

A Review of Strategic Public Relations and Stakeholder Communication in a Turbulent Asia Pacific Media Environment

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ABSTRACT

Operating in the highly fragmented Asia-Pacific (APAC) region requires a deep understanding of divergent media, political, and cultural environments. While existing literature often applies generic global benchmarks, this study synthesizes regional theoretical and empirical work to provide an organized, contextual framework for strategic public relations and stakeholder communication. Specifically, this paper offers four core contributions to the literature: first, it establishes a typology of dual-track and hybrid media systems to demonstrate how varying degrees of structural state control impact real-world campaign execution; second, it decouples localized techno-ecosystems by evaluating how a regional leap into mobile-first super-apps alters organic reach and brand amplification; third, it applies a techno-cultural lens to show how deep-seated ethno-linguistic, religious, and historical dynamics act as critical determinants of public opinion and trust; and fourth, it exposes systemic professional deficiencies in current one-way metrics to propose a resilient, iterative "owned-infrastructure" hub model that ensures culturally grounded, accountable communication.

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1 Introduction

The rapid economic and technological evolution of the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region has created a highly dynamic media environment, where exponential digital growth coexists with declining legacy print channels. Despite its global economic weight, regional public relations (PR) practices continue to experience systemic capability gaps, frequently over-relying on superficial, one-way transmission metrics rather than robust, dialogic stakeholder engagement (Macnamara et al., 2018; Phan, 2025).

While the broader literature contains several descriptive overviews of global communication, there is a distinct lack of deep, scholarly justification for how these universal standards fail under localized pressures. This paper addresses that exact gap by adopting a specific socio-political and techno-cultural analytical lens. Rather than treating "Asia-Pacific" as a monolith, this lens systematically examines how communication realities are

structurally dictated by political governance—ranging from authoritarian party-led systems to fragile democracies—and localized digital ecosystems that have entirely bypassed Western development patterns (Phan, 2025; Reilly, 2014).

The novel contribution of this paper lies in its granular intersectionality. We move beyond Western-centric frameworks—such as standard Grunigian models—by demonstrating how deep-rooted regional factors like ethno-linguistic diversity, religious mandates (e.g., navigating dietary or cultural taboos in Muslim, Buddhist, and Confucian societies), and super-app platform dependencies actively reshape the boundaries of public opinion and corporate reputation (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003; McElreath et al., 2015; Karanjit Kaur, n.d.).

By synthesizing these highly disparate regional variables into a coherent, non-universalist framework, this review provides scholars and practitioners with a critical, localized

baseline for advancing accountable, culturally synchronized communication strategies in a heterogeneous environment.

2 Conceptual Framework and Analytical Approach

As a conceptual essay, this paper employs a narrative and conceptual synthesis methodology to evaluate the landscape of public relations in the Asia-Pacific region. The architecture of this framework was developed through a multi-stage conceptual mapping process:

Thematic Scope: The analysis deliberately spans the intersection of political infrastructure, localized digital ecosystems, and ethno-linguistic or religious trust networks across the heterogeneous ASEAN and broader APAC landscape.

Literature Synthesis: We targeted foundational and emerging empirical studies addressing regional capability gaps, media dual-tracks, and platform dependencies (e.g., Macnamara et al., 2018; Phan, 2025; Sriramesh, 2015).

Axiomatic Grounding: Rather than treating regional communication practices as mere deviations from Western standards, this approach treats local contextual realities—such as super-app reliance and socio-political hierarchies—as primary axioms for building localized theory.

3 Theoretical foundations for public relations and stakeholder communication

3.1 Conceptualizing public relations and corporate communication

3.1.1 Definitions and scope of public relations

Public relations is situated within broader communication theory and practice, yet several authors underline its distinctive focus on managing relationships between organizations and their stakeholders and publics. Domm notes that public relations and corporate communication can be understood as aspects of communication theory as a whole and argues that it is difficult, as a matter of logic, to separate them from wider communication scholarship. This observation opens the way for stronger and more explicit synthesis between public relations, corporate communication and general communication theory, while still recognizing the particular frameworks that have been developed in public relations research. Within these frameworks, James Grunig's typology of public relations models, and particularly the fourth two-way symmetrical model, plays a central role in conceptualizing both the definition and desired scope of public relations practice. Domm explains that this model assumes a high level of respectful two-way dialogue and mutual influence between

organizations and their key stakeholders and publics, positioning public relations as a strategic function that should balance organizational and stakeholder interests rather than simply disseminate information. At the same time, he highlights potential limitations of this model in so-called high-context Asian societies characterized by high power distance, suggesting that definitions of effective public relations cannot be entirely abstracted from cultural context. Intercultural inquiry led by Grunig and collaborators such as Sriramesh and Verčič is therefore acknowledged as important for understanding how public relations operates across different societies, including Asia. Strategic planning concepts have also been integrated into definitions of public relations. Domm refers to work by McElreath and management theorist Minzberg, whose approaches to strategic planning, including rigorous situation analysis, setting measurable objectives and meticulous evaluation, have been widely adopted in public relations courses. This integration positions public relations not merely as media relations or publicity but as a strategic management function that contributes to organizational planning and decision-making. Grounding public relations in such strategic concepts expands its scope from tactical communication activities to systematic programs aligned with organizational goals and evaluated against explicit criteria of effectiveness. (Domm, 2015)

