders in delivering messages. Conversely, countries with low power distance prefer more egalitarian and participatory approaches.

2. Individualism vs. Collectivism

Individualistic cultures emphasize personal achievement and individual freedom, whereas collectivist cultures prioritize group harmony and togetherness.

→ PR Implication: In individualistic contexts, PR campaigns may highlight personal accomplishments and freedom of expression. In collectivist cultures, messages should focus on social benefits, community cohesion, and solidarity.

3. Masculinity vs. Femininity

Masculine cultures value competition and material success, while feminine cultures emphasize quality of life and relationships.

→ PR Implication: In masculine societies, campaigns can emphasize ambition, achievement, and excellence. Meanwhile, in feminine societies, messages that promote life balance, social care, and empathy are more effective.

4. Uncertainty Avoidance

Societies with high uncertainty avoidance feel uncomfortable with new or unpredictable situations.

→ PR Implication: Communication should be clear, structured, and include information that minimizes ambiguity. In cultures more tolerant of uncertainty, more experimental and creative approaches are acceptable.

5. Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation

Long-term orientation reflects a focus on perseverance and future planning, while short-term orientation emphasizes immediate results and traditional values.

→ PR Implication: In long-term oriented cultures, communication strategies should highlight long-term visions and sustainability. In short-term oriented cultures, messages emphasizing quick results and immediate impact will be more appealing.

6. Indulgence vs. Restraint

Indulgent cultures are more permissive of personal desires, whereas restrained cultures tend to suppress the expression of wants.

→ PR Implication: Campaigns in indulgent societies can leverage narratives of freedom, enjoyment, and lifestyle. Conversely, in restrained cultures, messages emphasizing self-control and conservative values are better received.

High-Context vs. Low-Context Communication

In addition to Hofstede, Edward T. Hall categorized cultures based on communication context (McSweeney, 2016):

1. High-context cultures (e.g., Japan, China, Indonesia): Rely on nonverbal communication, implicit cues, and social background.
→ PR Implication: Communication should consider symbolism, interpersonal relationships, and tactfulness in delivering criticism or claims.
2. Low-context cultures (e.g., Germany, the United States): Prefer direct, explicit communication and prioritize verbal clarity.
→ PR Implication: PR messages should be straightforward, factual, and not overly reliant on assumptions about local cultural context.

Trompenaars Model and the World Values Survey

In addition to Hofstede and Hall, Trompenaars' Cultural Dimensions approach introduces aspects such as universalism vs. particularism, and specific vs. diffuse relationships, which help in understanding how moral values and personal relationships influence communication (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1997). The World Values Survey also provides a continually updated global map of values that is useful for analyzing social and ideological preferences across various countries.

The Importance of Cultural Research in Designing PR Strategies

Understanding culture cannot rely solely on theory; empirical research is crucial for informing PR campaign design. Several research approaches that can be utilized include:

1. Content analysis of local media to understand dominant narratives.
2. Surveys adapted linguistically and contextually to avoid cultural bias.
3. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with cross-cultural target groups to explore in-depth perceptions on particular issues or messages.
4. Social listening on digital platforms to observe trends, public opinion, and communication style preferences.

Ethics of PR in Cultural Contexts

Cultural sensitivity is not only about communication effectiveness, but also about ethical responsibility. PR practitioners must be careful not to reproduce cultural stereotypes, ethnocentric bias, or cultural appropriation. On the contrary, strategies that respect diversity, equality, and cultural inclusion can help build a strong and sustainable reputation for organizations.

3.3 Globalization vs. Localization in PR Strategy

In the era of globalization marked by digital connectivity and the transnational flow of information, organizations face strategic challenges in building effective communication with cross-cultural publics. The central question arises: Should Public Relations (PR) strategies be globally standardized, locally adapted, or a combination of both?

Global Approach: Efficiency and Consistency

The global strategy emphasizes delivering a uniform message across the world. This approach is often used by multinational corporations seeking to establish a strong and consistent global brand image.

→ Advantages:

- Efficiency in content production and distribution
- Reinforcement of global brand identity and core values
- Centralized and controlled communication coordination

→ Disadvantages:

- Risk of cultural miscommunication
- Lack of local relevance
- Potential resistance from local publics who feel unrepresented

Case Study: Pepsi's failure in China in the early 1990s, when its slogan "Pepsi brings you back to life" was mistranslated as "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave," illustrates the consequences of a global approach without cultural sensitivity.

Cultural dimensions such as High vs. Low Context (Hall) play a critical role here. In high-context cultures (e.g., Japan or China), overly explicit messages may be perceived as rude or inappropriate. Meanwhile, in low-context cultures (e.g., Germany or the U.S.), overly implicit messages can be confusing.

