

## RESEARCH NOTE

### Developing Global Public Relations Practice: Exploring Relationships between Organisations and the Customer Stakeholder in Australia and Malaysia

Jannet Pendleton  
Kiranjit Kaur

#### *Abstract*

*This paper examines the practice and perception of organisation-public relationship management between the organisation and its customer public within and across Australian and Malaysian cultures. It analyses how customer public perception (through a survey) compares and contrasts with organization rhetorical strategies for managing relationship with customers (through speech texts and media releases posted on the organisations' websites) for an interpretation of the state of organization-public relationship. By employing a tested measurement instrument it seeks to further test its applicability in different cultural settings. Results indicated a lack of reliability in some aspects of the survey instrument in this context raising questions about the universal applicability of relationship measurement instruments. Generally, the neutrality of the responses given by respondents in both countries suggests that the organisation-customer relationship is not significant to them. This could be interpreted to be because of the nature of the organisation, the low risk of the product and the relatively low engagement between the organisation and the customer public. The neutral responses of the customers in the survey on their perception of the relationship with the organization contrasts with the stronger rhetorical messages of the organisation's commitment to managing relationships with customers and suggests that the organisation-public relationship can be examined further in the context of type of perceived risk of product to the customer public.*

*Keywords: organisation-public relationship, public relations, Australia, Malaysia, exchange relationship*

#### **Introduction**

Relationships between organisations and their publics are generally analyzed based on perceptions the latter have of the former. Often such analysis only describes the relationship at that point in time and is primarily based on the subjective experiences of individuals with different aspects of their contact with the organisation as well as the communication it receives from the organisation on shared issues of concern.

The organisation conveys its intentions about the kind of relationship it desires with its multiple and specific publics through various means. Such avenues include posting on their websites press statements as well as the speeches made by the leaders. Technology development now allows the organization to better facilitate the distribution of such messages. The organisational website is under direct management control and the IT savvy practitioner will ensure maximum exposure for all outgoing company communication, especially public statements about issues that could affect organisation-public relationship.

Cultural factors bear some influence on communication that the organisations have in different national environments. Expectations in organisation-public relationships may vary in different cultural contexts and both organisations and publics respond accordingly.

This paper examines the practice and perception of organisation-public relationship management between the organisation and its customer public within and across Australian and Malaysian cultures. It analyses how customer public perception (through a survey) compares and contrasts with organisation rhetorical strategies for managing relationship with customers (through speech texts and media releases posted on the organisations' websites) for an interpretation of the state of organisation-public relationship. By employing a tested measurement instrument it seeks to further test its applicability in different cultural settings.

The main objectives of the research are:

1. To measure customer perceptions of an organisation's long-term relationship using a modified version of the Public Relations Measurement Scale developed by Grunig and Hon (1999),
2. To identify organization-public relationship differences and similarities applicable in a cross-cultural context of the two countries of Australia and Malaysia, and
3. To examine how customer public perception compares and contrasts with organisation rhetorical strategies (through speech texts and media releases posted on the organisation's website) for managing relationship with customers.

## **Conceptualization**

### **Public relations as relationship management**

Conceptualisation of public relations as relationship management is increasingly acknowledged within the field as a focal concept in any definitional discussion of public relations. Early references to the central role of relationships in public relations management (Ferguson, 1984) called for relationships to be at the centre of public relations research and defined public relations as a management function that is responsible for establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with

key publics (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1985) as early as 1984. Pavlick (1987:122) observed that there was little research on relationship as a unit of analysis. Grunig (1992) suggested that relationship building should be the focus of public relations practice and linked to organisational outcomes.

Broom, Casey and Ritchie (1997, 2000) explicated a concept of relationship which Botan and Taylor (2004) describe as the core public relations function of relationship building. Broom et al (2000) at that time saw the lack of suitable definitions as one of the reasons that valid operational measures of organisational-public relationship had not been developed and also a limitation on theory building in public relations. The theoretical model they proposed for constructing a theory about organisation-public relationships included the conceptualisation of relationships with measurable properties that could be studied “as a phenomenon distinct from the perceptions held by the parties in the relationships” (Broom et al 2000:17)

