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Research Report

Corporate communications and public relations in Asia: Context, status quo, and future challenges

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für Kommunikation und Management im Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft

Corporate Communications and Public Relations in Asia

Context, Status Quo, and Future Challenges

Lisa Dühring, Ansgar Zerfass (2015)

Objectives & Methodology

Project lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prof. Dr. Ansgar Zerfass• Lisa Dühning
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide insights into the status quo, the challenges, and perspectives of corporate communications and public relations in Asian countries
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Literature review
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• December 2014 – March 2015
Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report follows the Strategic Communications Summit in Singapore in Nov 2014 by Nanyang Technological University and the Academic Society

Context of Corporate Communications in Asia

Asian companies on the rise:

- By 2025, Asian companies will make up 45% of the Fortune 500 (McKinsey)
- International companies start to relocate their HQ to Asia including corporate communications units
- Majority of Asia's communication industry and professionals are located in Hong Kong or in Singapore

Historical context:

- Public relations used to be exercised by governments and governmental organizations
- Even today, politicians are among the most important stakeholders for communicators

Economical context:

- PR in Asia is primarily driven by multinational corporations promoting their products through marketing, advertising, events, and media relations → focus on consumer relations; only slowly changing

Cultural context:

- Personal relationships and networks are of utmost importance (i.e. personal meetings to influence stakeholders outside official working stakeholders are an integral part of PR)
- Respect needs to be demonstrated to all authorities and elders
- Face: Important to save the face in all social or personal relationships
- Favor: PR practitioners are expected to give tips, gifts, or sympathies and invitations; often misused by public officials



Political and sociocultural variables influence communication in Asia to a far higher degree than in Western countries

Key topics and trends in Asia

Social media and Internet:

- Explosive growth of Internet and mobile devices in recent years in Asian countries, though Internet penetration still varies greatly between countries and regions
- Particular strong influence of social media on corporate communications and communication channels
- Online communication and mobile applications enjoy high trust rates
- Political impact: online forums/blogs have become popular alternative sources for political information
- The limitations of freedom of speech: far reaching political censorship of Websites i.e. in China
- Skills and training for online communicators/social media experts still in its infancy
- 73% of online communicators sit within the marketing function

CSR:

- Philanthropy and community development deeply ingrained in Asian culture and exercised by many companies – though sometimes not named CSR
- Expectations towards companies to act responsibly is growing. Main reasons:
 - 1) Environmental and working conditions are often discussed by mass media
 - 2) Growing middle class with an increasing awareness for CSR topics
 - 3) Expansion to the West – requires Asian companies to adopt Western standards

Professionalization and education in Asia

Professionalization:

- New thrust toward professionalization in Asia is visible
- However, in many corporations and agencies, practitioners still do not have proper PR training/ degree
- Great demand for qualified talents across Asia, however supply is short and retaining PR professionals is a major challenge
- PR experts expect a clear career path with clearly defined roles and positions, otherwise they look for a new job
- Urgent need to establish professional associations and better PR education programs at college or university level

PR education:

- PR education in Asia is highly heterogeneous
- Only very few universities have genuine PR departments – often subsumed under communication studies, journalism, and/or advertising
- Bachelor programs fairly widespread, master programs less common, very few PhD programs
- University education is often not accepted by communication practitioners when hiring people
- Curricula mostly based on US text books that lack the Asian context
- No consistent body of theoretical knowledge and communication management in Asia
- Widening gap between theory and practice – lack of interaction between academia and industry