Relationship Management: Relational Corporate Identity as Antecedent in Organization–Public Relationships (OPRs)

Dr. Chutima Kessadayurat

Bangkok University

Abstract

This article aims to provide an insight into organization and public relationship management. It focuses on how "Corporate Identity" concept affects an organization or corporation in managing its relationships with other entities. The highlight is to obtain mutual benefits. Ledingham and Bruning (2000) developed a Three Stage Model of *Organization-Public Relationship* (OPR) in managing relations with organization. Within such a concept, the model of *"The Communication Linkage"* is applied in order to explain the fundamental relationship management between an organization and its publics. OPR highlights the relationship management in three steps: stakeholders including antecedent to relationship, maintenance strategies and its consequences.

บทคัดย่อ

บทความขิ้นนี้มุ่งแสดงให้เห็นถึงความสำคัญของการบริหารความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างองค์กรและประชาชน หรือทฤษฎี Organization-Public Relationships (OPR) โดยเน้นในประเด็นของ Ledingham & Bruning (2000) แบบจำลองสามขั้นของการรักษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างองค์กรและประชาชน (Three-staged Model of OPR) ซึ่งประกอบด้วยต้นเหตุแห่งความสัมพันธ์ (Antecedents) กลยุทธ์การบริหารความสัมพันธ์ (Maintenance Strategies) และผลลัพธ์แห่งความสัมพันธ์ (Consequences)

Introduction

Relationship is one of the central concepts in public relations field. PR practitioners try their best in establishing and maintaining relationship between their organizations and stakeholders. As described by Huang (1997), "the goal of PR not only includes the dissemination of information, but also involves facilitating mutual understanding and resolving conflicts between organization and its publics (p. 7). In order to reach the goal, PR practitioners communicate and interact with their stakeholders in order to attain mutual relationships. As a result, as relationship is managed and strengthened, organization and its public both arrive at their win-win zone—the mutual benefit.

One of public relations theories that focuses on the significance of its role in managing relationship with various publics is Organization-Public Relationships or OPRs. The theory is influenced by different perspectives such as interpersonal communication, psychotherapy, interorganizational relationship, and system theory (Ledingham, 1997). Among these perspectives, system theory provides the explanation of the process of creating relationship between organization and its

various publics and structures which comprised elements in the process. According to Ledingham (2000), "system theorists posit that interacting units develop patterns of interaction that form the structure of the system, but the structure and the process of creating is not the same" (p.15). In addition, based upon the emphasis of the structure and process of system theory in managing Organization and Public Relationships, the concept of 'antecedent' and 'consequences' provides a clearer understanding of process and structure. These two major concepts are explained through 'The Communication Linkage Model' which allows an initial step for understanding the process of OPRs.

As influenced by the system theory, the importance of process and structure of relationship is also described. In terms of process, 'The Communication Linkage Model' explains relationship between organization and publics "which reflects the conjoint, purposive behaviors of the actors (organization and publics) in the relationships" (Ledingham, 2000, p. 25). Through relational communication, each unit can interact, interpret, and adapt his/her relational message to respond to one another. Most importantly, the change occurred is mutual aiming at obtaining mutual benefits between the parties. For the structure of relationship, the structure or the element of OPRs is explained through the concept of 'Antecedent' and 'Consequence'. Antecedents to relationships are described as "the perceptions, motives, needs, behaviors and so forth, (positing) as contingencies or as cause in the formation of relationships" (Cutlip et al., 1994, p. 213). The antecedents, to put it simply, are "the cause of change on the system derived from the changing context. The consequences of relationships are the outputs that have the effects of changing environment and of achieving, maintaining, or changing goal states both inside and outside to the organization" (Cutlip et al., 1994, p. 213). Adapted from "The Communication Linkage" Model, Broom et al., (1997) developed 'a three-stage

model of relationship' which comprised 'Antecedents'—such as social and cultural norms, collective perceptions and expectations, needs for resources, perceptions of uncertain environment, and legal/voluntary

and 'Consequences of relationship'—such as 'goal achievement,' 'dependency/loss autonomy,' 'routine and institutionalized behavior'(Ledingham & Bruning, 1997, p. 30). In addition, Broom added 'Relationship concepts' as additional elements in the structure of relationship. 'Relationship concepts' is later redefined as 'maintenance strategies', the third element, referring to the strategies used to maintain relationship to the expected outcome(s).