Building on these theoretical foundations, Macnamara and colleagues situate contemporary public relations and communication management within a cluster of related theories. Excellence theory, as elaborated by Grunig and others, advocates two-way communication and symmetry between an organization and its stakeholders and environment as both effective and ethical. Dialogic theory extends this focus by emphasizing dialogue between organizations and stakeholders, particularly in digital and social media contexts, thereby reinforcing definitions of public relations that foreground interaction, responsiveness and relational engagement rather than one-way broadcasting. Corporate communication theory is described as highlighting the importance of organizational adaptiveness to its environment while serving predetermined management objectives, connecting public relations to broader corporate communication functions that support organizational legitimacy and performance. Furthermore, strategic communication scholarship frames public relations as part of planned, purposeful communication processes that support organizational strategies. Collectively, these perspectives delineate public relations as an applied field grounded in two-way, ethical, adaptive and strategic communication. (Macnamara et al., 2018, 2019)

In practical terms, the scope of public relations in Asia Pacific is described as large and rapidly growing, yet under-

researched relative to Western regions. Macnamara et al. report that public relations has become a sizable global industry and that major Asia Pacific countries, including China and India, are recognized as among the fastest-growing markets. A study of India characterizes public relations as the most modern and fastest-growing branch of communications, apart from the Internet and mobile phone, which underscores its expanding role in managing organizational communication within rapidly changing environments. However, the same authors point out that public relations and communication management are less studied in Asia Pacific and that local contexts are often not fully explored, indicating a gap between the practical scope of public relations activity and scholarly understanding. (Macnamara et al., 2019)

Ongoing debates about measurement and evaluation further refine the scope of public relations by insisting that it must demonstrate organizational and societal value. Macnamara argues that emotional and cultural factors linked to communication outcomes require advanced qualitative methods and notes that practitioners still do not consistently implement rigorous measurement and evaluation despite decades of research. He calls for scholars to connect theory more effectively to practice and to engage more actively with industry initiatives on measurement standards. This focus situates public relations not only as a relational and strategic function, but also as one that should be accountable through systematic assessment of its contributions to organizations and society.

3.1.2 Stakeholder theory and relationship management

Stakeholders in public relations and corporate communication include not only external audiences such as paying customers, shareholders, media and suppliers, but also internal customers and employees, all of whom require fair and equal respect. Phan and Peng explicitly argue against the traditional maxim that "the customer is always right" and instead advocate an "enlightened service" philosophy in which mutual respect for all parties is the guiding principle, irrespective of who is deemed right in any particular interaction. This approach positions relationship management as a normative, ethically grounded practice that seeks sustainability through reciprocity and recognition of the dignity of diverse stakeholder groups, rather than asymmetric deference to one category of stakeholder. Within this perspective, sustainable success in Asian business contexts is linked to two factors: sustained hard work without shortcuts and mutual respect for others. These elements are presented as core reasons for enduring achievements, suggesting that stakeholder relationships built on effort and respect can endure competitive and environmental volatility. Mutual respect is described as

operating within a "closed loop of enlightened service," highlighting a cyclical dynamic in which respectful treatment of stakeholders invites corresponding respect from them. This normative stance on stakeholder relationships complements strategic communication theories that call for balancing organizational and stakeholder interests, by emphasizing the everyday interpersonal ethics that underpin such balance. (Phan & Peng, 2014)