Ledingham and Bruning (2000) provided a basis for discussion of the conceptualisation and possibly the redefinition of public relations as relationship management noting the steady increase in scholarly research on the influence of organisation-public relationships over the previous 10 years. This approach was supported by other researchers, for example, Kent and Taylor (2002) who described both the study and practice of public relations as having an emphasis on relationship management. One of the arguments offered by Ledingham and Bruning (2000) was that while research into influence of organisational-public relationship had increased, much of it suggested links between public evaluation and behaviors were lined to attitudes about their relationship with an organisation. It is not enough to simply apply principles of interpersonal relationships to organisation-public relationships; practitioners need to understand more about the way these relationships operate and how they effect evaluations and behavior. In their study, Bruning, Castle and Schrepper (2004) concluded that effectively managed organization-public relationships contributed to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

The benefits in adopting a relational approach are that it defines the organisational function of public relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998), clarifies the role of communication within that function (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000) and elevates the practice beyond traditional metrics of public relations value (Samsup et.al. 2004), providing evidence of the financial contribution of public relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Huang 2001; Grunig 1992). Relationships are valuable predictors of public predispositions, behavior and satisfaction (Ledingham, 2003).

Philips (2005) takes the concept further, discussing the application of relationships in a commercial setting to add wealth to the organisation and contribute to the ability of public relations to quantify both the outcomes of its work and its value to the organisation. He claims to go beyond the viewpoint expressed by Grunig and Huang (2000), viewing relationships as both valuable in their own right and pivotal to wealth generation, and is also critical of Ledingham and Bruning's (2000) definition of public relations as relationship practice suggesting that these definitions do not go far

enough to acknowledge the value of relationships as a primary asset or as a primary actor in changing the value of assets and call for more specificity in the nature of any benefits described.

One important benefit of relationships noted by Phillips (2005) is differentiation. In mature economies it is increasingly difficult for organisations to establish significant points of difference and in this context stakeholder relationships can be correlated with company performance (White & Murray, 2004). Also, according to Phillips (2005) stakeholder relationships, as intangible assets, can be considered as a major driver in the global economy and in corporate survival and success.

### **Defining and measuring organisation-public relationships**

In 1992, Grunig, Grunig and Ehling still found little agreement on the essential nature of relationships even though acknowledging they were central to their theory of public relations. Organisation-public relationship was subsequently defined by Ledingham, Bruning and Wilson as “the economic and humanistic interchange between an organization and its publics to obtain quality relational outcomes through optimal initiation and maintenance strategies” (1999: 169). While the relationship approach has gained support there are calls for more research to identify the specific components to use when assessing public relationships (Samsup et al. 2004).

Focusing on the transactional aspect of relationships, Broom, Casey & Ritchie suggested that relationships consist of the transactions that involve the exchange of resources between organisations and publics, being represented by patterns of “interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organisation and its publics” (2000:18). The relationships examined in this study were essentially marketing relationships-mobile phone customers were surveyed and asked about their relationship with the organisation. While this provides a reliable indicator of the relationship from the customer’s perspective, individual members of publics have multiple stakes in organisations - a customer is also a stakeholder in other ways; as a community member, taxpayer, shareholder and their relationship with the organisation is shaped by all of these to some degree.

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) operationalised five dimensions culled from the literature on interpersonal, marketing and other types of relationships - trust, openness, involvement, investment and commitment and explored the linkage between these dimension and public perceptions, attitudes and choice behavior demonstrating the value of relationships as a predictor of predisposition, behavior and satisfaction. (Ledingham, 2003:185). Grunig and Hon (1999) developed a scale examining the organisation- public issues of trust, control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, communal relationships, and exchange relationships. Huang (2001) developed a relationship scale that showed that trust, control mutuality, relationship satisfaction, relationship commitment and face and favor were factors that measured the quality of cross-cultural organisation-public relationships. A later study used the scale to show

the capacity of effectively managed relationships to positively effect issue outcomes (Huang 2001b)

There has been considerable research examining the influence of organisation- public relationships, linking specific relationship issues to satisfaction, behavioral intent and also research which shows that organisations and key public members have personal, professional and community relationships that impact on satisfaction and actual behavior (Bruning, Castle & Schrepper, 2004). In relationship marketing, Morgan and Hunt identify relationship, commitment and trust as essential to success (Morgan & Hunt 1994).

While the relationship may be conceptualised as independent of the related parties' perceptions there is no established way to measure it without these. Most research has focused on one side of the relationship (Kim, 2001, Grunig & Hon, 1999). One aim of this paper is to explore the gap between public perceptions of and organisational rhetoric about the relationship.

