

Towards a theoretical framework of intercultural communication ethics in the Arab Gulf culture

The perspectives of global public relations practitioners in Bahrain

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Abstract

This research investigates the perspectives of global public relations practitioners in the governmental sector in Bahrain. Sixteen qualitative interviews were conducted to provide in-depth theoretical understanding of the intercultural communication ethics in the Arab Gulf. The researcher used the theoretical framework of Hofstede (1984; 1994) to analyze the data. The research reveals that an Arab framework of intercultural communication ethics should address the society's dilemma between modernization and Arabic/Islamic traditional values. The research provides a proposed framework that consists of "revealed" and "avoided" processes of communication. This framework is based on Arabic relational values of openness, awareness of diversity, power hierarchy, loyalty to collective culture, motivation to achieve individual goals, respect to woman and motivation to develop uncertainty-avoidance strategies.

Keywords: *global public relations, public diplomacy, Arab culture, intercultural communication, intercultural communication ethics*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the age of globalization, the practices of public relations cannot be limited to one nation or culture. Bahrain is located in the Middle East region between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula and it is a member of the Cooperative Council of Arab Gulf States that consists of six states that share the same culture, history, language, religion and economic interests: United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Qatar. The discovery of oil in the Arab Gulf resulted in social and economic challenges in the second half of the twentieth century (Al Jassaney, 1982, p.207). The Arab Gulf societies started to move from tribalism towards modernization and globalization. As a result, a cultural dilemma appears between the society's restricted traditional form of living on one hand and the "modernization" brought by the new technologies and economic development on the other hand.

In the last decade, Bahrain has witnessed a political reform based on the National Action Charter in 2001 that paved the way for national elections and for the country to become a constitutional monarchy in 2002. This reform was accompanied by legislations that support democratic values such as equality, justice, diversity and empowerment of women. Moreover, economic development has flourished in non-oil sectors and the financial sector has achieved good growth rates (Bahrain Economy, n.d.).

In the age of globalization, Bahrain has established global relationships with various countries over the world. As for public relations education in Bahrain, it started in 1997 as a minor subject in the BA of Mass Communication at the University of Bahrain, and then it developed in 2007 to take a full track as part of the plan. There is only one module called “International Public Relations” taught as part of PR track. At the master level, one of the specialization tracks is “International Communication and diplomacy” that was established in 2011. Moreover, Bahraini Association for Public Relations organized practical workshops in protocol and international public relations that train PR practitioners in association with Washington School of Protocol.

1.2 Definition of “global public relations”

Although the term “international public relations” is more often used in Bahrain, the researcher replaced it with the term “global public relations” as a broader term. Szondi (2009) defined “global public relations” as “the internationalization of the profession, including being practiced in more and more countries throughout the globe” (p.119). Ki and Ye (2017) argued that the term “global public relations” is “broader, more inclusive, and holistic because the term “global” denotes the whole world” and it “represents strategic communications all around the world” which makes it “a progression from International public relations” (p.236). Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) defined global public relations as “the strategic communication that different types of organizations use for establishing and maintaining symbiotic relationships with relevant publics, many of whom are increasingly becoming culturally diverse.” (p.xxxiv). Thus, exploring intercultural communication is an important aspect of studying global public relations. “Global public relations” departments in governmental organizations in Bahrain are the departments that aim to establish relationships with diverse publics from different countries/cultures all over the world for social, cultural and political purposes.

1.3 The problem

Although the sector of global public relations is growing and developing rapidly in Bahrain, few Arabic scholars have stressed the significant role of global public relations in the Arab world (i.e. Mohammed, 2012; Al-Sultan, 2012; Al-Rasheed, 2017). However, these studies fall short of taking a cultural approach to study global public relations in governmental organizations in the Arab Gulf context. Ki and Ye (2017, p.243) stressed the need for further research to study some regions that are still underexplored such as the Middle East. Additionally, most of the global public relations scholars have employed quantitative methods and limit themselves to Western models without relating them to cultural ethics in non-western cultures. Therefore, there is an increasing need for further research that would combine both qualitative and quantitative research.