Ledingham and Bruning (1997) developed "Three-stage model of organization-public relationships". The model is developed to parallel Brooms et al., (1997) and being influenced by the Excellence Theory in conceptualizing the antecedents and one of the consequences of organization-public relationship. According to the Three-stage Model, one of the significant consequences, 'goal achievement', represents the result of good relationship. It is redefined as 'complementary behavior' (Ledingham & Bruning, 1997, p. 30). In addition, four outputs/outcomes are proposed; 'control mutuality', 'trust', 'relational satisfaction' and 'relational commitment' (Ledingham & Bruning, 1997, p. 30).

So far, this article provides a general understanding of the significance of relationships in public relations field, Ledingham and Bruning (1997)'s model of organization-public relationships and its process and structure, specifically the components of OPR include 'Antecedents', 'Maintenance Strategies,' and 'Consequence'. However, describing each element in detail is not the main purpose of this article. Instead, the the new d paper aims to propose imension that should be considered as another 'Antecedents,' that is 'Relational corporate identity' and its attributes on OPRs.

Postmodern Corporate Identity as Constructivism: The consequence of globalization and dilemmas of identity.

As Gergen (1991) notes, truth or fact is socially constructed, not essentially existing. The truth about the essence of an organization's identity is constructed. Following Kuhn's (1970) The Structure of Scientific Revolution, Gergen explained that "what we view as great scientific

advances cannot be credited to a modernist account of rational procedure. Rather, mainstream scientists of a given age are committed to a particular perspective of the world— a paradigm, in Kuhn's term" (p. 90). As noted earlier, scholars have attempted to define the essence of corporate identity and the means of managing corporate identity. While these ideas are accepted as general knowledge in the modern approach, a postmodernist perspective emphasizes the changeable or relational nature of corporate identity in response to the impact of globalization.

The postmodern ontology, as the form and nature of reality, relies on relativism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). From the relativist perspective, "realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experiential based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions" (110-111).

From the relativistic perspective, universal truth is rejected because, in different contexts, there will be different or multiple truths residing in each society. Therefore, the concept of universal truth cannot be applied to every single context or society. Based on the concept of social construction of reality, each society constructs their knowledge and this knowledge influences the members of the society to behave or act according to that truth. Therefore, multiple truths are constructed in relation to each particular society and this makes it necessary to revisit the concept of universal truth.

Kellner (1992) asserted that "Contemporary postmodern thought has by and large rejected the essentialist and rationalist notion of identity and builds on the constructivist notion" (p. 143). From the modern perspective, identity is viewed as autonomous and self-constituting while postmodernism rejected this idea and viewed it as fragmented and temporary depending on the social process (Kellner, 1992). Further, "as the pace, extension, and complexity of modern societies accelerates, identity becomes more and more unstable, more and more

fragile" (p. 143).

Postmodernism problematizes the traditional, modern perspective of identity and proposes the constructivist view that identity is "a myth, a construct of language and society, an overdetermined illusion that one is really a substantial subject, that one really has a fixed identity" (Kellner, 1992, p. 143). The impact of globalization calls for a reconsideration of the stability of corporate identity as the identity no longer has the depth, substantiality, and coherence which are part of the core definition of identity in modernism (Kellner, 1992, p. 143). Consequently, postmodernism views the corporate identity as not deeply and essentially existing in each organization, but socially constructed, fluid and changeable according to the circumstances (Gergen, 1991).