The impact of culture on public relations practice is debated among academics. Many researchers, mainly proponents of PR Excellence theory, argue that general principles of public relations can be applied globally, that the same principles and practice can be applied in all cultures (McNamara, J. 2012). However this is disputed by others who suggest that this underestimates the differences between cultures and is ethnocentric (Sriramesh, K. 2004). By locating this research in two cultural context this study aims to illuminate the limits of global models of practice.

## **Methodology**

Research was carried out through a quantitative self-administered customer survey and a qualitative analysis of corporate media releases from selected telecommunication organizations. To enable inter-country comparisons the selected organisation were from the telecommunications industry and were the major providers, reflecting as much as possible the business culture of each country. Both are majority owned by the government and considered national brands.

### **a. Self-administered Questionnaire Survey**

The survey was self-administered by respondents from both Australia and Malaysia. A total of 189 useable questionnaires were collected by email and in person. English speaking people over the age of 18 who use a mobile phone were eligible to respond. The language requirement applied equally in Malaysia where English is the language of business. The survey was conducted over a three-month period from December 2005 to February 2006. Quota sampling with a snowball sample within a range of age and occupational categories was used.

Respondent organization-public relationship perceptions were measured using a modified version of the Grunig and Hon (1999) scale, which examined issues of trust, control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, communal relationships and exchange relationships. The demographic section of the questionnaire was modified further for the Australian and Malaysian respondents. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement, on a nine point Likert type scale, with 29 statements.

This scale has been previously tested and the validity of the six -factor model has proven valid and reliable (Grunig & Hon, 1999; Samsup et al. 2004).

### **b. Qualitative Analysis of a Sample of Corporate Media Releases and Speech Texts**

Data indicating relationship intentions by organisations was extracted through an examination of the press releases and speeches by senior management placed on the websites of two national organisations of Australia and Malaysia respectively.

A sample of media releases and speeches from the website of each of the two major providers -Telstra in Australia and Celcom in Malaysia - were examined for a period of 12 months. Obvious duplications were omitted.

### **Quantitative Data Findings and Analysis**

The survey instrument constructs a set of Likert scales from the individual items in the questionnaire. In the calculation of the Control Mutuality variable the responses for question nine are reversed; in calculation of the Communal Relationship variable, the responses for questions 22, 24 and 25 are reversed.

The first step in examining the results of this survey was to carry out a reliability analysis. The result of this is the Cronbach Alpha statistics (closer to 1 is better). A split- half analysis was then carried out for each scale in turn. The Trust scale showed a satisfactory positive relationship between all six items in the scale, with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.899. The Commitment variable has Cronbach's Alpha of 0.879 and a satisfactory positive relationship between all five items in the scale. The Satisfaction variable has Cronbach's Alpha of 0.920 and a satisfactory positive relationship between all five items in the scale. The Exchange variable has Cronbach's Alpha of 0.861 and a satisfactory positive relationship between all five items in the scale.

Problems arose with the Communal Relationship variable, which has a Cronbach's Alpha of only 0.409 and the Control Mutuality variable, which has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.676. Part of this problem seems to stem from the reversed questions. If, for example, in the Control Mutuality variable, question 9 is deleted, the reduced scale constructed from questions 7, 8, 10 and 11 has a Cronbach Alpha of 0.831 and would be a possible alternative construct for Control Mutuality.

A further reliability analysis was carried out splitting the data into two parts based on country and in both Control Mutuality and Communal Relationship the effect of disassociation produced by the reversed questions remained but was more pronounced in Malaysia than in Australia. The question arising here is why this should have been so and this should be the subject of some further qualitative research.

### **Description of the sample**

The demographic profile of the sample, which comprised 100 surveys from Malaysia and 89 from Australia is attached in Appendix 1. Of the 189 respondents, the majority was female (n= 112; 61.5%) and mostly in the younger categories in both countries; 72% were aged between 18 and 34 years. The samples drawn from Australia and Malaysia did not differ significantly on gender or age. The dominant ethnic groups were the Bumiputra (n = 43; 43%) in Malaysia, and Anglo European in Australia (n = 67; 75%), which reflected the broad social make-up of each country.

Appendix 2 shows the mobile telephone usage characteristics of the sample. The majority, 85% of respondents stated that their mobile phones were for personal rather than business use.

The purpose of the mobile phone, whether for business or personal use, made no difference to results in this study. Age as a possible influence on relationship indicators was tested with ANOVA and did not relate with any level of significance.