1.4 The research aims

The contribution of this research is that it is the first study that uses a qualitative methodology to investigate the perspectives of global public relations participants in the governmental sector in Bahrain. The aim of this study is to bring new theoretical understanding and develop implications for the practice of global public relations in the governmental and diplomatic sector in Bahrain. Besides, it aims to generate a new theoretical framework of intercultural communication ethics in the Arab Gulf culture based on the perspectives of global PR practitioners in Bahrain.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Cultural approach to global public relations

The literature on the practice of global public relations is still limited as few studies have analyzed the impact of culture on the practice of public relations (e.g., Huang, 2000; Rhee, 1999; Sriramesh, 1999; Sriramesh, Kim & Takasaki, 1999). Sriramesh & Verčič (2003, p.8) argued that “Many more empirical analyses of the linkage between public relations and culture are needed.” Ki and Ye (2017, p.242) explained that a number of studies suggested that future research in global public relations should relate

cultural dimensions to strategies employed (Low, Varughese & Pang, 2011), and explore non-Western cultures (e.g., Lee, 2004).

One of the most cited cultural models in studying global public relations is Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The researcher uses this model because it identified cultural dimensions that are "generic across cultures" (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003, p.11). Hofstede (1984; 1994) identified five cultural dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, and individualism-collectivism and Confucianism, or "long-term orientation". Power distance addresses the differences in inequality across cultures (Hofstede's, 1984, p.65). Uncertainty avoidance refers to the ability for humans to cope with uncertainty (Hofstede's, 1984, p.176). Masculinity-femininity alludes to the duality of the sexes (Hofstede's, 1984, p.176). Hofstede (1994, p.51) explained that, "Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family"; whereas "Collectivism pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty". Long-term orientation refers to "the tendency where a collectivity values long-term commitments and tradition" which "results in a strong work ethic among employees who also expect rewards in a more distant future rather than more immediate returns." (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003, pp.9-10)

Hall (1976) proposed another cultural model that is based on two categories of cultures: high-context communication culture and low-context communication culture. A high-context culture is "one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little information is in the coded, explicitly transmitted part of the message", while low-context communication is the opposite (Hall, 1976, p.79). Although some research employed these cultural dimensions in some non-western contexts, most of these studies used a quantitative methodology. Ki and Ye (2017, p.243) criticized that the quantitative approach was more common than the other approaches in global public relations research and stressed the need for more qualitative research in the field. Thus, there is a need for a qualitative cultural approach that generates new theoretical understanding of the unique cultural aspects of Arab culture ethics to develop an Arab framework of global public relations.

2.2 Public relations as a form of diplomacy in the context of globalization

Several scholars attempted to study the relationship between public relations and public diplomacy (i.e. Mogensen, 2017; Vanc & Fitzpatrick, 2016; Kim, 2016; L'Etang, 2009; Signitzer, 2008; Signitzer & Wamser, 2006; Yun, 2006). However, more research should be conducted to understand how and why public diplomacy is practiced in different cultures (Sallot, Ling, Acosta-Alzuru & Jones, 2003). Vanc & Fitzpatrick (2016, p.138) explained that past research found that there is little public relations theory development covering how countries manage their communicative relationships with foreign publics. Kim (2016) cited the definition of the University of Southern California (USC) Center on Public Diplomacy, "public diplomacy focuses on the ways in which governments (or multilateral organizations such as the United Nations) acting deliberately, through both official and private individuals and institutions, communicate with citizens in other societies" (p.136). L'Etang (2009, p.608) argued that "diplomacy (political, economic, informational, cultural) is part of organizational strategic PR and that skills of diplomacy are important to effective PR." Therefore, the research used a qualitative approach to fill the gap in the literature through studying the intercultural practice of global public relations in diplomatic and governmental sector in the cultural context of Bahrain.

2.3 Arabic communication model of public diplomacy

The first Arabic communication public diplomacy model was proposed by Vujnovic and Kruckeberg (2005) who developed a morally/ethically defensible "organic theory" of public relations that suggested that "the organization is an organ and society is a body as a whole" (p.340). They recommended moving from old communication models that heavily rely on mass communication theories (models of propaganda and persuasion) toward an interpersonal model of public relations that is consistent with Arab culture (Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2005, p.341). The model suggests that relational paradigm is more appropriate in the Arab World. However, the model provided a broad framework without offering detailed themes and principles based on empirical research of the real-life practice of global public relations in governmental organizations in the Arab world. Therefore, this research aims to provide rich

understanding of the practice of global public relations in Bahrain that is used as a springboard to develop a cultural framework for intercultural communication ethics in the Arab Gulf.