Relationship management in volatile media and communication environments in Asia Pacific further requires an appreciation of how stakeholders inform and respond to communication programs. Macnamara's DPC model of strategic communication evaluation shows that the inputs stage of a program is informed by stakeholder and public attitudes, perceptions, needs, and channel preferences, as well as societal interests and organizational considerations. Communication strategy is therefore envisioned as being shaped by stakeholders and publics at the outset, rather than being purely organization-centric. Moreover, evaluation of outcomes and impact is explicitly bidirectional: it must assess effects on the organization and on stakeholders, publics, and society. This reinforces the notion that effective relationship management entails listening to stakeholders, incorporating their perspectives into strategy, and measuring how communication affects them, not only how it advances organizational objectives. Critical analysis of this model identifies gaps that further illuminate the demands of stakeholder-oriented relationship management. One identified issue is that communication objectives are often determined before formative research, raising the risk that objectives may be unrealistic or in conflict with stakeholder interests. Another is that program logic is typically depicted as a linear sequence of separate stages, whereas stakeholder relationships and communication activities overlap and are contingent on feedback, requiring iterative adjustment of strategy. Internal and external context, including economic, political, social, cultural and competitive factors, are also noted as major influences on whether strategic communication is effective, yet they are omitted from many evaluation models. Finally, unintended impacts on stakeholders and publics are not usually considered, even though these may significantly shape relationships and reputations. Together, these critiques highlight that rigorous relationship management must integrate stakeholder research into objective setting, remain flexible and iterative, attend to contextual conditions, and account for both intended and unintended effects on stakeholders. (Macnamara, 2018)

Operationalizing stakeholder theory in practice calls for specific competences and organizational arrangements. Phan and Peng recommend appointing a content manager who combines the focus of an editor, the writing skills of a

journalist, the perspective of a researcher, and the vision and charisma of a leader, and tasking this person with assembling a team to run web, social media and mobile platforms as a content-centric environment. This configuration supports continuous, coherent communication that can maintain trust with media, customers and other stakeholders by aligning content quality with stakeholder expectations. In parallel, they describe how clients began to request social media and mobile application consulting as these platforms emerged, leading to the development of social media primer training programs to help clients understand basics and their relation to the broader marketing communication landscape, as well as the design, development and maintenance of social media channels and apps. These activities illustrate how relationship management increasingly relies on digital interfaces and training that enable organizations and stakeholders to interact effectively within fast-changing technological ecosystems. (Phan & Peng, 2014)

Trust, particularly in media relationships, is highlighted as foundational for successful stakeholder communication across Asia Pacific. Phan describes building and maintaining strong relationships with journalists, editors and other media stakeholders as paramount in the region's complex and diverse media landscape, arguing that mastering relationship-building skills enhances the ability to secure coverage, manage organizational reputation and communicate messages to target audiences. Trust in these relationships is strongly conditioned by cultural norms, with personal relationships playing important roles in many APAC cultures. Evidence indicates that reputation management across diverse markets requires balancing global best practices with local cultural adaptations, tailoring communication strategies, and engaging key stakeholders to build and protect brand images. Success is framed as depending on the ability to navigate the specific expectations of stakeholders in each market while maintaining a coherent overall strategy that supports brand integrity and stakeholder trust. (Phan, 2025)

Stakeholder theory and relationship management in Asia Pacific public relations, therefore, converge on an ethic of mutual respect, dialogic input into strategy, sensitivity to context and culture, and systematic evaluation of bidirectional impact on organizations and stakeholders. These elements collectively define how relationships can be sustained under conditions of media volatility and rapid social and technological change.

3.2 Communication theory and strategic perspectives

3.2.1 Models of organizational communication

Organizational communication in public relations and corporate communication is closely tied to how

organizations align their communicative activities with strategic objectives and with their environments. Strategic communication theory is described as advocating alignment of public relations and corporate communication to organizational objectives as well as to stakeholders and the environment in which the organization operates, particularly when based on emergent strategy approaches associated with Mintzberg and others. This view situates communication as a core organizational process rather than a peripheral activity, and it emphasizes that communicative decisions should respond to environmental conditions and stakeholder expectations, not only internal plans. (Macnamara et al., 2019)

System theory of public relations is introduced as an important management framework for understanding these organizational communication processes. Abdullah and Threadgold hypothesize that system theory and core competency strategies can strengthen concepts of public relations management and professionalism, particularly in contexts such as Malaysia. Applying system theory, public relations professionals are expected to play adaptive roles in shaping standards of professionalism based on concepts of adjustment and adaptation of organizations to their environments. These concepts are presented as crucial in managing openness and transparency of organizations in highly competitive business environments, indicating that organizational communication models grounded in system theory focus on the interaction between organizations and their external environment rather than on one-way dissemination.

Core competency strategy, identified by Mintzberg and Quinn and by DeSanto and Moss, is employed alongside system theory to observe educational and professional standards from a strategic management perspective. This strategy emphasizes a set of skills or knowledge that is flexible and permeable, capable of providing long-term benefits, and oriented to customer relationships. Abdullah and Threadgold argue that elements of core competency strategy may be compatible with elements of system theory, and they regard their study as possibly the first attempt to find convergence between these two approaches in public relations. In terms of organizational communication models, this convergence suggests a focus on capabilities and competences that enable organizations to communicate adaptively and maintain relationships in changing environments, rather than viewing communication as a static function. (Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008)