In postmodernism, "the fragmentation of self conceptions due to technology conforms to the multiplicity of fragmented and disconnected relationships and the concept of self as possessors of real and identifiable characteristics are dismantled" (Gergen, 1991, p. 83). From this perspective, identity is unidentifiable and fluid; moreover, "the apparent durability of identity is somewhat illusory" (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000, pp. 63-64). Corporate identity is constructed through the communicative interaction an entity has with the stakeholders within a particular society. The modern view of corporate identity study that is attached to the essence of corporate identity is incapable of explaining corporate identity in a world where environmental shifts result in individuals or corporations having different relationships with different stakeholders, relationships which often require different identities (Feungfusakul, 2003; Gergen, 1991; Gioia et al., 2000).

Relational Corporate Identity: The impact of globalization on corporate identity.

Globalization, as primarily resulting from the advancement of technology, allows the organization to communicate internationally and globally without time and space limitations. Globalization alters our traditional knowledge about identity in such a way that the stability of

identity is difficult to preserve in the midst of environmental changes (Gergen, 1991; Woodward, 2002). This perspective is in contrast to the modern approach that regards technology as a tool that helps increase productivity, urbanization and social formation in the era of capitalism. As stated by Best and Kellner (1991), "in the contemporary high tech media society, emergent processes of change and transformation are producing a new postmodern society and its advocates claim that an era of postmodernity constitutes a novel stage of history and novel socio-cultural formation which requires new concepts and theories" (p. 3). From the postmodern perspective, globalization is proposed as the major factor that influences changes in the study of identity (Feungfusakul, 2003; Gergen, 1991; Woodward, 2002).

Gergen's the Saturated Self: Dilemmas of identity. Gergen (1991) described the "technology of social saturation" as the major factor that sheds light on the study of corporate identity from an alternative approach. He emphasized the role of technological advancement in the study of identity. The advancement of technology, specifically globalization, enforces change in the organization's identity. The impact of globalization can be traced back in the forms of "low tech and high tech," ranging from transportation, media technology, electronic innovation, and "the proliferation of the relationship" (Gergen, 1991, p. 57). Specifically, this includes the development of communication appliances such as digital computers and satellites as electronic linkages that allow the social linkage between societies. Due to the growth of technology, globalization enhances one to communicate internationally and globally and the relationship is expanded and dynamic, unlike in the traditional society where the relationship between people is limited to intermediate communities. As explained by Gergen (1991):

Through the technologies of the century, the number and variety of relationships in which we are engaged, potential frequency of contact, expressed intensity of relationship, and endurance through time all are steadily increasing. As this increase becomes extreme we reach a state of social saturation. (61)

By having multiple relationships with others as a consequence of globalization, multiple patterns will be developed (Gergen, 1991). For an organization, globalization enables having multiple channels of communicating with its stakeholders, and it also develops the social relations with those people. Different patterns of relationship with the stakeholders emerge. For example, in the past, a university could only communicate and project its identity among its local or national stakeholders as they had a limited capacity for communication. Due to these limitations on communication with stakeholders, its identity was easy to manage. It was thus also possible for the university to maintain its stable identity. But when the technological changes in the form of transportation, mass media and electronic innovation occurred, change in corporate identity happened as a consequence. As a result, the communication the university has with different stakeholders influences the organization to alter its identity according to specific situations (Gergen, 1991, p. 69). Consequently, maintaining a rigid identity or attempting to regain the same identity through a time of technological change might not be an appropriate strategy to be employed during the era of globalization.

In emphasizing the significance of the constructivist approach to identity, Gergen's three phases are also illustrated to explain the postmodern view of identity that regards the context (i.e., social, culture, technology and globalization) as the determinant of an entity's identity. His three major phases comprise the "consciousness of self-construction" which are "the strategic manipulator," "the pastiche of personality," and "the emergence of relational self" as applied to an organization's identity (p. 147).