3. Methodology

3.1 The research paradigm

The research uses a qualitative constructive paradigm to provide new theoretical understanding of the practice of global public relations in governmental associations in Bahrain from the participants' perspectives. Daymon and Holloway (2002) stressed the pressing need for further qualitative research in public relations scholarship to provide in-depth data. Schwandt (1998) indicated that,

The constructivist or interpretivist believes that to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it. The inquirer must elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors. To prepare an interpretation is itself to construct a reading of these meanings; it is to offer the inquirer's construction of the constructions of the actors one studied. (p.222)

Based on the constructive paradigm, the researcher used the perspectives of PR practitioners to generate new understanding of the practice of intercultural communication in the global public relations sector.

3.2 Research Questions

The researcher has focused on three themes taking Hofstede's (1984, 1994) cultural dimensions into account. The researcher raises several questions under major themes in order to develop a theoretical framework of intercultural communication in the Arab Gulf as follow:

Bahraini culture ethics in global public relations sector

- What are the intercultural communication ethics in the Arabic culture?
- How can global PR practitioners define global PR in Arabic culture?

Hofstede's Cultural dimensions in relation to Arabic ethics of communication

- What are the cultural ethics regarding women's role in global PR?
- How can PR practitioners deal with uncertainty, pressure, and unexpected situations?
- In the age of globalization, do participants work individually or collectively?
- How can participants define their "power" relationships with publics from different cultures?
- What are the ethics of work motivation?

The future of global public relations in Bahrain

- What are the challenges and opportunities of the practice of global public relations in the government sectors in Bahrain?

Based on the participants' constructions of the findings, the researcher develops new theoretical understanding of the practice of global public relations in Bahrain.

3.3 Sampling

The research used a purposeful sample of semi-structured interviews with sixteen PR practitioners working in global/international PR departments in governmental organizations in Bahrain based on the

previous research questions. The scope of the research has focused on the governmental practice of public diplomacy in Bahrain. One of the key challenges in this research is the difficulty of conducting interviews with practitioners in governmental sector who are trained to talk in a diplomatic way. The interviewees were very concerned of the image of the organization when talking about the challenges and power relationships, therefore it was beneficial to establish rapport with the interviewees and observe their nonverbal communication. The interviews lasted between 45 to 75 minutes. Snowballing was used to access some interviewees. The main criterion for selecting interviewees was to be working in global PR departments in a governmental organization in Bahrain.

3.4 Methods of verification

In such a constructivist paradigm, the aim is not to generalize the research findings on other cases in other contexts. The researcher used theory to generate new theoretical insights based on the perspectives of global PR practitioners in order to offer in-depth understanding of intercultural communication ethics in the Arab Gulf. Therefore, instead of the notion of “external validity”, we used “transferability” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Moreover, if the answers of the interviewees are the same in several contexts, the researcher can achieve “analytic generalization” of theoretical insights or propositions. Constructivist scholars used the notion “confirmability” to replace the positive criterion of “objectivity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In order to achieve “confirmability”, the researcher showed continuous evidence in the analysis by discussing the rationales of every finding by several methods of evidence such as citing interviewees, giving examples, and providing contrary findings.

3.5 Reduction of the data, analysis and theorization

The researcher recorded and wrote the transcripts of interviews. Then, they were coded through the process of reading and re-reading. After that, the key statements were quoted and reduced to key codes or categories. Finally, these categories were reduced to key themes and dimensions for the study. Since the interviewees preferred to keep their names anonymous, coded names were used to organize the results. The role of theory in this constructivist paradigm is “instrumental” to develop new theoretical insights on intercultural communication ethics in the Arab Gulf culture based on the participants’ perspectives. Besides, the developed theoretical framework on Arabic communication ethics cannot be separated from the way in which PR practitioners behave as interactors in real interactions.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 The notion of Arab culture ethics in global public relations sector

4.1.1 Arabic culture ethics of honoring the guests

Based on the interviews, it is an Arabic value that the host has to offer the best hospitality to the guests and hide any bad circumstances in front of them. Interviewee X stressed,

“Showing your beautiful face to the guests is derived from our Arabic cultural traditions of honoring the guests (‘ikram aldiyf).”

In Arabic culture, honoring the guests from different cultures and giving them the priority is a significant ethical value of intercultural communication. It is interesting that PR practitioners in Arabic/Islamic culture derive their communication ethics from their cultural and Islamic principles. This can be attributed to the nature of Arabic collective culture where people have to adhere to the cultural rules.