Local Approach: Relevance and Emotional Connection

In contrast, the local strategy adapts messages, communication styles, and distribution channels to align with local norms, languages, and values.

→ Advantages:

- Increases proximity and relatability with local publics
- Avoids miscommunication and cultural rejection
- Builds reputation through contextual social engagement

→ Disadvantages:

- High cost of local research and content production
- Challenges in maintaining global brand consistency
- Complexity in cross-team and cross-regional coordination

Case Study: "McDonald's succeeded in India with its localization strategy by offering beef- and pork-free menus and adopting family-oriented advertising that aligned with local values."

In the context of Hofstede's Individualism vs. Collectivism dimension, local strategies become crucial in collectivist cultures, where decisions are shaped by group values and social norms.

Glocalization: An Adaptive Combined Strategy

The glocalization approach seeks to combine the advantages of both global and local strategies. This strategy retains core brand values and identity while allowing flexibility in local expression.

→ Advantages:

- Global consistency with local relevance
- Enhances cross-cultural public engagement
- More adaptive to social and cultural changes

→ Challenges:

- Balancing centralized control and local autonomy
- Managing multivocal yet integrated narratives
- Complex coordination across cultures and time zones

Case Study: Unilever, through its Lifebuoy brand, promoted global handwashing awareness, but its local campaign in India titled "*Help a Child Reach 5*" was tailored to local cultural issues such as child health and infant mortality, while maintaining the overarching message of hygiene.

The Role of Technology in Global-Local Strategy

Digital technology expands an organization's capability to execute glocalization strategies. Social media, for example, enables the distribution of global messages while allowing micro-targeting based on location, language, and user behavior.

However, technology also demands fast and accurate responses to cross-cultural crises, which can go viral very quickly. Organizations must therefore develop adaptive multilingual and multicultural social monitoring systems.

Ethical Considerations in Globalization and Localization

Cross-cultural PR strategies must take ethics into account, especially when introducing global values into local cultures. A global approach that imposes certain values may face cultural resistance or even be perceived as cultural imperialism.

Conversely, poorly executed localization may risk reinforcing stereotypes or exploiting cultural values for commercial gain.

Ethical Implications:

1. It is important to avoid demeaning cultural generalizations.
2. PR should build participatory partnerships with local communities.
3. Communication should foster mutual understanding and inclusiveness, not cultural dominance.

Connection with Cultural Dimensions

The choice of global, local, or glocal approach should take into account the cultural variables discussed in previous subsections. For example:

1. Power Distance: Whether PR strategies emphasize hierarchy or community empowerment
2. Uncertainty Avoidance: The degree of openness to innovation and speculative PR messaging
3. Masculinity/Femininity: Competitive vs. collaborative narratives in campaigns

The correlation between cultural dimensions and communication strategies is not absolute, but provides a foundational framework for designing culturally sensitive and effective PR strategies.

3.4 Message and Language Adaptation in Cross-Cultural Communication

In the global field of Public Relations (PR), the power of a message lies not only in what is said, but also in how and in what context the message is delivered. When communication crosses cultural boundaries, sensitivity to language, symbols, and emotional nuances becomes crucial. The same message can be received as an inspiring call to action or as an unintended insult, depending on the recipient's cultural interpretation.

Why Message Adaptation is Vital

PR messages cannot follow a one-size-fits-all approach. Every society has its own value systems, collective references, and unique

communication conventions. Without adaptation, messages may lead to:

1. Meaning distortion, where the recipient interprets something different from what was intended.
2. Emotional rejection, when the message clashes with or contradicts cultural norms.
3. Reputational crisis, caused by the perception that the organization does not respect local culture.

Conversely, a carefully adapted message not only enhances communication effectiveness but also builds a relationship of mutual respect between the organization and its public.

Strategies for Language and Symbol Adaptation in PR

1. Transcreation vs. Translation

- a. Transcreation goes beyond literal translation. It adjusts tone, style, and cultural references to keep the message authentic and relevant.
- b. Successful example: Coca-Cola in Japan replaced the slogan "Delicious and Refreshing" with *Kimochi ii* (心地いい), which means "a pleasant feeling," aligning with Japanese emotional culture.
- c. Failed example: Pepsi faced backlash in China when its slogan "Pepsi Brings You Back to Life" was literally translated into "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave."

2. Emotional Nuance and Connotation

- a. A neutral word in one culture can carry positive or negative connotations in another.
- b. Example: In Arab cultures, the word "family" often carries connotations of warmth and honor; highlighting it in a PR campaign can trigger strong emotional resonance.
- c. Emotional tone must also be adjusted—a message intended to be motivational in the West might feel overly aggressive in cultures that value harmony.