Evaluation models of strategic communication add further layers to organizational communication modelling by specifying how inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts are connected. Macnamara's analysis of the DPC

model highlights that the inputs stage should be informed by stakeholder and public attitudes, perceptions, needs, and channel preferences, as well as societal interests and organizational considerations. In this model, communication strategy is not solely determined by organizational objectives but is shaped by two-way flows of information between the organization and its environment. Outputs flow outward from the organization to stakeholders and publics, while evaluation of outcomes requires assessing responses from these groups. Impact is conceptualized as bidirectional, with effects on both the organization and stakeholders, publics, and society. This framing moves organizational communication models beyond organization-centric logics toward structures that integrate dialogic interaction and corporate responsibility. Critical analysis nevertheless identifies important gaps in traditional and contemporary evaluation models that reflect broader limitations in organizational communication modeling.

One issue is that communication objectives are commonly predetermined before formative research, which can render them unrealistic or in conflict with stakeholder and public interests. Another issue is that stages in program logic are depicted as separate boxes, implying linear progression, whereas in practice they overlap and are contingent on factors such as feedback and contextual events. Internal and external context, including resources, management decisions, economic, political, social, cultural, and competitive factors, are noted as major influences on effectiveness but are omitted from many models. Furthermore, unintended impacts on stakeholders and publics are not usually considered, leading to potential blind spots in understanding the full consequences of communication. These critiques show that organizational communication models must incorporate iterative processes, contextual evaluation and attention to unintended consequences if they are to represent real-world dynamics accurately.

In response, an integrated evaluation model for strategic communication is developed that explicitly seeks to integrate the organization with its stakeholders, publics, and society, rather than presenting a top-down one-way flow of information and effects. This integrated model shifts communication objectives from being a unilateral antecedent to being the result of internal planning and consideration of stakeholder and societal views, needs and interests, with objectives proposed to be SMART. It recognizes that inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact are overlapping and contingent stages. It also visually and conceptually emphasizes ongoing iterative two-way interaction between the organization and its stakeholders and publics at each stage, with inputs flowing into and from the organization, outputs flowing outwards, outcomes evaluated

through stakeholder responses, and impact occurring in both directions. Importantly, all stages are located within internal and external contexts that should be monitored and evaluated, and both intended and unintended impacts are to be assessed. As Macnamara argues, such evaluation models do more than guide assessment; they reveal how strategic communication is theorized and operationalized, including whose interests are served, thereby functioning as organisational communication models that make underlying logics visible. (Macnamara, 2018)

Taken together, system theory, core competency strategy and integrated evaluation models outline organizational communication frameworks that stress adaptiveness to environments, alignment with organizational and stakeholder objectives, iterative two-way interaction, and rigorous evaluation of both context and impact. These features are directly relevant to communication management in volatile and competitive settings in Asia Pacific, where organizations must respond to rapid changes in media use, stakeholder expectations and societal conditions while maintaining coherent and accountable communication practices.

3.2.2 Cross-disciplinary lenses on communication

Cross-disciplinary engagement is portrayed as increasingly necessary for understanding and improving communication practice, particularly under conditions of technological disruption and social change. Macnamara and colleagues argue that strategic communication analysis should not be confined to traditional public relations or corporate communication theory but should draw on neighboring fields concerned with creativity, innovation, adaptive systems, emergent strategy and innovative ecosystems. They note that employers and industry organizations have historically focused on technical skills as core competencies, yet disruptive technological change requires curricula and professional development programs to incorporate courses in creativity, innovation and alternative ways of thinking. This, in turn, demands interdisciplinary engagement with management, professional studies and development scholarship, as well as research on coping with change that is based on adaptive systems, emergent strategy and innovative ecosystems. Within communication studies, calls for practical theory further open connections to broader social and philosophical debates. Craig's work, as discussed by Macnamara et al., promotes the view of communication as a practical discipline and urges development of practical theory that goes beyond normative prescriptions and applied theory. Practical theory is described as providing guidance for action designed to transform the world, drawing on the concept of communicative praxis. In the same context, Fuchs and Qiu are cited for their advocacy of transformative

praxis aimed at social change toward a better world, in line with Marxian critical thinking. Littlejohn, Foss and Oetzel are referenced for defining practical theory as a form of theorizing that goes beyond depictions of reality to guide practical action intended to transform that reality. These cross-disciplinary interventions link communication theory to critical theory, philosophy and social change scholarship, positioning communication management and public relations within wider debates about ethics, social responsibility and transformation. (Macnamara et al., 2018)