In Qur’an, this ethical value was stressed,

“But those who before them, had homes and had adopted the Faith,- show their affection to such as came to them for refuge, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their (own lot).”

And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls, - they are the ones that achieve prosperity” (Holly Qur’an, Surat Al-Hashr, 59:9).

It is an Islamic value that “generosity” and good manners result in “prosperity” and rewards. Besides, Interviewees I, III, IV and V stressed that people in Arabic culture traditionally show emotions and generosity towards their guests, which can be related to the characteristics of high-context cultures (Hall, 1976).

4.1.2 The challenges of Arabic culture as a high-context culture

It was observed that one of the challenges of Arabic interpersonal discourse is the ambiguity of verbal communication when dealing with guests from different countries. Interviewee II explained:

“Some words might be interpreted in a bad way in some cultures and misunderstood as there’re different Arabic dialects. Once, I told a Moroccan (Arabic) guest “Ya’ateek Al-A’afiah” which means in the Bahraini dialect “God bless you”, but in his Moroccan dialect this phrase means “Go to hell!””

If we analyze this interpersonal communication challenge more deeply, we will notice that it is derived from the nature of the Arabic culture as a high-context culture where words are interpreted in indirect ways. This is stressed by Interviewee III, who explained,

“In our sector, it’s important to be trained what not to say to publics in some cultures not only what to say.”

It is interesting that sometimes public relations practitioners coming from Arabic high-context culture have to use direct messages in global public relations sector to deal with publics from different cultures. Interviewees III and IV showed awareness of this aspect:

“Usually people in Bahraini culture used a lot of nonverbal and indirect communication, but in our sector you have to communicate direct messages.”

This awareness of the need to cope with different interpersonal discourse in diverse cultures is significant in global public relations sector. Moreover, the participants stressed that their ethical values of honesty, trust and justice with foreign guests have been derived from their ethical Arabic/Islamic ethics. It is interesting that in such a high-context society, collective Islamic and cultural ethics shapes the identity of Bahraini PR participants.

4.1.3 The participants’ definition of global public relations

Interviewee VI explained that the sector of global public relations has developed rapidly in Bahrain:

“The practice of PR in diplomacy sector has developed because of the rapid economic development in Bahrain.”

Interviewee VII argued that the practice of global public relations in Bahrain stems from Bahraini traditional etiquette:

“In our Bahraini traditions, we have rules of seating in “majles” (a place where men meet weekly as a social tradition), rules of how we should start the greetings and who we should shake hand first.”

It is noticed that the participants related their daily practices to the societal culture, which is derived from the Bahraini high-context culture.

Interviewees I, III and X defined global public relations in the governmental sector in Bahrain through explaining the technical aspect of their job,

“Global PR includes events organizations, guests’ receptions and face-to-face meetings.”

However, most of the participants defined global public relations as *“communicating with multiple cultures”*. This definition stressed the importance of relational practice of PR in the global sector. Interviewee IX argued,

“Global PR sector is like the bridge between different cultures, if this bridge failed to reach the other edge, it would collapse!”

This metaphor stressed the role of global public relations as a facilitator in building relationships with publics from different cultures.

4.1.4 The challenge of “loyalty” to national culture

According to the official census for the year 2010, 70.2% of the total population of Bahrain is Muslim, and 29.8% are adherents of other religions and beliefs, such as Christians (10.2%) and Jews (0.21%), and Bahraini citizens are 99.8% Muslim (Ministry of Information Affairs, 2018). As part of the Bahraini high-context culture, the participants showed high loyalty to their own national culture. For instance, Interviewee VIII explained,

“You should understand other cultures and at the same time keep your cultural identity.”

This connection makes it important to draw a balance between cultural identity and cultural dialogue.

It is interesting that some interviewees explained that their motivations in working in global PR in diplomatic sector stems from their national loyalty and responsibility towards keeping good image of their country. For instance, Interviewee X indicated,

“It’s a big responsibility when you’re representing your country not only yourself.”

This sense of national responsibility is derived from the collective nature of Arabic society where collective loyalty to the culture is a significant Arabic and Islamic value.

4.2 Hofstede’s dimensions in relation to Arabic ethics:

4.2.1 What are the cultural ethics regarding women role in global public relations?

4.2.1.1 The increasing role of women in global public relations sector

Interviewee XIV explained,

“Nowadays Bahraini woman is playing an important role in public diplomacy sector in Bahrain.”