3. Visual and Symbolic Adaptation

- a. Colors, symbols, and gestures have different meanings across cultures.
- b. Example: In Brazil, the “OK” sign formed with a thumb and index finger is offensive. Ignoring such details in visual campaigns can cause unwanted controversy.
- c. Emojis in the digital age must be used cautiously—hearts, smiles, or fire symbols can carry different meanings across online communities.

4. Legal and Regulatory Considerations

- a. Some countries, like Canada, France, and Malaysia, require the use of national languages in all public communication, including PR.
- b. Other regulations may prohibit the use of religious symbols, stereotypical portrayals, or political references.
- c. PR practitioners must align their communication strategies with local advertising laws, content censorship rules, and media ethics regulations.

5. Digital PR and Virality

- a. Global digital communication increases the complexity of adaptation. Messages now cross borders instantly.
- b. Challenges include:
 - 1) Limited character space on social media restricts nuance.
 - 2) Emojis and memes are often culturally ambiguous.
 - 3) The potential for virality heightens the risk of widespread misinterpretation.
- c. Solution: Cross-cultural message testing is critical before launch.

6. The Role of Technology and AI in Adaptation

- a. AI tools such as automatic translation and sentiment analysis can help identify potential linguistic or emotional issues in messages.
- b. However, AI cannot fully grasp deep cultural context. Therefore, human oversight with cultural awareness is essential.

Ethics in Message Adaptation

Adaptation is not only about communication effectiveness, but also about cultural respect and responsibility.

1. Cultural appropriation occurs when symbols or cultural elements are used without understanding or permission, often for aesthetic or commercial gain.

Negative example: A global fashion brand faced backlash for featuring a model in traditional Indian attire without context, alongside a stereotypical narrative.

2. Ethical practice involves engaging local actors in campaign design and providing space for authentic representation of the target culture.

Positive example: Dove's *Real Beauty* campaign adapted visuals and narratives of women to match local beauty standards in various countries, resulting in strong emotional engagement and customer loyalty.

3.5 Selection of Media and Communication Channels in Cross-Cultural Contexts

In cross-cultural public relations strategies, the selection of media and communication channels is a complex strategic decision that requires careful consideration. It is not only related to the effectiveness of message delivery but also involves a deep understanding of cultural values, media consumption patterns, social structures, and applicable regulations within each local context.

Framework for Cross-Cultural Media Selection

To assist PR practitioners in making informed decisions, the following six-dimensional framework can be used to evaluate and select media in cross-cultural settings:

1. Reach and Penetration
 - a. Does the media channel reach the targeted demographic and geographic area?
 - b. *Example:* In rural areas of Southeast Asia, community radio may be more effective than digital media.
2. Credibility and Trust
 - a. How much trust does the public have in the media within a particular culture?

- b. *Example:* In some Scandinavian countries, national public media are perceived as more neutral compared to private media.
- 3. Cost and Resources
 - a. Is the use of the media in line with the organization's budget and available resources?
 - b. Local PR efforts often require greater investment in building relationships with community-based media.
- 4. Message Appropriateness
 - a. Does the media's format and communication style align with the nature of the message being conveyed?
 - b. Emotional and symbolic messages are better delivered through video or visual narratives rather than written text.
- 5. Interactivity and Feedback
 - a. To what extent does the media allow the audience to respond or engage directly?
 - b. Social media and online forums excel in this area, though content moderation can be challenging.
- 6. Cultural Sensitivity of Media
 - a. Is the media known for respecting cultural diversity and capable of delivering locally relevant content?
 - b. Utilizing well-established local media can minimize the risk of cultural insensitivity.

This framework is flexible and can be adapted based on project context, audience, and communication objectives.

The Role of Influencers in Cross-Cultural Communication

Influencers have become an integral part of global PR strategies. However, their effectiveness and public perception are highly influenced by cultural contexts:

- 1. **Macro vs. Micro vs. Nano Influencers:**
 - a. Macro influencers may be effective for building rapid brand awareness, but may risk being perceived as inauthentic in cultures that value personal closeness.

- b. Micro and nano influencers tend to be more trusted due to their closer connection to the community. In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, Japan, or Mexico, this approach is often more successful.

2. Ethical Implications:

- a. It is essential for organizations to ensure transparency in collaborations with influencers (e.g., clearly labeling sponsored content) and to promote authentic representation of local cultures.
- b. Cultural missteps, such as imposing foreign narratives or communication styles, can lead to reputational backlash.

Glocalization and Media Choices

The glocalization approach applies not only to content but also to media selection:

1. Combining global and local media enables consistent global messaging while maintaining local relevance and cultural sensitivity.
2. *Example:* An international food brand may launch a global digital campaign via Instagram while partnering with local TV stations and community print media to reach consumers in remote areas.