Strategic communication theory itself is described as inherently cross-disciplinary, drawing on management and organizational studies. Macnamara and colleagues refer to emergent strategy approaches associated with Mintzberg and others, and to participatory strategy as discussed by Falkheimer and Heide, to underpin alignment of public relations and corporate communication with organizational objectives, stakeholders and environmental conditions. Abdullah and Threadgold similarly integrate system theory, derived from management and organizational theory, with core competency strategy identified by Mintzberg, Quinn, DeSanto and Moss. They hypothesize that core competency strategy, which emphasizes flexible, permeable skills oriented to long-term customer relationships, can converge with system theory concepts of adjustment and adaptation to strengthen public relations management and professionalism. This convergence is presented as possibly the first attempt to link these two approaches in public relations studies, underscoring a deliberate cross-disciplinary lens that connects communication management to strategic management frameworks. (Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008; Macnamara et al., 2019)

Digital and social media scholarship constitutes another crucial cross-disciplinary lens. Macnamara et al. explain that their study of Asia Pacific practices is framed not only by public relations and communication management theory, but also by a growing body of literature on digital and social media. Excellence theory, dialogic theory, corporate communication theory and strategic communication are used together with digital media research to analyze contemporary practice. Excellence theory advocates two-way communication and symmetry between organizations and stakeholders and environments as both effective and ethical. Dialogic theory takes the concept of two-way interaction further by emphasizing dialogue between organizations and stakeholders and publics, particularly in social media environments. Corporate communication theory highlights organizational adaptiveness to its environment, while strategic communication scholarship emphasizes planned support for organizational objectives. By integrating these perspectives with digital and social media research, Macnamara et al. construct a composite

analytical framework that reflects technological, organizational and ethical dimensions of communication. (Macnamara et al., 2019)

Practice-oriented texts from APAC further exemplify how communication draws on marketing, technology and human resource development. Phan and Peng recount that major public relations firms have rebranded to signal that they manage much more than traditional media relations, including digital communications. In their own practice since the mid-1990s, they have combined public relations counsel with website development, curriculum development, training and human resource consulting, based on the view that every employee functions as a spokesperson and public representative of the company. This approach implies integration of communication with internal training, organizational culture and human resource management. In addition, they describe how social media walls, X/Twitter threads and LinkedIn pages can serve stakeholders as spaces for sharing, chatting, exchanging inspiration, forming business partnerships and connecting human capital, recommending that practitioners learn the distinct benefits and strengths of each social media tool for complementary use in social marketing campaigns. These accounts situate communication practice at the intersection of marketing, digital technology and organizational development. (Phan & Peng, 2014)

Further cross-disciplinary connections in APAC practice involve technology and content production. Phan's guidance on building in-house audio and video studios illustrates how communication practice now requires knowledge of digital production tools and platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, SoundCloud and Spotify, as well as an understanding that ordinary citizens equipped with smartphones can operate as citizen journalists and producers. This perspective links public relations and stakeholder communication to media technology, digital literacy and participatory culture studies, where every smartphone user becomes both an audience member and potential content creator.

4 Historical and socio-political evolution of the APAC communication environment

4.1 Macro-historical trajectories and media development

Southeast Asian communication environments are profoundly shaped by colonial impacts on culture, identity, and social relationships. Regional nations navigate fluid cultural identities caught between globalization, regionalization, resurgent nationalism, and cross-border alignments. Except for Thailand, which avoided formal

colonization, regional states contend with arbitrary borders and inherited foreign administrative systems that generate internal frictions. Current communication remains entangled with power asymmetries and historical fears of domination, raising questions about whether international public relations theory adequately addresses these intercultural and post-colonial perspectives (Domm; Bardhan and Weaver).

Sociological and critical frameworks further interpret these post-colonial dynamics. Habermas's concept of "systematically distorted communication" illustrates how power imbalances disrupt the public sphere and obscure the role of public relations. Meanwhile, Bauman's "liquid modernity" depicts the rise of rootless, corporatized, and socially alienated societies. These frameworks underscore that communication in post-colonial environments is structurally entangled with questions of power, inequality, and visibility (Domm; Habermas; Bauman).

National infrastructure and professional communication practices are heavily conditioned by economic development. Low economic development and weak media profitability restrict mass media infrastructure, limiting public access to information and suppressing the formation of informed interest groups. This structural underdevelopment constrains communicative participation independently of deliberate political censorship, forming a crucial background to contemporary practice in countries like Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand (Domm; Sriramesh).

Conversely, economic liberalization and WTO integration have shifted regional markets away from state monopolies toward pluralistic, competitive environments, expanding the role of communication practitioners beyond government clients. However, practice remains complex within the region's "hybrid political economies." Transitioning states like China and Vietnam, alongside capitalist hubs like Singapore, maintain robust central state guidance despite adopting open-market features, which complicates professional autonomy and necessitates context-specific understanding (Sriramesh).

Regionalization via ASEAN opens trade borders and reduces business restrictions, expanding transnational corporate activities and the demand for regional communication management. However, regional integration does not automatically equalize communicative capacity; persistent disparities remain evident in the slower infrastructure and sector development of nations like Myanmar, Laos, Brunei, and Cambodia (ASEAN).