Interviewee XII stressed,

“Women have succeeded to be the head of Bahraini diplomatic delegations and international PR departments in the main governmental entities in Bahrain.”

If we analyze this finding more deeply, we cannot separate the role of women in global public relations in Bahrain from women's role in Bahrain economy. In 2015, the percentage of working women (comparing to men) increased to (49%) in the public sectors; (33%) in the private sector; (39%) in the business sector; and (74%) in education (Supreme Council of Women, 2015).

Bahraini women have succeeded to achieve an advancing status comparing to other Arab Gulf countries. For example, The Saudi females' labor force participation rate was about 17.3 percent in 2015 and has been increasing at a slower pace than expected while being accompanied by a rise in females' unemployment rate (CDSI, 2015; cited in Koyame-Marsh, 2017). Koyame-Marsh (2017) stated that legislative policies are changing positively in the Arab Gulf countries to empower women to participate in the labor force such as in “Dubai where women's labor force participation rate increased 3.7 times since 2003 and Qatar where it rose 3.1 times during the same time period” (p.433). This development can be attributed to the legislative, economic and social change in this region.

4.2.1.2 Cultural “glass ceiling” of the role of women in global public relations

The participants indicated that respecting conservative Arab Gulf culture is significant in global public relations sector. For example, Interviewee XIV talked about wearing national Islamic clothes as part of the national identity:

“There's no difference either PR women are wearing a veil or not, but sometimes veiled women are preferred to represent Bahraini Islamic national identity.”

Moreover, some male participants talked about the significance of respecting the culture of the relationship between man and woman when dealing with female delegations from other countries. For example, Interviewee XIII explained,

“When receiving Arab Gulf woman, you shouldn't shake her hand unless she starts first.”

It is interesting that Interviewees III, X and V talked about Arabic traditional protocol that prefers that female participants receive female delegations as it is part of Arab Gulf hospitality that female participants are responsible for interpersonal communication with women from other Arab countries. Interviewee XV explained,

“In diplomatic sector, both man and woman are equal in positions, but sometimes some religious figures preferred men to receive them, while women are preferred to receive female delegations.”

This finding shows the existence of a kind of “glass ceiling” in gender divisions of tasks in global PR sector. Glass ceiling is “a term coined in the 1970s in the United States to describe the invisible artificial barriers, created by attitudinal and organisational prejudices, which block women from senior executive positions” (Wirth, 2001, p.1). This glass ceiling appears when Interviewees XVI and XVII talked about some cultural barriers:

“The challenging barrier in our job is the lack of specific work timing... we have to work some days until late hours of night which is challenging for married woman with children in our culture.”

It can be noticed that this glass ceiling stems from Bahraini cultural traditions rather than organizational legislations. The participants agreed that political and social reform that has accompanied the issue of Bahrain National Charter in 2001 has provided a legislative structure that has developed women's

participation in public relations. However, cultural glass ceiling exists in the way men and women divided their tasks and roles in global public relations departments.

4.2.2 How can global PR participants deal with uncertainty and unexpected crisis?

4.2.2.1 The increasing need for uncertainty-avoidance strategies

Based on the interviews, the concept of strategic planning is still new and limited in the Arab culture. As a high-context culture, the participants' perception of the future is connected to "God's will". For example, they often used the Islamic phrase "enshallah" in their discourse, which means that they believe that "Allah/god" will bring all the best in the future. However, it can be observed that the rapid transformation from tribalism to modernization in the Arab Gulf region affects the level of uncertainty and pressures of modern life. Interviewees XV and XVI talked about the high pressures of the work of global public relations,

"There's high price for making mistakes"; "When things go wrong with VIP, you might lose your position!"

Furthermore, all the research participants stressed that uncertainty-avoidance strategies are significant for public relations practitioners. In such a multicultural sector, the participants stressed the importance of flexibility, openness to change and preparing alternative plans. For instance, Interviewee IV stressed,

"When working in international PR sector, you should always have plan B."

However, no one of the interviewees talked about long-term strategic planning of communication as the use of planning was restricted to organize specific events. This can be attributed to the new practice of strategic planning in global public relations sector.

4.2.3 In the age of globalization, do participants work individually or collectively?

4.2.3.1 The conflict between Islamic ethics of "collectivism" versus "individualism" brought by modernization

The participants stressed that Bahrain is a collective society that derives its values from Islamic ethics. This is best described by the concept of Islamic "Ummah" where Muslims everywhere are united by being Muslims regardless of their ethnicities or nationalities, which emphasizes collectivism, not individualism. Interviewee V emphasized that,

"Working in international PR department requires working as one collective team."