Glocalization strategies also encourage collaboration with hybrid media—those that merge local traditions (e.g., performing arts, customary figures, or cultural rituals) with modern technologies. This has proven effective in building deeper and more meaningful engagement.

Alternative Media and Community Engagement

In certain cultural contexts, alternative and community-based media can serve as powerful communication bridges:

1. Town hall forums, traditional ceremonies, local arts, and community events are often more effective in conveying messages that require long-term understanding and trust.
2. *Example:* In Papua New Guinea, a public health PR campaign was conducted through a traveling community theater using local languages and cultural symbols.

Regulatory and Legal Aspects of Media

Various countries impose strict regulations on media content, including:

1. Requirements for the use of official language
2. Prohibitions on specific symbols or expressions
3. Tight oversight of cross-border digital content

For instance, in France, advertisements must be in French; in Gulf countries, gender portrayal in media is closely monitored. Therefore, cross-cultural PR strategies must begin with a thorough mapping of media regulations in the target region.

Media Preferences Across Generations

Media preferences are also strongly influenced by age segments:

1. Generation Z and Millennials are more active on social media and prefer visual, short, and interactive content.
2. Generation X and Baby Boomers still rely on print media, TV, or radio, and tend to prioritize credibility over speed.

Effective cross-cultural PR strategies should consider this segmentation holistically—not just by age, but also by understanding the generational roles in the local social structure (e.g., who holds decision-making power within the community).

3.6 Crisis Management in Different Cultural Contexts

Crisis management is one of the most critical aspects of Public Relations practice. When a crisis arises, a response that is swift, appropriate, and culturally sensitive can be the key differentiator between effective resolution and further escalation. In cross-cultural environments, these challenges become significantly more complex due to differences in perceptions, communication norms, and public expectations of organizations and media.

The Importance of Cultural Sensitivity in Crisis Situations

Each culture has a unique perspective and response mechanism when facing crises. For instance, in high power distance cultures, the public may expect organizational authorities or leaders to appear publicly and demonstrate full control over the crisis. In contrast, low power distance cultures may value a more transparent and participatory response.

Moreover, high-context cultures tend to use implicit and symbolic communication during crises, while low-context cultures expect direct and explicit information. Understanding these differences is essential to avoid misinterpretations or perceptions of insensitivity.

Culturally-Based Crisis Management Strategies

The following are key principles for managing crises effectively in cross-cultural contexts:

1. Cultural Analysis in the Pre-Crisis Stage

- a. Conduct a cultural mapping of the target audience and their social norms prior to the onset of any crisis. This includes understanding communication styles, cultural values, and effective media channels.
- b. *Example:* Identifying whether the audience prefers collective or individual problem-solving may influence communication and negotiation strategies.

2. Crisis Message Adaptation

- a. Tailor crisis messages to align with the audience's cultural values and expectations.
- b. *Example:* In collectivist cultures, emphasize solidarity and the organization's social responsibility; in individualist cultures, highlight transparency and individual accountability.

3. Selecting the Right Spokesperson

- a. Choose a spokesperson who possesses cultural legitimacy and credibility.
- b. In some cultures, formal leaders or community figures are respected as organizational representatives, whereas in others, a more relatable and communicative spokesperson may be more effective.

4. Managing Local and Global Media

- a. Adapt crisis communication channels to suit both local and global media preferences.
- b. For example, using social media for global audiences and traditional media such as radio or local television for specific communities.

5. Upholding Ethics and Cultural Sensitivity

- a. Avoid stereotypes and refrain from blaming specific cultures during a crisis.
- b. Show respect for social norms, including when issuing apologies or clarifications.

Cross-Cultural Crisis Case Studies

1. BP Deepwater Horizon (2010)

BP faced a significant global crisis communication challenge during the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. A key issue stemmed from differing expectations between the American public, which demanded full transparency, and BP's British corporate culture, which initially leaned toward withholding information. These differences influenced public perception and the international handling of the crisis.

2. McDonald's Product Issues in India

When McDonald's faced health and cultural sensitivity issues regarding food in India, their response adapted to local norms—emphasizing the use of halal and vegetarian ingredients and aligning their communication campaigns with local cultural values.

Crisis Management Challenges in the Digital Age

Social media and digital platforms have accelerated the spread of information and public opinion during crises. In cross-cultural contexts, these challenges are further compounded by:

1. The viral spread of uncontrolled messages that can magnify the impact of the crisis.
2. Differences in cultural interpretations of language and symbols, which may lead to widespread misunderstandings.
3. The need for rapid responses that may conflict with internal organizational processes requiring time to adapt messages culturally.

