

International Communications Strategy: Developments in Cross-Cultural Communications, PR and Social Media

By Silvia Cambié and Yang-May Ooi
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A Book Review by

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Much of the discussions in this issue of the *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition* has examined the relationship between communication and multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-faith communities. While new communication practices and technologies may be bringing these segments closer together, companies or organizations attempting to reach new global markets are challenged with building a unique message that appeals to each diverse segment. For marketers and public relations professionals to be successful, this requires a sound understanding of local cultures and values and how they pertain to the overall corporate brand.

In their 2009 book *International Communications Strategy: Developments in Cross-Cultural Communications, PR and Social Media*, Silvia Cambié and Yang-May Ooi provide an outline of this new media landscape and what it means for PR professionals in reaching an international audience. While the world is coming together through technology, the authors are quick to remind communicators that their messages must be tailored according to local cultures and customs.

Quoting *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, the authors argue that we are entering a world of “Globalization 3.0” (2009: 4). We have moved beyond sole Western dominance into an age where China, India, Brazil, and the Middle East are having a major impact politically and economically and changing global discourse. According to Cambié and Ooi, this is a welcome development for the communications profession:

Business executives are waking up to the idea that . . . they need experts able to get the message across to new audiences and new markets by using new technologies. The time has come for corporations to have a much more strategic view of communication.

(2009: 4)

Written in a clear and easy-to-navigate fashion, *International Communications Strategy* is structured into two main sections: international communications and the role of social media in international communications. The first section goes deeper into this idea of Globalization 3.0

and how it is changing communications. The authors adeptly discuss changes in public relations strategy, the new emphasis on corporate social responsibility, and the role of effective leadership in tackling the new communication landscape. The second section goes on to provide a series of unique case studies demonstrating how companies and organizations have used social media in this new era. Here, they examine how social media is becoming more ingrained in modern life, the importance of authenticity and trust, how social media brings communities together, new forms of expression, and new media advances in the future.

Altogether, Cambié and Ooi provide a strong and coherent argument that modern communications practitioners should pay close attention to. The authors are both experienced multi-cultural communicators who have worked in Europe and Asia in public relations, business, and journalism. They are also the authors of successful blogs about cross-cultural issues and communications. Not only are Cambié and Ooi heavily engaged with this new era of Globalization 3.0, it is quite obvious from the text that they are excited with the possibilities it offers the communication profession.

This book offers a number of useful lessons for any student of marketing, public relations, or business. Essentially, the authors state that for communicators to be successful in Globalization 3.0 they “need to gain exposure to other cultures, learn other languages and develop a curiosity for other ways of thinking” (2009: 14). This requires taking on “a set of skills that will enable us to interpret complexity. In the coming years this is where much of the value added by the communication function will come from” (Ibid).

International Communications Strategy is illustrated with several fascinating case studies from countries such as China, India, and Malaysia demonstrating how the success of a growing number of companies has been determined based on their understanding of local cultures and the reach of new media. Organizations that fail to do their research will be gradually overtaken or dramatically blindsided by a major cultural faux pas, as the authors describe was the case for PepsiCo in a PR disaster in India. Meanwhile, companies that seek to understand the values and desires of specific local cultures will prosper.

As an example, the authors discuss Pampers’ successful Absolute Baby campaign in China. Communications agency Weber Shandwick had discovered that the country’s one-child policy created a generation of parents with little experience in raising children. Surveys found that many mothers felt their parenting information was either “old fashioned” or “out-of-date” (2009: 27). As such, the agency determined that there was a desire for parenting information, which presented “an opportunity to position Pampers as a trustworthy source of information and to support sales of its leading-edge products” (Ibid). The company then created a special website providing information articles along with blogs and interactive features to allow parents to share their stories and experiences. Not only was the website successful, but Weber Shandwick found that a number of their articles were circulated through outside blogs and discussion groups, which helped spread Pampers’ message and positive image as a baby-care authority even further.

Technology is providing a new arsenal of tactics for communicators to engage such a successful strategy. Information now travels at an incredible speed and more citizens, countries, and cultures are connecting over new social media forums. To engage these new tools, the authors argue that communicators need to understand the new online culture: “Just as it is useful for enterprises doing business in another country or continent to understand something about the culture they are coming into, there are advantages in understanding online culture when we come into cyberspace” (2009: 100).

This discussion of the modern online culture and how companies use new media tools is interesting and full of useful examples of successes and failures. The authors are quite successful in showing that the wise PR practitioner should understand the opportunities and hazards of these new mediums and communication outlets. Nevertheless, it is the wider context of the first section of this book that modern communicators should truly absorb from *International Communications Strategy*. Indeed, it is important to follow trends and messages on Twitter or any new media tool. More essential, however, is having new media tactics underlined with a clear strategy designed according to the specific values of the international audience. Savvy communicators must be able to interpret how certain messages will reflect back on local cultures and be ready to respond accordingly.

About the Reviewer

Darcy Knoll has been working in communications, journalism, and marketing since 2005. He holds a Master's of Arts in Communication with a specialization in Media Studies from the University of Ottawa and a Bachelor of Journalism with High Honours and Minors in Political Science and Mass Communication from Carleton University in Ottawa. He is interested in the study of media, public relations, and political communication.

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