Based on the interviews, working in international public relations sector requires collectivism as the work is judged based on the team work. In this collective culture, the role of the individual is defined and judged by the team. Interviewee IX explained,

"Everyone in the organization is completing the other as a one team."

However, Interviewees V, I and XIII talked about their ambitions to improve their individual skills in intercultural communication through organizing specialized workshops. Thus, the transformation towards modernization in the Arab Gulf has challenged the collective nature of Bahraini individuals who are recently seeking to improve their individual ambitions and compete among the team. "Competition", "individual ambitions" and "self-improvement" are new notions emphasized by the participants, which raised the question of the extent to which modernization has affected collective societies.

4.2.4 How can participants define “power” relationships with publics from different cultures?

4.2.4.1 Arabic ethics of “power” relationships in global public relations

In global public relations sector, “power” played a key role in defining the relationships as every culture defines power relationships in a different way. Some participants explained that power hierarchy is significant when dealing with international guests as they have to take account of small details such as clothes, seating, body language and gifts. For instance, Interviewee VII talked about the traditional clothes as a sign of power,

“The head of delegation should wear “besht” (formal traditional gown that men wear in the Arab Gulf) in the formal meetings as a sign of power.”

Interviewee XII noted,

“If the guest isn’t wearing “besht”, the head has to take it off because it would give the impression that he has power over the guest, which is not accepted in the Arab Gulf protocol.”

Again, it is part of the Arab cultural ethics where the host shows modesty and should not show power over his/her guests. We cannot separate the individuals in the Arab societies from their deep cultural ethical values that affect their daily communication practice.

Bahraini PR practitioners explained that power hierarchy is derived from Bahrain’s traditions as a high-context culture. This hierarchical power was observed in the interviews as the participants were hesitant to talk about some powerful figures and preferred to keep their names hidden. The nature of power in governmental public relations employs a kind of hierarchy which was explained by Interviewee IX,

“If the manager enters the office, everyone stands for him as a sign of respect.”

Interviewee III argued,

“Nowadays values of cooperation and democracy are significant between the participants and their manager in PR, but we can’t deny the existence of power hierarchy in many organizations”.

Moreover, it is observed that Bahraini interpersonal discourse includes many verbal vocabularies and phrases that are used to imply that the guest has power over his/her host. These phrases are used as a sign of respect to the guest in the Arab Gulf culture. It is interesting that this discourse has cultural meanings derived from Arabic and Islamic concepts that are sometimes difficult to be translated by non-Arabic interpreters such as “May Allah/God gives you long life”. Again, it is part of the nature of Arabic high-context culture where power is implied through discourse with powerful figures.

4.2.5 What are the ethics of work motivation?

4.2.5.1 Transformation from long-term nationality to short-term motivation goals

Interviewees XVII, IX and VII talked about their long-orientation national responsibility in global public relations,

“When you’re representing the image of your country, it gives you big motivation.”

However, Interviewees I, XI, II and X emphasized that short-term motivation is very significant in their sector:

“We’re honored after big events”; “Promotion motivates us”; “It’s good that we’re paid for overtime hours”; “Financial reward is important”.

It can be observed that the participants showed motivation to achieve short-term goals such as promotion and financial reward. This finding emphasizes the new change in the Arab Gulf collective societies, as modernization results not only in modern lifestyle and technology, but it also results in deep cultural change towards more individual motivation to achieve materialistic goals.

4.3 The future of global public relations in governmental sector in Bahrain

4.3.1 Challenges for global public relations in Bahrain

Several participants explained various challenges in the governmental global public relations in Bahrain. For instance, Interviewee XV noted,

“In global PR sector, it’s challenging that you have to care about the details such as the food, how to stand and talk as any error might cause big problems.”

Interviewees VI, III and IX talked about the time challenges:

“Time is challenging and you have to work under a lot of pressure.”

The challenge of time punctuality stems from the nature of Arabic culture where people are less punctual about time and implement many tasks at the same time. Thus, it is more demanding for global PR practitioners to adhere to the nature of their jobs and apply more time organization. This finding supports the previous findings that the challenges of global public relations in Bahrain are part of the challenges of modernization and the stress of professional new life.