Organizations must therefore develop crisis response protocols that include cross-cultural teams and leverage media monitoring technology to detect and respond to potential crises in real time.

Conclusion

This chapter emphasizes that the success of Public Relations strategies in cross-cultural contexts largely depends on a profound understanding of cultural dimensions, message adaptation, media selection, and culturally sensitive crisis management. Cultural aspects such as power distance, individualism, and high/low context serve as essential foundations for designing effective and relevant communication for diverse audiences.

Globalization, localization, and glocalization offer strategic frameworks for organizations to balance brand consistency with specific local needs. Language and message adaptation should go beyond translation, taking into account emotional, symbolic, and cultural regulatory nuances to ensure acceptance across regions.

Media and communication channel choices must also be tailored to cultural characteristics, generational preferences, and evolving technologies. Cross-cultural crisis management requires teams that are culturally competent, empathetic, and technologically equipped to respond quickly and effectively.

Ultimately, cross-cultural PR strategies are not merely challenges—they represent opportunities to build stronger and more authentic relationships with global audiences. Through sensitive and

adaptive approaches, organizations can enhance reputation and loyalty in an era of communication that is increasingly interconnected yet deeply rooted in rich local cultures.

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CHAPTER 4

TECHNOLOGY AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

4.1 Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, technology has reshaped the way individuals and communities communicate, particularly in intercultural contexts. The proliferation of digital communication platforms, such as email, video conferencing, messaging applications, and social media, has significantly altered the landscape of human interaction, making it possible for people from diverse cultural backgrounds to collaborate, learn, and share ideas across vast geographic distances (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

Globalization has facilitated increased contact and collaboration among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. As societies become more interconnected through trade, education, and migration, the demand for effective intercultural communication has grown exponentially. Intercultural communication, which refers to interactions between individuals of different cultural backgrounds, is shaped not only by linguistic differences but also by varying norms, values, and expectations. In this context, technology plays a transformative role. The rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has revolutionized how individuals communicate, collaborate, and construct meaning across cultures.

The digitization of communication has resulted in unprecedented access to information and has enabled real-time interaction across continents. Tools such as email, instant messaging, video conferencing, and social media platforms have become integral to daily communication in both personal and professional contexts. These technologies offer opportunities for intercultural dialogue and collaboration that were previously unimaginable. For example, a student in Indonesia can participate in a virtual classroom with peers

from Germany and Brazil, exchanging ideas and perspectives that enrich their global competence (O'Dowd, 2018).

However, the digital transformation also brings significant challenges. Differences in communication styles, cultural misinterpretations, and varying levels of digital literacy can lead to misunderstandings and conflict. Additionally, the proliferation of technology is uneven, creating a digital divide that excludes marginalized communities from fully participating in intercultural exchanges (van Dijk, 2020). Moreover, the dominance of certain languages, particularly English, on digital platforms may contribute to linguistic imperialism and the erosion of minority languages (Pennycook, 2010).

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into communication tools further complicates the intercultural landscape. AI-driven applications such as automated translation, chatbots, and recommendation algorithms may lack the nuanced understanding of cultural context, leading to errors or biased outputs (Lopez, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to critically examine the ways in which technology both facilitates and impedes intercultural communication.

This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on theories from communication studies, cultural anthropology, and media studies to explore the multifaceted relationship between technology and intercultural communication. Through the analysis of case studies and empirical research, it aims to identify best practices and propose strategies to harness technology for inclusive and effective intercultural engagement.

4.2 Conceptual Framework

Understanding the interplay between technology and intercultural communication requires a firm grounding in both communication theory and technological applications. This section outlines the key concepts and theoretical perspectives that underpin this study.

4.2.1 Defining Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication refers to the process through which individuals from different cultural backgrounds exchange information, negotiate meaning, and build relationships. It involves verbal and non-verbal communication, cultural values, norms, and expectations that influence how messages are sent, received, and interpreted (Samovar & McDaniel, 2013). According to Gudykunst and Kim (2003), effective intercultural communication involves a high degree of mindfulness, empathy, and adaptability, as communicators must navigate unfamiliar cultural cues and assumptions.

As communication increasingly shifts to digital platforms, the dynamics of intercultural communication have become more complex. Technology can facilitate instant communication, yet it also introduces issues related to misinterpretation, technological literacy, and the loss of contextual cues essential in high-context cultures (Hall, 1976).

The integration of technology into intercultural communication is not neutral; it is mediated by power dynamics, cultural frameworks, and digital literacy levels. Individuals from low-context cultures—who rely on explicit verbal messages—may adapt more easily to text-based platforms, while those from high-context cultures may find the absence of nonverbal cues challenging (Hall, 1976; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). Moreover, the uneven global distribution of digital infrastructure continues to pose a barrier to equitable participation in cross-cultural digital discourse (UNESCO, 2022).