### **Analysis of Relationship Dimensions between Organizations and Customers in Malaysia and Australia**

One aim of this study was to determine the most salient aspects of the relationship in each country and where they differed. Due to the poor reliability of two indicators, Control Mutuality and Communal Relationship, this discussion does not include them. A notable factor in the overall results was the neutrality of the responses. While the detailed results in the tables below show where individual relationship indicators differed significantly, in both countries the mean scores tended to be around the mid point of the scale, without a lot of differentiation between scales (Appendix 1). One interpretation of this could be that the relationship as conceived here is just not significant to them. As one respondent said, "I just want them to give me a phone that works properly, I don't want a relationship with them."

Overall Malaysia tended to score higher than Australia on three of the four relationship dimensions (exception being Exchange Relationship) but the countries differed significantly on only two dimensions, namely Commitment and Exchange Relationship, Table 1).

**Table 1 :Relationship dimensions between Organizations and Customers in Malaysia and Australia**

	Country	N	Mean	Std Deviation	p
<b>Trust</b>	Malaysia	100	5.3530	1.49746	.141
	Australia	89	5.0412	1.38744	
<b>Commitment</b>	Malaysia		5.4875	1.64617	.020
	Australia	89	4.7298	1.60943	
<b>Satisfaction</b>	Malaysia	100	5.5200	1.58299	.134
	Australia	89	5.1685	1.62338	
<b>Exchange relationship</b>	Malaysia	100	5.4175	1.55255	.019
	Australia	89	5.9710	1.67338	

*Note:* All comparisons are horizontal within relationship indicator grouping. Means are compared using t tests and are significantly different at  $<0.10$ . All items were measured on a nine point scale anchored by strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (9). The relationship varied significantly according to the type of phone service for three dimensions (Trust, Satisfaction and Commitment) where prepaid scored higher to a highly significant degree, with all cases prepaid being higher than postpaid range of 0.018 to  $<0.001$  level of significance. Overall the type of phone service- prepaid or postpaid through an account-made a difference. Table 2 shows the analysis of phone type against each of the relationship indicators.

**Table 2: Relationship Indicators by Mobile Phone Type**

	Type	N	Mean	p
<b>Trust</b>	prepaid	99	5.5300	.001
	postpaid	90	4.8500	
<b>Commitment</b>	prepaid	99	5.4035	.018
	postpaid	90	4.8306	
<b>Satisfaction</b>	prepaid	99	5.7475	.000
	postpaid	90	4.9222	
<b>Exchange relationship</b>	prepaid	99	5.8359	.164
	postpaid	90	5.5046	

Where 1= strongly disagree, 9= strongly agree



Interestingly, the Bumiputras were generally higher on all four factors where type of phone service was also significant. This raised the question of whether it being a prepaid account or country ethnicity was having an influence. Because a few dimensions were impacted by ethnicity and usage we asked the question as to which is significant. Results from a Univariate analysis test run for each relationship dimension as the dependent variable by phone type and country showed that Trust had more to do with ethnicity ( $F = 3.93$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .051$ ). Commitment was very strongly related to ethnicity ( $F = 7.28$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .009$ ) but not to type of phone ( $F = 2.10$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .15$ ). Satisfaction related to type of phone ( $F = 5.07$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .028$ ) and not ethnicity ( $F = 1.61$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .209$ ). And for all of the above the interaction factor is not significant. In this test Exchange Relationship was not significant.

Overall there were differences between how the two country groups rated each indicator with Malaysians rating the relationship higher on all dimensions except Exchange Relationship compared to the Australians (Table 3).

**Table 3: Relationship Indicator Values: Malaysia and Australia**

	Malaysia			Australia		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Trust	100	5.36	1.497	89	5.04	1.387
Commitment	100	5.487	1.646	89	4.729	1.609
Satisfaction	100	5.53	—	89	5.28	1.623
Exchange relationship	100	5.412	1.552	89	5.97	1.673

Where 1= strongly disagree, 9= strongly agree

The indicators Exchange Relationship and Communal Relationship have been identified in the psychology literature on relationships as also being useful to assess the relationship between an organisation and a public (Grunig & Hon, 2003). Organisations need both and “often mutually beneficial exchanges can begin to build trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction.” (Grunig & Hon, 2003: 21).

#### *Exchange Relationship*

One party gives benefits to the other only because the other has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the future. This is the essence of marketing relationships, which are essentially the nature of the relationships measured in this study. Grunig &

Hon (2003) note that this type of relationship is usually not enough, all publics expect organisations to do more.