Another challenge that was observed was the lack of specialization in global public relations. The interviewed participants have come from different educational backgrounds such as management, business, media studies and communication. Interviewees XIII and XIV indicated,

“It’s challenging that most of the PR participants aren’t specialized”; “Participants should be provided with more training.”

This can be attributed to the fact that global public relations sector is new in Bahrain and the specialized workshops and educational programs are still limited.

4.3.2 New opportunities for global public relations in Bahrain

The interviewed participants recommended various opportunities for the development of global public relations in Bahrain. Interviewee II stressed the role of technology in “building relationships with the public”. Interviewee XVI recommended,

“The use of technology in international sector should be improved through establishing news groups in the internet.”

Based on the interviews, there is an increasing need for specialized training programs and educational workshops in global public relations sector. Moreover, there is an instant need for a theoretical frame of

reference for public relations practitioners as most of the participants stated that they are depending on their experience rather than sophisticated educational training programs.

5. A proposed framework

5.1 The revealed-and-avoided processes of intercultural communication

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that an Arab Gulf intercultural framework of communication should take into consideration the rapid transformation of the Arab Gulf societies from tribalization towards modernization. What distinguishes the Arab Gulf region is that although it has modern lifestyle and technology, people are still attached to their cultural Islamic traditions. This transformation results in a conflict between modern rapid lifestyle where people have individual motivations on one hand, and the collective nature of Bahraini high-context culture on the other hand.

To deal with this conflict, global PR practitioners explained what they have to “avoid” or “reveal” in order to adjust with other cultures and maybe with their own conflicts and ambiguity. For example, they have to use linear discourse in global public relations sector despite the nature of Bahraini high-context culture. Although this process seems artificial, the participants addressed this process as a sign of “respect” and building “relationship” with other cultures. Democratic values of “respect”, “openness” and “diversity” were stressed as the essence for this process.

Thus, in diplomatic intercultural communication, the participants explained that they have to pay attention not only to how to behave and talk with foreign guests, but also to what is not supposed to be said and implemented in different cultures. Global PR participants in Bahrain have showed awareness of the avoided and revealed processes of intercultural communication. The findings show that these processes of planned communication are derived from Arabic ethical values of intercultural communication, which will be discussed in the following section.

5.2 The framework of intercultural communication ethics in the Arab Gulf

Hofstede (1984) defined culture as “The collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from those of another” (p.389). Based on this definition, we can define Arab culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of Arab region from those of other regions of the world”. Therefore, based on the results, the researcher suggests an intercultural communication ethics framework in the Arab Gulf that is based on the following parameters:

- **Relational values of openness, respect and honoring the guests:** The research finds that relational values have deep roots in the Arabic communication ethics that encourages building relationships and emphasizes respect and openness to other cultures. It is an Islamic value that “different nations” are created by Allah/God to “communicate” and “know” each other: “O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another” (Holly Qur’an, Surat Al-Hujurat, 49:13). This finding supports Vujnovic and Kruckeberg's (2005) organic model of public relations ethics. Besides, it goes along with the recent literature that highlights the importance of “dialogue” and “building relationships” in intercultural communication (Kent and Taylor, 2011; Martin and Nakayama, 1999).
- **Commitment to power hierarchy:** The participants reported the existence of hierarchal power in the global public relations context, which stems from the nature of Bahraini high-context culture. Hofstede (1984) explained that “Power distance addresses the basic differences in inequality across cultures” (p.65). This power distance is showed through the participants’ communication discourse and behavior. In Arab culture, the guest has power over the host, which is derived from traditional Arabic ethics.