In today's interconnected world, intercultural communication is not limited to face-to-face interactions. Digital technologies have expanded the scope of intercultural encounters, facilitating communication across geographic distances. This expansion has significant implications for how individuals and organizations engage in cross-cultural dialogue.

4.2.2 Technology in Communication

The evolution of communication technology has dramatically altered the way humans interact. Traditional forms of communication, such as face-to-face conversation and written correspondence, have been supplemented and, in many cases, supplanted by digital media. Email, video conferencing, social media, and instant messaging are now central to professional and personal communication. Digital communication tools have dramatically reduced temporal and spatial boundaries, enabling individuals worldwide to interact in real time, fostering multicultural understanding (Herring, 2001; Thorne, 2003). These platforms support both synchronous and asynchronous modes, enabling inclusive participation across time zones and linguistic proficiencies.

Bauman and Shcherbina ((2018) observed that Millennials' heavy use of social media fosters cross-cultural engagement, with digital reflection encouraging deeper intercultural insights. Yet they caution that superficial engagement or stereotyping may result without intentional instructional design that prompts richer communication.

Understanding how technology influences intercultural communication is critical for educational institutions, global businesses, and international organizations. In education, the shift to online learning and collaborative international projects has introduced a need for culturally responsive teaching strategies and digital tools that promote intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). In business, effective cross-cultural communication is vital for multinational teams and virtual collaboration, requiring an awareness of cultural differences and appropriate technological choices (Bennett, 1988; Bauman & Shcherbina, 2018).

Castells (2010) argues that we live in a "network society," where the flow of information is facilitated by digital networks that transcend national boundaries. These technologies enable users to communicate asynchronously or in real-time, access a vast array of cultural content, and form virtual communities that foster intercultural dialogue. However, the effectiveness of digital communication depends on users' familiarity with technological tools and cultural norms.

4.2.3 Theoretical Perspectives

Several theoretical frameworks help explain the complexities of intercultural communication in a technological context:

1. **High-Context and Low-Context Cultures (Hall, 1976):** Hall distinguishes between high-context cultures, where meaning is derived from context and non-verbal cues, and low-context cultures, where communication is explicit and direct. Digital communication platforms, which often lack rich contextual cues, may favor low-context communication and disadvantage those from high-context cultures.
2. **Cultural Dimensions Theory (Hofstede, 2001):** Hofstede identifies dimensions such as individualism vs. collectivism and power distance, which influence communication styles. For instance, collectivist cultures may prioritize group harmony and indirect communication, which can be misinterpreted in more individualistic, direct cultures.
3. **Face-Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2018):** This theory examines how people from different cultures manage face or self-image during conflict and communication. In digital settings, face-saving strategies may be complicated by the lack of non-verbal feedback.
4. **Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986):** This theory posits that communication effectiveness depends on the medium's ability to convey rich information. Face-to-face communication is the richest medium, while text messages are among the leanest. Selecting the appropriate medium for intercultural communication is crucial for reducing ambiguity and enhancing understanding.
5. **Social Information Processing Theory (Walther, 1992):** Walther argues that users adapt to the limitations of computer-mediated communication (CMC) by developing new strategies for impression formation and relationship building. Over time, intercultural understanding can be achieved even through lean media, given sufficient interaction and effort.

Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens through which to analyze the role of technology in shaping intercultural communication practices.

4.3 Impact of Technology on Intercultural Communication

Technology has profoundly reshaped the landscape of intercultural communication. Its impact can be categorized into three primary areas: bridging geographical and cultural gaps, enabling linguistic translation and interaction through artificial intelligence, and influencing cultural representation through digital media.

4.3.1 Bridging Geographical and Cultural Gaps

Technological tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Slack, and WhatsApp allow individuals and organizations to engage in cross-cultural communication without the need for physical travel. These tools are particularly transformative in education, where virtual exchange programs connect students and educators across borders. O'Dowd (2018) describes how such programs develop intercultural communicative competence by facilitating sustained dialogue and collaboration among participants from different cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, technology enables diasporic communities to maintain ties with their homelands while integrating into new cultural environments. For example, social networking platforms allow migrants to access native-language news, participate in cultural discussions, and maintain familial relationships across long distances. This dual engagement supports hybrid identities and enhances cultural understanding.

4.3.2 Language Translation and AI Tools

One of the most significant contributions of technology to intercultural communication is the development of AI-powered translation tools. Applications such as Google Translate, Microsoft Translator, and DeepL offer instant translation of texts, speech, and images. These tools facilitate communication in multilingual

environments, enabling collaboration in international business, diplomacy, and education.