Despite these inequalities, the regional communication sector is expanding rapidly, driven by multinational influxes, the regionalization of Asian firms, and widespread

privatization of state-owned enterprises. This economic dynamism coincides with a growing rejection of Western paternalism and a rise in regional confidence and pride. Ultimately, international communication professionals must navigate a volatile terrain marked by deep-seated political, cultural, linguistic, and historical sensitivities (Domm; Tan; Kaur; Birch, Schirato and Srivastava; Mahbubani; Grunig, Sriramesh, Verčič, Hofstede).

4.2 Political systems, regulation and public discourse

4.2.1 State control, censorship and policy frameworks

State intervention in Asia-Pacific media systems manifests through elaborate mechanisms of control, censorship, and regulatory design that structurally dictate the conditions of public relations and stakeholder communication. In China, a sophisticated dual-track press management system maintains ideological oversight while permitting limited commercialization by pairing government administrative departments at the managerial level with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) committees at the editorial level. All media remain subject to systematic censorship via regularly issued regulatory directives and technical filtering systems like the Great Firewall. While mainstream state media ("Party Publicity Inc.") continue their propaganda tradition to sustain government legitimacy, commercially oriented metropolitan and web media push toward market-driven coverage. However, pervasive state control ensures these commercial outlets assert only limited autonomy, anchoring tensions between market logics and state interests within the institutional architecture of China's hybrid media system (Hou, 2019).

These extensive control structures deeply intersect with policy concerns regarding transparency, professional ethics, and media relations. Non-transparent practices—such as undisclosed cash payments, gifts, or travel provisions exchanged for media coverage—persistently undermine normative professional standards. While scholarly models emphasize strategic public relations planning that respects journalistic routines and newsroom practices, the historical antagonism between public relations and journalism complicates the implementation of transparency frameworks. This challenge is especially acute in state-controlled environments where regulatory frameworks and state ideology inherently restrict editorial autonomy and limit the boundaries of ethical influence (Hou, 2019).

Other regional states exhibit similar policy and ownership controls that actively condition public discourse and restrict public accountability. Vietnam's one-party system maintains full state ownership of media outlets, severely limiting independent public dialogue and constraining

communication practitioners who often perceive government agencies as inefficient. Although authorities occasionally permit selective media coverage to expose official misconduct, the governance system itself remains beyond critique, as demonstrated by the muted domestic reporting surrounding major state economic scandals. Consequently, state control, regulatory designs, and censorship technologies across these hybrid media systems function not as mere background conditions, but as active forces that delimit acceptable discourse and mediate relationships among organizations, journalists, and publics (Domm, 2015).

4.2.2 Democratization, civil society and freedom of expression

Debates surrounding democratization and freedom of expression in Asia frequently center on whether political and legal structures permit the development of strategic public relations grounded in two-way dialogue. Sriramesh argues that responsive, dialogic communication relies heavily on public opinion and pluralistic environments, whereas tightly controlled, one-party systems restrict public relations to unidirectional propaganda. In many of the region's emerging democracies, alternative views may be encouraged theoretically but remain stifled in practice by overt and covert forms of government, social, and self-censorship. Furthermore, independent, arm's-length legal codes provide interest groups with the confidence to lobby, while opaque legal structures embedded in social or religious codes deter open advocacy and hinder civil society from participating fully in public discourse (Sriramesh; Domm).

Levels of activism and public advocacy are inherently tied to these political and legal environments, flourishing most where interest organizations possess the freedom and resources to promote competing views. While corporate entities and NGOs frequently deploy public relations resources against one another during activist movements, the strategic intersection of activism and public relations remains largely unexplored in Asia. This dynamic is further complicated by culture, which acts as a critical environmental variable shaping communication practices. In societies where cultural norms emphasize hierarchy and deference, open contestation of power may be minimized; however, hybrid or emergent cultures can simultaneously foster new forms of activist expression that challenge established political boundaries (Sriramesh; Domm; Grunig; Hofstede).

Country-specific trajectories distinctly illustrate how these shifting political, legal, and cultural configurations affect public discourse. Indonesia exemplifies a rapid transition from a repressive, one-party regime to a vigorous multi-

party democracy, expanding the communicative space for local and international NGOs despite persistent structural challenges like poor infrastructure, inequality, and religious tensions. Conversely, Vietnam's one-party system maintains tight media control and full state ownership, which effectively eliminates institutionalized opposition voices and binds expressive freedoms to regime legitimacy. Ultimately, strategic public relations premised on mutual adjustment can only be fully realized where pluralistic politics, transparent law, and supportive cultural configurations coexist to guarantee space for diverse voices (Domm; Sriramesh).