Gergen's three phases as the "consciousness of self-construction." In the "strategic manipulator," individuals learn to perform different roles in achieving social benefits. At this stage, the modern notion of fixed self or identity is threatened. This is due to the fact that globalization enhances the social saturation which is led by low and high technology. This compels one to encounter multiple relationships which is more complex when compared to

the traditional community. As Gergen (1991) claimed, "The result is that one cannot depend on a solid confirmation of identity, nor on comfortable patterns of authentic action. One confronts scores of new and different demands" (p. 147). This is also applicable to corporate identity. That is, when an organization confronts new and different relationships (for example, when a university has developed new relationships with different stakeholders such as international students from different countries, different ethnic groups and age groups, media representations from international newspapers and other international universities, etc.) the organization needs to think strategically in managing its identity and/ or role in such a way that it helps attain the social benefit within globalization (Gergen, 1991). An organization tends to adapt and project a new identity as they feel more insecure when they face the socially saturated world and feel uncomfortable in applying the same identity to every situation. Gergen (1991) argued:

As one shuffles and searches for appropriate forms of action, identity is more likely to be questioned than confirmed. . . . Thus as modernist confronts the challenge of social saturation, he or she is continuously ripped from the security of an essential or unified self. (p. 147-148)

Therefore, the sense of real or authentic selves is rather considered as illusion and dismissed so that one can project many identities without feeling guilty. It can be said that the idea of deep identity or originality of identity never exists. This leads one to involve the second phase, "pastiche personality" (Gergen, 1991, p. 147).

In the "pastiche personality," the second phase, individuals are not limited to a fixed identity. They are allowed to perform many forms of self expression. Gergen (1991) postulated that:

As one casts out to sea in the contemporary world (globalization), modernist moorings are slowly left behind. It becomes increasingly difficult to recall precisely to what core essence one must remain true. The ideal of authenticity frays about the edges; the meaning of sincerity slowly lapses into indeterminacy. And with the sea change, the guilt of self-violation also recedes. As the guilt and the sense of

superficiality recede from view, one is simultaneously readied for the emergence of a pastiche personality. (p. 150)

In studying corporate identity, once an organization attempts to accommodate its identity to survive in the multiple relationships with different stakeholders, the organization projects multiple identities in accordance with the situation and stakeholders. The stability of the core or essence of identity is difficult to achieve, and instead the "social chameleon" feature of an organization's identity is projected. Gergen (1991) explained the "social chameleon" personality as "constantly borrowing bits and pieces of identity from whatever sources are available and constructing them as useful or desirable in a given situation" (Gergen, 1991, p. 150). The stability of an organization's identity limits rather than enhances the chances of success in communicating the corporate identity within the framework of globalization. Consequently, a change in corporate identity, its multiplicity, therefore, should be necessary.

Finally, in the "emergence of the relational self," as the third phase, Gergen explained that:
(This) sense of the self as autonomous individual is largely responsible for the severe stresses of multiphrenia. . . . Concepts of the individual—as the center of knowledge ("one who knows"); as possessor of rationality; as author of his or her own words; as one who creates, decides, manipulates, or intends—are all placed in question. (Gergen, 1991, p. 156)

Following the concept of the emergence of the relational self, the autonomous self that represents the fixity and stability of one's identity is no longer considered as necessary but rather focuses on the self as contingent, the constructing and reconstructing of one's identity. As indicated by Gergen (1991), "one's potentials are only realized because there are others to support and sustain them; one has an identity only because it is permitted by the social rituals of which one is part; one is allowed to be a certain kind of a person because this sort of person is essential to the broader games of society" (p. 156-157). In this stage, an individual's identity is contingent or relational depending on the changing situation. Further, at this stage, "(A)s the moorings of the substantial self are slowly

left behind and one begins to experience the raptures of pastiche personality, the dominant indulgence becomes the persona - the image as presented" (Gergen, 1991, p. 156).