However, these translation tools are not without limitations. Machine translations often struggle with idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and context-dependent meanings. Lopez (2021) highlights how automated translations can perpetuate bias, particularly when trained on unbalanced data sets. Additionally, nuances in politeness strategies or honorifics in high-context languages such as Japanese or Korean may be lost in translation, leading to misinterpretation or offense.

4.3.3 Cultural Representation in Digital Media

Digital media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook serve as arenas for cultural expression and representation. Content creators use these platforms to share their experiences, traditions, and perspectives, thereby contributing to the global cultural mosaic. According to Abidin (2016), influencers from marginalized communities can subvert dominant narratives by presenting alternative identities and challenging stereotypes.

Social media also facilitates the rapid spread of cultural symbols, memes, and narratives. While this can foster cultural appreciation, it may also lead to cultural appropriation and superficial engagement. Therefore, digital literacy and critical media consumption are essential components of effective intercultural communication.

4.4 Challenges in Technology-Mediated Intercultural Communication

Despite its potential to connect diverse populations, technology-mediated communication also introduces a range of challenges that can hinder intercultural understanding. These challenges include miscommunication and stereotyping, the digital divide, and ethical concerns around privacy and representation.

4.4.1 Miscommunication and Stereotypes

Technology often strips communication of vital contextual cues such as tone, body language, and facial expressions. This is

particularly problematic in intercultural settings where such cues carry significant cultural meaning. Hall (1976) posits that high-context cultures rely heavily on non-verbal cues, which are frequently lost in text-based or low-context digital environments. For instance, an emoji used to convey friendliness in one culture may be interpreted as sarcasm or insincerity in another (Park, Baek, & Cha, 2014).

Moreover, stereotypes can be reinforced through digital communication when individuals rely on assumptions rather than direct experience. Algorithms that curate content based on previous behavior may also amplify cultural biases. As Tufekci (2015) argues, these algorithmic echo chambers limit exposure to diverse perspectives and hinder intercultural empathy.

4.4.2 The Digital Divide

The unequal distribution of technological access—commonly referred to as the digital divide—remains a major barrier to equitable intercultural communication. According to van Dijk (2020), digital inequality arises from disparities in access to devices, internet connectivity, and digital literacy. Marginalized communities often lack the infrastructure necessary for consistent and effective digital engagement, which can further entrench social and cultural exclusion.

This divide is not only global but also local, existing within countries across urban-rural lines, income levels, and educational backgrounds. The result is a stratification of who can participate in global digital conversations and whose voices are amplified or silenced.

4.4.3 Privacy and Ethical Concerns

Different cultures have divergent conceptions of privacy and personal data. In some Western contexts, individual privacy is prioritized and protected through regulatory frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In contrast, collectivist societies may view information sharing as a norm, leading to conflicting expectations in cross-cultural interactions (Ess, 2009).

Additionally, AI tools used in translation, content moderation, or surveillance often lack cultural nuance. Biased data inputs can result in misrepresentation or discrimination against certain cultural or ethnic groups. Noble (2018) demonstrates how algorithmic systems can perpetuate racial and gender biases, raising important ethical questions about the use of AI in intercultural contexts.

4.5 Case Studies

4.5.1 Virtual Intercultural Exchange in Education

A compelling case of technology-enabled intercultural communication is found in virtual exchange (VE) initiatives within education. One such project between Japanese and Canadian students employed digital storytelling to share personal narratives. According to Helm (2020), the asynchronous format allowed students to reflect on their identities and cultures before responding, resulting in deeper intercultural engagement and mutual respect. VE not only broadens global awareness but also enhances digital literacy and empathy among participants. However, successful implementation requires careful instructional design, culturally responsive pedagogy, and equitable access to technology.

4.5.2 Cross-Cultural Collaboration in Corporations

In multinational corporations such as Unilever and Google, global teams collaborate across time zones and cultures using digital platforms like Slack, Zoom, and Trello. Neeley (2015) highlights how these tools can foster teamwork and innovation, provided that employees are trained in cultural competence and inclusive communication.

To avoid miscommunication, companies often employ intercultural training and hire diversity officers. Some firms even design user interfaces with cultural preferences in mind, offering multilingual support and localized user experiences to accommodate global employees.

4.5.3 Social Media and Transnational Movements

Social media platforms have become critical tools for transnational activism and cultural solidarity. The global spread of

the #MeToo movement exemplifies how digital platforms can transcend national boundaries to address gender-based violence. Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles (2020) describe how the movement's hashtags were localized across countries—#NiUnaMenos in Latin America and #WithYou in South Korea—reflecting diverse cultural realities while maintaining a shared mission.

