

Krishnamurthy Sriramesh and Dejan Vercic (Eds.), **The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice**. New York: Routledge, 2013, 992 pp, \$93.40 (paperback).

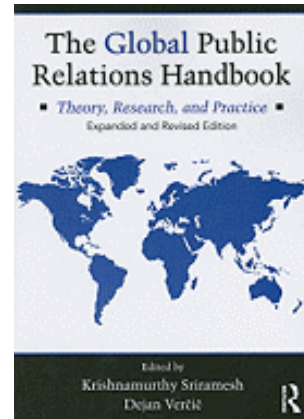
Reviewed by

Aimei Yang

University of Southern California

Public relations is a relatively new academic field and most research in this field has been dominated by a Western perspective. Since the early 1990s, research such as the "Excellence" studies has made a continued effort to identify and theorize Western excellence models. Many prominent scholars have argued excellence models should be promoted and are applicable worldwide even though the field has little knowledge about how public relations is practiced in non-Western contexts (Grunig, 1992).

Within this tradition, *The Global Public Relations Handbook* (2nd edition) is a remarkable effort to counterbalance "the existing ethnocentricity in public relations" (p. 919) and to challenge the assumption that public relations in other countries, especially Western Europe and Asia, is "no more than a copy of the Anglo-American approach" (van Ruler and Vercic, 2004, p. 149). The book, composed of 43 chapters, presents a multinational, multicultural description of how public relations is practiced across the world.



I would advise readers to start with section one, "Global Public Relations: Conceptual Framework," which provides a framework to discuss how the public relations practice is conditioned by political systems and activism, economic development, and localized culture and media environments in different nations. This section is important because most subsequent chapters apply this framework to examine specific cases from various countries and regions. This framework provides the readers with a consistent context within which comparisons can be made across nations. Once readers familiarize themselves with the framework, they can easily navigate the rest of the book.

This handbook represents a massive, far-reaching editorial effort and includes case studies from 30 nations and four major regions (Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas). An important feature of the handbook is that many chapters are written by scholars native to those countries. Despite the fact that many of the authors have a Western education, this editorial choice is an important development in international public relations. This is because many international public relations studies and introductions have been written by visiting American scholars, whose acquaintance with the region in question is often brief and their local contacts limited. And, indeed, in the handbook these authors' native knowledge about their countries does shine through in some chapters. For example, Badran, VanSlyke Turk, and Walters' chapter on public relations in the United Arab Emirates shows that a working knowledge of the laws, customs, taboos, and ethics of the region should be a requisite for practitioners. Kim's chapter on the evolution of professionalism in South Korea adds a fresh look at how family chief orientation and Confucian worldview affects public relations.

Another important update, although still limited in its scope, is the handbook's discussion of how social actors other than corporations utilize public relations. For instance, chapter 36, "Transnational Public Relations by Foreign Governments" by Michael Kunczik, is an excellent example of how public relations is applied in public diplomacy by government agencies. Tkalac and Pavicic's chapter on international NGOs and international public relations examines how NGOs can benefit from public relations operations.

The Global Public Relations Handbook is written as a graduate textbook. I would recommend scholars and students interested in international public relations, international strategic communication, or international management communication purchase the book. Some chapters can also be selected as readings for graduate-level international communication courses to demonstrate the breath and scope of applied international communication. I have used the book in my own graduate class, and many students responded positively to the content. Moreover, the book's value for public relations practitioners should not be overlooked. Many chapters include practitioner-oriented advice. Given how little knowledge we have on international public relations, and the rapid global growth of the profession, the book can provide a valuable road map for practitioners who are unfamiliar with diverse international dynamics.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that only about half of the chapters in the second edition are actually new, and some are revised chapters by the same authors from the first edition. The first edition of the book came out in 2003. Over a decade has passed, and there are new developments in international public relations that are not reflected in the book. Moreover, there are important geographic regions such as the Middle East (with a few exceptions) missing in the book. At the same time, some regions such as Europe are disproportionately weighted in terms of the number of chapters (there are 11 chapters on European countries).

Additionally, the editors and their editorial style still heavily draw upon the *Excellence* tradition. But the field of public relations has evolved since 1992. New theories have emerged providing new perspectives on the discursive meaning created by organizations and publics of all kinds (Toth, 2010). The handbook's theoretical orientation and U.S. prototypes, which get carried over into different chapters, should not be overlooked. A serious reader needs to be critical of the latent value judgment implied in those case studies (what is considered successful, what is considered ethical, etc.). Additionally, the strong editorial influence somehow forces every author to conform to a limited intellectual space and therefore may compromise the autonomy of thoughts and regional diversity. I would argue that the effort to categorize culture and local diversity is in itself a force that undermines the richness that the editors and authors set out to pursue. Individuality and difference are compromised in exchange for consistency and coherence. Finally, despite its significant achievements, as acknowledged by the editors, there remains a massive amount of work to be done in international public relations. We know too little about any aspect of this burgeoning international industry, and this book is but a first step forward in bridging the chasms that exist on the global level.

References

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