This is due to the fact that the world allows people to construct and reconstruct their identity freely while the real self, as an object, seems diminished. Globalization allows one to construct multiple relationships and to possess different identities. Gergen (1991) emphasized the role of communication in constructing numerous relationships, particularly, the words and phrases one uses to construct multiple selves. Communication is a necessary part of constructing relationships with others. The meaning of identity will be granted in the relationship because identity is relational and dependent on the context, the relationship. Each relationship will grant a different meaning of identity. As claimed by Gergen (1991) "One's words remain nonsense (mere sounds or markings) until supplemented by another's assent (or appropriate action). And this assent, too, remains dumb until another (or others) lend it a sense of meaning" (p. 157). Consequently, the individual will not condition him or herself with one identity but will change their own identity dependent on the social ritual; thus, the relationships in society construct the self or identity. The meaning of one's identity bears an interdependence with the relationships with others.

For an organization to project its identity within globalization, the relationship an organization has with different stakeholders influences the meaning of the identity interpreted by the stakeholders. That is, the organizational identity is not purely controlled by the management but is influenced by the context, the relationships the organization has with its stakeholders. Consequently, it can be concluded that globalization allows an organization to communicate through different means and construct multiple relationships with different stakeholders which finally leads to the instability of corporate identity.

Relational Corporate Identity as Antecedents in Three-staged Model of OPR

As discussed above, the relational corporate

identity which includes such attributes as flexible, multiple, socially constructed etc. may be introduced as an additional dimension in antecedent element/stage as it affects the selection of maintenance strategies to be employed in maintaining relationships with stakeholders. According to Gergen (1991), globalization enables an organization to communicate with its stakeholders through multiple channels of communicating. At the same time, an organization can help the social relations with those people. By having multiple relationships with others as a consequence of globalization, multiple patterns of relationship will be developed. Accordingly, it can be said that, through communications, an organization will be able to communicate its relationship building/maintaining message based upon its corporate identity that is relational or contextual based.

Moreover, it can be said that once people develop the new forms of relationship, they are facing the dilemmas of representing their multiple selves or identities (Gergen, 1991). As indicated by Gergen: "Such experiences with variation and self contradiction may be viewed as preliminary effects of social saturation. They may signal a populating of the self, the acquisition of multiple and disparate potential for being" (p.69). Thus, an organization, like an individual, will encounter multiple forms of relationships. With the advancement of technology in communication, an organization accumulates these forms of relationship and learns how to perform these with different stakeholders nationally, internationally, and globally. And most importantly, as social relations are developed along with the communication, corporate identity performed at each different stage also influence the selection of relationship maintenance strategies since an organization will communicate with it stakeholder in accordance with its current identity.

Practical implication

Scholars and practitioners in public relations' field may find it useful to manage their relationships relationship with stakeholders through the awareness of this possible addition of relational corporate identity as the antecedents

in managing relationship. To be specific, in the first phase of "Strategic manipulator," the scholars and practitioners need to be aware of all possible dimension(s) of corporate identity which occurs through various channels of communication; types and attributes of stakeholder an organization is dealing with and the cultural as well as geographical contexts which require different strategies in managing relationships. In the "Pastiche personality," the second phase, organizations are not limited to a fixed identity. They are allowed to perform many forms of self expression. Therefore, an organization needs to review the maintenance strategies that were employed in the past. And finally, in the "Emergence of the relational self", as the third phase, the stability of the core or essence of identity is difficult to achieve, and instead the "Social chameleon" feature of an organization's identity is projected. Once an organization attempts to accommodate its identity to survive in the multiple relationships with different stakeholders, the organization projects multiple identities in accordance with the situation and stakeholders. Accordingly, the scholars or practitioners need to monitor and evaluate the relationship's maintaining strategies overtimes as it will eventually enhances the sustainable relationship with organization's publics, the utmost goal in practicing Public Relations.

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