Country differences were significant here, the mean score of Australia on Exchange Relationship ( $M = 5.971$ ) being significantly higher ( $t = 2.36$ ,  $df = 187$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ) than Malaysia ( $M = 5.42$ ).

There was also a significant relationship between Satisfaction ( $F = 2.74$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .03$ ) and Exchange Relationship ( $F = 3.03$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .019$ ) in terms of the degree of usage. Post hoc tests revealed that those spending more were less satisfied in their relationship with the organisation than those who spent the least per month. There could be a number of reasons for this such as, possibly those spending less have less investment in the organisation.

The following three characteristics, Trust, Commitment and Satisfaction, go further toward defining the quality of relationships. They are presented in descending order of importance. In the study we are unable to discuss results for Control Mutuality and Communal Relationship due to reliability issues, as stated before, although these characteristics were identified to be among those most important to organisation/public relationships by University of Maryland researchers.

#### *Trust*

Trust refers to the level of confidence that both parties have in each other. The dimensions of Trust considered important by Grunig and Hon (2003) are integrity - belief that the organisation is fair and just, dependability - the organisation will do what it says it will do, and competence - the organisation has the ability to do what it says it will do. The means of 5.35 for Malaysia and 5.04 for Australia were not significantly different. The type of phone plan used is significant in rating Trust ( $t = 3.3$ ,  $df = 187$ ,  $p = .001$ ) with prepaid users rating this indicator at a higher level ( $M = 5.53$ ,  $M = 4.85$ ). To a highly significant degree with all cases, prepaid rated higher than postpaid with a range of .018 to  $<0.001$  level of significance. The nature of the prepaid relationship may mean a lower level of trust is required as there is no dependence on the organisation for accurate accounting measurements, terms of payment, and the transaction is relatively simple.

#### *Commitment*

Commitment relates to the extent to which both parties believe and feel that the relationship is worth spending energy on to maintain and promote (Grunig & Hon 2003). The mean score of Malaysians on Commitment ( $M = 5.49$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ) is significantly higher ( $t = 3.12$ ,  $df = 187$ ,  $p = .002$ ) than that of Australians ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ). Ethnic differences followed country trends with the exception of Malaysian Chinese being more like Australians on the aspect of commitment and with a more significant difference than on Trust. A t-test on the two groups with the most noted

differences, the Bumiputra and Caucasian, revealed significant differences ( $t = 5.5$ ,  $df = 108$ ,  $p < .001$ ) with mean scores for Bumiputras being higher than for Caucasians.

### *Satisfaction*

This relates to the extent to which both parties feel favorably about each other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced, where each party believes the other is positively trying to maintain the relationship.

There was no significant difference between the two countries on this indicator. On ethnic differences a t-test on the two groups with the most noted differences, the Bumiputra and Caucasian showed that they differed significantly on Satisfaction ( $t = 4.1$ ,  $df = 108$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with means scores for Bumiputra higher than for Caucasian. Chinese and Caucasians were close, if not statistically significant, in their rating on this indicator also, scoring the two lowest scores.

In summary, the overall differences in the way the two country groups rated each indicator would suggest that the quality of the organisation customer relationships in Malaysia is higher than in Australia, particularly on those factors most relevant to public relations practice. It is important to note the contextual differences here between the two aspects of market structure and political debate in Australia.

### **Qualitative/Interpretative analysis of media releases and speeches**

A qualitative or interpretative analysis of media releases and speeches posted on the websites of Telstra and Celcom was also undertaken to gauge the organisations intentions of a relationship with its publics. Speeches examined were by the chief executive officer or senior officials of the respective organisations.

To avoid any bias, the two researchers jointly identified aspects of the six relationship indicators suggested by Grunig and Hon (1999) in these media releases and speeches. The researchers identified key words in the text, which suggested the concepts of the six relationship indicators. The following are a summary of these words and phrases as they relate to the two selected organisations, their leaders, products, and services.

### **Trust (Integrity, dependability, competence)**

Key words appearing most frequently in the text were dependable and competent. Dependability was evidenced in statements that the organisations could be trusted to provide a high level of service in peak periods (Telstra). Both organisations had several statements referring to the reliable products and services of the company.

Competence was also mentioned in a number of ways - industry leadership; consistent product innovation, continuous upgrading of services, and employment of high quality staff. Customers could trust the integrity of the organisations to be socially responsible and meet regulatory obligations.