These digital movements foster intercultural alliances and empower marginalized voices. However, they also face challenges such as online harassment, censorship, and co-optation by commercial interests.

4.6 Strategies for Effective Intercultural Communication Through Technology

To harness the benefits of technology while mitigating its pitfalls, several strategies can be employed in educational, corporate, and social contexts.

4.6.1 Culturally Responsive Design

Designing communication tools and platforms with cultural diversity in mind is essential. This includes not only language localization but also sensitivity to visual symbols, colors, interaction patterns, and values. For example, interface designs that emphasize community feedback or group collaboration align better with collectivist cultures (Marcus & Gould, 2000).

Moreover, platform developers should include diverse perspectives during the design process to avoid ethnocentric assumptions. Engaging local communities and cultural consultants can help ensure that products meet the needs of a global audience.

4.6.2 Intercultural Training and Digital Literacy

Institutions must invest in digital literacy and intercultural training programs. Such initiatives teach users how to navigate cross-cultural interactions, recognize bias in digital tools, and adapt their communication styles. Byram (1997) emphasizes the importance of cultivating intercultural communicative competence—skills in

empathy, critical cultural awareness, and negotiation—that are essential in a digital world.

For example, international student orientations and corporate onboarding programs can integrate modules on virtual etiquette, time zone awareness, and multilingual communication strategies.

4.6.3 Inclusive and Ethical Tech Policies

Governments, corporations, and educators should implement ethical policies that promote inclusion and data responsibility. These policies should prioritize transparency in algorithmic decision-making, protection of minority languages, and accountability for biased outcomes (Crawford, & Paglen, 2019).

Open-source platforms and decentralized networks can also empower local content creators and prevent monopolization by dominant tech giants. By embedding ethical values into the digital infrastructure, societies can create a more inclusive online environment for intercultural communication.

4.7 Intercultural & Communicative Competence

Intercultural competence involves attitudes (openness), knowledge (cultural awareness), skills (interpretation, empathy), and behaviors (adaptation)—as defined by Deardorff (2006). Online learning environments, when designed for reflection and dialog, effectively nurture these dimensions.

TikTok, Instagram, Slack, and other platforms—when used with intention—allow students to share cultural artifacts, reflect on differences, and build empathy. These processes align with Deardorff’s dynamic, processual model of intercultural competence.

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Deardorff (2006) developed a process-oriented model of ICC comprising four interrelated components: attitudes (respect, openness), knowledge (cultural awareness, deep understanding), skills (interpreting, relating), and behaviors (flexibility and adaptability).

Technology can enhance or hinder ICC development depending on how it is integrated. Online platforms offer frequent opportunities for intercultural contact, but these opportunities must be structured to promote meaningful dialogue. For example, projects such as Virtual Exchange use collaborative problem-solving and guided reflection to develop ICC by fostering empathy and understanding between diverse student populations.

In digital spaces, learners must also navigate online identities, digital etiquette, and differing norms of interaction—factors that are increasingly relevant to communicative competence in globalized societies. Reflection and feedback are key: without them, online interaction can become superficial or transactional, rather than transformative.

Importantly, digital ICC is not only about being effective communicators but also about being ethical and culturally responsive in the use of technology. This includes avoiding stereotypes, recognizing power dynamics, and acknowledging the limitations of automatic translation or algorithmic mediation.

4.8 Conclusion

Technology has become an indispensable medium for intercultural communication in the 21st century. While it offers unprecedented opportunities for global engagement, it also presents significant challenges related to cultural misinterpretation, inequality, and ethical use. Through an exploration of theoretical frameworks, real-world case studies, and strategic recommendations, this paper has highlighted the complex yet promising relationship between technology and intercultural communication.

Effective communication across cultures in the digital age requires more than just access to technology—it demands a nuanced understanding of cultural contexts, deliberate inclusivity in design, and ethical governance of digital tools. Educational institutions, corporations, and policymakers each have a role to play in fostering an environment where technology bridges rather than widens cultural divides.

Equally important is the cultivation of Intercultural Communicative Competence, which requires learners and professionals to engage with digital tools not only functionally, but reflectively. Projects like COIL demonstrate that when intercultural interaction is structured, guided, and accompanied by reflection, digital platforms can serve as powerful spaces for mutual learning and growth. In such environments, participants develop skills in empathy, adaptability, and cultural awareness that extend far beyond the virtual classroom.

Looking ahead, future research should investigate emerging technologies such as the metaverse, augmented reality, and natural language processing in greater depth, examining their potential for both enhancing and complicating intercultural interactions. Ultimately, technology must be guided by human values to serve as a tool for empathy, cooperation, and cultural respect in a rapidly changing world.

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