5 Cultural diversity and cross-cultural dynamics in Asia Pacific public relations

5.1 Cultural diversity and identities across the region

5.1.1 Ethno-linguistic plurality and cultural identities

Ethno-linguistic plurality and culturally diverse identities serve as core variables shaping public relations practice across the Asia-Pacific region. In multilingual societies like Singapore, practitioners must navigate contexts where diverse customs and languages necessitate rigorous localization; for instance, campaign slogans must be tested not only for semantic meaning across spoken languages but also for phonetic quality to avoid offending heterogeneous audiences. Furthermore, religious traditions are inextricably linked with regional culture and language, adding layers of complexity to stakeholder identity. Transnational Islamic identities—which spread peacefully and adapted to local customs across Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand—frequently transcend modern, colonial-era nation-state borders. Similarly, the later arrival of Christianity via European colonial expansion introduced Western languages, symbols, and communicative practices into local organizational environments. These dense intersections of linguistic and spiritual traditions establish specific societal expectations regarding public comportment, community responsibility, and communication legitimacy that practitioners must thoroughly understand (Domm, 2015).

Domm's analytical framing emphasizes that ethno-linguistic plurality interacts dynamically with other environmental variables, including economic development, media infrastructures, and political ideologies. This multi-layered diversity challenges the validity of Western public relations models in non-Western contexts, particularly as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) moves toward regional market integration. Communication professionals function as both products and interpreters of this diversity; their professional judgments and strategies are

continually mediated by their own situated understandings of plural cultures rather than abstract global theory. Reinforcing this perspective, Phan characterizes the Asia-Pacific cultural landscape as a vast tapestry of unique subregional identities, communication styles, and social hierarchies. To execute impactful campaigns, manage crises, and maintain stakeholder trust, practitioners must balance global best practices with deep local insights, tailoring their strategies to specific cultural sensitivities, local regulations, and regional media dynamics (Domm, 2015; Phan, 2025).

5.1.2 Religious traditions and communicative implications

Religious traditions across the Asia-Pacific region intersect with communication practices to shape audience expectations, identity formations, and the ethical evaluation of organizational messages. In Southeast Asia, centuries of intergenerational modeling have inextricably linked religion with culture, meaning that deep-seated spiritual heritages silently frame the reception of public relations campaigns even among nondevout individuals. For example, Hinduism—characterized by rigid social structures, cleansing rituals, and cross-border communal duties—fosters transnational religious identities. Through sociological lenses of deterritorialized culture, this means that ethnically Indian Hindus across Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia often evaluate corporate messaging as members of a dispersed religious community rather than merely as citizens of a nation-state (Domm, 2015).

Similarly, Buddhism and Islam heavily dictate societal norms and communicative efficacy within the region. In predominantly Buddhist nations like Thailand, public relations strategies that align with concepts of karma and merit-making achieve greater traction. Meanwhile, Islam's historical, decentralized spread across Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and southern Thailand established flexible local identities that overlay modern colonial borders. The critical importance of respecting these religious frameworks is demonstrated during crises where spiritual norms are violated. In Malaysia's "Chocolate Jihad" incident, the discovery of porcine DNA in Cadbury products triggered widespread boycotts and threats from Muslim groups despite corporate recalls and halal reassurances, demonstrating that violations of religious dietary practices can rapidly escalate into severe reputational crises (Domm, 2015; Phan, 2025).

Christianity, introduced later via European colonization, injected distinct principles of monotheism, stewardship, and reconciliation into the regional media and organizational landscape. Ignorance of Christian rituals can carry profound communicative consequences and legal risks; for instance, an incident where journalists desecrated Holy Communion

bread caused immense public outcry that required digital, online apologies to resolve. Ultimately, practitioner-oriented analyses underscore that effective crisis communication and reputation management in Asia-Pacific require adapting global best practices to local, religiously inflected contexts. Whether accommodating Islamic practices during Ramadan or navigating volatile media dynamics, strategic communication hinges on a nuanced engagement with localized religious values and symbols rather than generic cultural awareness (Domm, 2015; Phan, 2025).

5.2 Case Studies and Practical Application

To ground the theoretical frameworks and demonstrate the critical intersection of cultural sensitivity, historical memory, and rapid digital escalation, this section analyzes three detailed case examples from the Asia Pacific region. These cases illustrate the catastrophic consequences of corporate tone-deafness and highlight the operational mechanics of reputation recovery.