The two organisations also sought to make public statements that they could be trusted as responsible marketers. Generally, the rhetoric was customer centric -we trust them to create efficiencies that will provide the best service; to act in the customer's interest in allowing for controlled spending on mobile phones (with caps); to be responsible marketers.

### **Control Mutuality**

The texts suggest that both Celcom and Telstra seek and respond to feedback from customers on services and products. Rhetoric includes: improve productivity through feedback - two-way relationship, understand changing customer needs, and refresh shop outfit to incorporate technology (Telstra) and counter service (Celcom). They also research "customer needs and expectations," for example, Celcom strives "to change and improve customer service in response to customer feedback through customer portfolio analysis." Telstra points out that they "respond to customer feedback."

### **Commitment**

Both organizations make public statements about their commitment to customers and to their staff. Telstra and Celcom talk of their commitment to customers in several ways: providing excellent service; the fact that they conduct research, customer portfolio analysis (Celcom); industry leadership commitment and consider customer convenience. They talk of their wider commitment to customer and community through both product provision and corporate social responsibility activities. For example, payphones are described as a community resource and their corporate citizenship is demonstrated through provision of free calls for emergencies, for example; bush fire crises (Telstra) and youth reach programmers (Celcom).

Messages about staff commitment are mainly motivational. Staff and the organisation work together for the wider social good, for example, Celcom conducted post-Tsunami disaster fundraising efforts together with employees. Telstra "works together with staff to increase productivity and provide better services to the larger community in rural areas."

### **Satisfaction**

Both Celcom and Telstra talk about their excellent customer and counter staff service for customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is also related to advanced and improved products such as 3G products offered to the customer. Celcom talked about efforts to "delight" customers. Examples of both companies' efforts to build Satisfaction among the customer public are closely related to those mentioned for the Trust variable.

### **Communal Relationships**

Sponsorship arrangements are necessarily marketing oriented and therefore transactional in nature. However, provision to indigenous groups that were neither

large nor affluent was more a corporate social responsibility (CSR) effort and not otherwise stipulated by government in licensing arrangements (Telstra).

Community engagement is also demonstrated through general CSR, often undertaken with community partners in projects unrelated to the organisations' core business. Generally, many of the corporate social responsibility efforts portrayed the two companies to be working as part of the community. While their commercial links and details of commercial benefit are very clear, releases espouse the higher virtues of the arrangements. Also, Telstra strongly emphasised that it contributed to remote areas better than required by regulation, part of economic growth of communities in regional areas.

### **Exchange Relationship**

As marketing entities it is logical that the biggest group with which the organisation has a relationship is its customer and not surprisingly much of the rhetoric is aimed at this group.

Analysis of the texts also revealed other aspects of the exchange relationship. It was evidenced in the CSR activities, for example, where Celcom sponsored "Box Office Now" (shows on TV) in support of the local entertainment industry or Celcom In-Play Futsal Fiesta (street football). Loyal customers were invited to shows and offered freebies and loyalty rewards made through packages of company products.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to extend the application of a tested relationship measurement instrument in two different cultural settings. It explored the phenomenon between the organisation and its customer public within and across the Australian and Malaysian cultures. Customer public perceptions were compared and contrasted with organisation rhetorical strategies for an interpretation of the state of organisation-public relationship.

Generally, the neutrality of the responses given by respondents in both cases suggests that the organisation-customer relationship is not significant to them. This could be interpreted to be because of the nature of the organisation, the low risk of the product and the relatively low engagement between the organisation and the customer public. However, the quality of the organisation customer relationships seems to be slightly higher in Malaysia than in Australia, particularly on those factors most relevant to public relations practice. Nevertheless, it is important to read this within the contexts of market structure, culture, and political debate in the two countries. Malaysia rated the relationship higher on the Trust, Commitment, and Satisfaction relationship dimensions while Australia scored higher on the Exchange Relationship dimension; but the countries differed significantly on only the Commitment and Exchange Relationship dimensions. In addition, what is not clear from these results is how much

respondents differentiate the pure exchange relationship from the other elements of their relationship with the organisation.

A reliability analysis of the Likert Scale constructs revealed that the tool was not effective in measuring two of the variables, particularly in the Malaysian context. This highlights some of the limitations in attempting to use a single measurement tool in a global context and suggests further research to develop effective global measurement instruments.