- **Awareness of diversity:** The findings reveal that the practice of global public relations sector requires coping with different communication contexts of diverse cultures. Hall & Hall (1990) explained that high-context cultures usually suffer greater levels of ambiguity than low-context cultures. Therefore, it is important that public relations practitioners acquire a “conscious awareness” of the relational function of global public relations and the need to cope with other cultures. According to Zaharna (1995), “conscious awareness” is important to distinguish and deal with the differences between cultures. The results demonstrate that acquiring “awareness of diversity” is an important value of the Arabic framework of intercultural communication.
- **Loyalty to collective cultural traditions:** According to Sriramesh & Verčič’s (2003) argument, “In collectivist societies, organizational employees tend to have greater loyalty to the organization and think in terms of group goals rather than individual accomplishments.” (p.9) Historically, Islamic culture looks at the society as an interactive, complementary system rather than separate individuals. From an Islamic point of view, the core system is the society, not the individual (AlSaqr, 2016). Prophet Mohammad described the Islamic Ummah as a “one body”; if any part of this body, any individual, is in pain, the whole body will suffer. This collective nature of Arab culture results in high loyalty to the cultural and Islamic traditions in the global public relations sector.
- **Motivation to achieve individual goals:** The findings show that the transformation towards modernization in the Arab Gulf increases the motivation of the participants to achieve individual goals. The mixture between collective loyalty and individual ambitions is part of the new structure of Arab Gulf region. The participants emphasized their motivation to improve individual competence through education and training.
- **Respect to cultural values regarding woman:** One of the important Arabic values in global public relations is respect to women’s cultural ethics in clothes, shaking hands and communication with men from different cultures. While woman in Bahrain has succeeded to attain her legislative rights, cultural glass ceiling affects the work of women in global public relations. This cultural glass ceiling appears in the way women defined their jobs and limitations in this sector.
- **Motivation to develop uncertainty-avoidance strategies:** The findings highlight that the rapid transformation from tribalism to modernization in the Arab Gulf region affects the level of uncertainty and pressures of modern life. Although the participants emphasized the significance of planning, the notion of global public relations in Bahrain was still limited to technical tasks. Based on Grunig & Grunig’s (2000) definition, strategic public relations refers to “managed public relations as opposed to public relations as a set of communication tactics supplied by communication technicians” (p.308). Thus, there is an increasing need to develop long-term strategic planning to decrease the pressures of the practice of global public relations. Moreover, the findings reveal that technology can play a significant role in developing strategic communication to build relationships with the public. This goes along with Sriramesh & Verčič’s (2003) argument that collective societies can use technology to cope with the ambiguity and stress of modern life.

6. Conclusion

This research highlights the significance of developing a framework of intercultural communication ethics in the Arab Gulf region to facilitate building relationships with publics from different cultures. Contrary to the old models of media propaganda in global public relations, a model of intercultural communication should be based on being open to respect the cultural values of different cultures. In intercultural communication, it is difficult to represent a good image of the participants’ culture without showing respect to the values of other cultures.

The research finds that a framework of intercultural communication ethics in Bahrain cannot be separated from the transformation to modernization that results in a conflict between the new individual lifestyle and the traditional collective culture. The research finds that Bahraini society is strongly tied to the ethics of Arabic relational values of openness and respect. In this sense, an Arab intercultural communication framework should take account not only of “revealed” intercultural discourse, but also on “avoided” verbal and nonverbal communication (what is not said and implemented in order to respect other

cultures). For example, global PR practitioners from high-context culture would “choose” to “avoid” indirect discourse with guests from low-context cultures.

This process is based on the idea that the host should avoid anything that would annoy his/her guests and reveal the best verbal and non-verbal communication from the perceptions of his/her guests. The host should show respect and modesty through highlighting the “power” of the guest in interpersonal discourse, which is derived from Arabic high-context culture. In the global public relations sector, the participants have to reveal the “beautiful face” of their country through the use of appropriate discourse and behavior, and should avoid anything that is not accepted in the other cultures.

These “avoided” and “revealed” processes of communication are typical in Bahraini collective culture where the “awareness” of diversity highly exists. In such a high-context culture, individuals are concerned of how the “others” would perceive and judge their actions. Thus, global public relations participants showed awareness of what they should “reveal” and “avoid” when dealing with other cultures, which is derived from the relational values of the Bahraini culture.

To sum up, the ethics of intercultural communication in the Arab Gulf culture stems from the participants’ awareness and motivation to cope with the challenging conflicts and ambiguity of modernization. In the Arab Gulf culture that has a mixture between collective loyalty and modern individuality, the ethical essence of intercultural communication framework is building a relational bridge between different cultures. The core ethics of this framework is the Arabic relational values of openness, commitment to power hierarchy, awareness of diversity, loyalty to collective traditions, motivation to achieve individual goals, respect to woman and motivation to develop uncertainty-avoidance strategies. To achieve these ethical values in Bahrain, the research recommends that public relations participants should acquire both education and training to develop the strategic practice of global public relations. Besides, the research suggests that technology can play a significant role to improve the relational practice of intercultural communication with diverse cultures. Future research should take this framework further towards a more comprehensive Arab model of intercultural ethics in global public relations in the governmental sector.

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