Organisation rhetorical strategies aimed at customers, suggest commitment to customer, community and staff, through both product provision and corporate social responsibility activities. Key words appearing most frequently in the texts were dependable and competent. The rhetoric emphasised the dimensions of Trust and Commitment to bring about customer Satisfaction over the other dimensions. Customer ambivalence on their relationship with the organisation contrasts with the stronger rhetorical messages of the organisation's commitment to managing relationship with customers and suggest the notion that the organisation-public relationship can be examined further in the context of type of perceived risk of product to the customer public.

## References

- Botan, C. H., & Taylor, M. (2004). Public relations: State of the field. *Journal of Communication*, 54(4), 645-661.
- Broom, G. M., Casey, S., & Ritchie, J. (1997). Toward a concept and theory of organization-public relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9(2), 83-98.
- Broom, G. M., & Ritchey, J. (2000). Concept and theory of organization-public relationships. In J. A. Ledingham, & S. D. Bruning (Eds), *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bruning, S. D. (2004). Building relationships between organizations and publics: examining the linkage between organization-public relationships, evaluations of satisfaction, and behavioral intent. *Communication Studies*, 55(3), 435-446.
- Bruning, S. D., Castle, J. D., & Schrepper, E. (2004). Building relationships between organizations and publics: examining the linkage between organization-public relationships, evaluations of satisfaction, and behavioral intent. *Communication Studies*, 55(3), 435-446.

Bruning, S. D., & Ledingham, J. A. (1998). Organization-public relationships and consumer satisfaction: Role of relationships in the satisfaction mix. *Communication Research Reports*, 15, 199-209.

Cutlip, S. M., Center, A. H., & Broom, G. M. (1985). *Effective Public Relations* (6th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Ferguson, M. A. (1984). Building theory in public relations: Interorganisational relationships as public relations paradigm. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Gainesville, FL.

Grunig, J. E. (1992). Communication, public relations, and effective organizations: An overview of the book. In Grunig, J. E. et. al. (Eds), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp. 1-30). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grunig, J. E., & Hon, L. (1999). *Guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations*. Institute for Public Relations Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation, University of Florida.

Grunig, J. E., & Huang, Y. (2000). From organizational effectiveness to relationship indicators: Antecedents of relationships, public relations strategies and relationship outcomes. In Ledingham, J. A. & Bruning, S. D. (Eds), *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations*. Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Huang, Y. H. (2001a). Values of Public Relations: Effects on organization-public relationships mediating conflict resolution. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 13(4), 265-301.

Huang, Y. H. (2001b). OPRA: A cross cultural, multiple item scale for measuring organization public relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 13, 61-91.

Hung, C. F. (2003). Cultural influence on relationship cultivation strategies: Multinational companies in China. *Journal of Communication Management*, 8(3), 264-281.

Ind, N. (1997). *The Corporate Brand*. London: McMillan Press.

Kim, Y. (2001). Searching for the Organization-Public relationship: A valid and reliable instrument. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 4, 799-815.

Ledingham, J. A., & Bruning, S. D. (1998). Relationship management and public relations: Dimensions of an organization-public relationship. *Public Relations Review*, 24, 55-65.

Ledingham, J. A., & Bruning, S. D. (Eds.). (2000). *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations*. Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Ledingham, J. A., Bruning, S. D., & Wilson, L. J. (1999). Time as an indicator of the perceptions and behavior of members of a key public: Monitoring and predicting organization-public relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 11(2), 167-183.

McNamara, J. (2012) Public relations: theories, practices, critiques, Pearson Australia  
Nakamura, L. (2001). What is the US gross investment in intangibles? At least one trillion dollars per year! Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia. Working Paper No. 01-15.

Samsup, J., Hon, L. C., & Brunner, B, R. (2004). Organization-public relationships: Measurement validation in a university setting. *Journal of Communication Management*, 9 (1), 14-27.

Sriramesh, K. (2004), Public relations in Asia: An anthology. Singapore: Thomson.  
Sveiby (2001). Retrieved from <http://www.sveiby.com/articles/IntangibleMethods.htm> on 22 February 2006.

Valin, J. (2004). *Overview of public relations around the world and principles of modern practice*. Remarks at CONFERP conference Brasilia, October 2004.

Telecoms and Technology Forecast June 2005, the Economist Intelligence Unit Limited. Retrieved from <http://www.eiu.com> on 22 February 2006.