5.2.1 Case Study 1: Lululemon's Great Wall Taiko Drum Controversy in China (May-June 2026)

On May 30, 2026, the Canadian sportswear giant Lululemon organized a large-scale yoga festival at the Huanghuacheng Water Great Wall in Beijing, marking the company's 10th anniversary in mainland China and launching its 2026 yoga festival series (The Independent, 2026). The event gathered over 2,000 participants and was heavily promoted as an initiative to 'unwaveringly pay tribute to Chinese culture and wellness' (The Guardian, 2026). To maximize impact, Lululemon engaged popular Chinese actor and brand ambassador Zhu Yilong, who participated in a high-profile drumming segment alongside the HiiKo Drum Group. The instrument utilized in the performance was explicitly billed by organizers as a traditional Chinese drum, known as "dagu" (Channel News Asia, 2026).

However, immediately following the online publication of the event's promotional videos, Chinese musicians and percussion experts—most notably prominent percussionist Xu Yang on Weibo—pointed out that the drum's physical structure, the specific staging, and the overall performance style did not align with Chinese traditions, but were instead characteristic of a Japanese "taiko" drum (The Independent, 2026). This revelation ignited a massive cultural and nationalistic firestorm on Weibo, drawing over 50 million views within days. Netizens and cultural commentators argued that presenting a Japanese symbol as a showcase for Chinese culture at the Great Wall—a foundational symbol of Chinese national defense and identity—was highly provocative and directly stirred up painful historical memories of Japanese imperial aggression and wartime

atrocities (Channel News Asia, 2026; The Straits Times, 2026).

The crisis escalated rapidly due to a 'cognitive trust chasm' and delayed corporate response. On June 16, 2026, Lululemon issued a formal apology on its official Weibo account, stating: 'Due to limitations in our understanding of relevant professional knowledge, we failed to fully identify potential controversy in the early stages,' admitting that they should have been more prudent and thorough in their review processes (Channel News Asia, 2026). Zhu Yilong's studio and the HiiKo Drum Group subsequently issued separate statements distancing themselves from the cultural misstep and pledging deeper cultural study. Lululemon scrubbed all related promotional materials from its digital platforms. This case demonstrates that in high-context, historically sensitive markets like China, a complete lack of deep cultural vetting can cause global marketing initiatives to mutate into national security and reputational crises, severely damaging brand equity in the company's fastest-growing major market (The Straits Times, 2026).

5.2.2 Case Study 2: Starbucks Korea's 'Tank Day' Marketing Crisis (May-June 2026)

On May 18, 2026, Starbucks Korea, operated locally by the retail conglomerate Shinsegae Group, launched a major marketing campaign titled 'Tank Day' to promote its new 'SS Tank' large-volume reusable coffee tumbler range (The Guardian, 2026). To generate marketing copy, corporate marketers consulted an artificial intelligence tool, which suggested the promotional slogan 'thwack on the desk' to emphasize the robust nature of the tumblers. Shinsegae's subsequent investigation revealed a critical governance failure: internal managers approved the campaign without opening the email attachments containing the actual marketing imagery and copy (The Guardian, 2026).

The launch date, May 18, is known universally in South Korea as '5/18'—the sacred anniversary of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, where military strongman Chun Doo-hwan deployed paratroopers and tanks to violently crush pro-democracy student protests, resulting in hundreds of verified civilian deaths (Al Jazeera, 2026). Furthermore, the AI-generated slogan 'thwack on the desk' directly mimicked the infamous historical excuse used by dictatorship-era authorities to cover up the waterboarding and torture-induced death of activist Park Jong-chol in 1987 (The Guardian, 2026). The combination of declaring a 'Tank Day' on the anniversary of a military massacre and using a slogan that trivialized dictatorship-era torture unleashed an unprecedented nationwide uproar.

The backlash was swift and severe. Activists and citizens launched massive boycotts, staging public rallies where individuals smashed Starbucks mugs with hammers on the streets (Al Jazeera, 2026). Card payment volumes at Starbucks stores plunged by 26% within a single week, and incensed consumers demanded immediate cash refunds for an estimated 400 billion won (\$260 million USD) held in Starbucks prepaid loyalty accounts (The Guardian, 2026). Recognizing the catastrophic scale of the PR disaster, Shinsegae Group fired Starbucks Korea CEO Son Jeong-hyun on the very day of the launch and cancelled the promotion (Al Jazeera, 2026). To stem the commercial hemorrhage, Shinsegae Group Chairman Chung Yong-jin issued a televised national apology on May 26, 2026, physically bowing three times before the cameras (The Guardian, 2026).

In an unprecedented operational move to salvage its social license, Starbucks Korea announced on June 15, 2026, that it would temporarily close all 2,000 of its stores nationwide early at 3:00 PM on a mandatory basis so that thousands of frontline and backend employees could undergo intensive, standardized 'historical awareness and social sensitivity' training (Al Jazeera, 2026; ABC News, 2026). This marked the first comprehensive nationwide store closure in Starbucks Korea's 27-year history. This crisis vividly highlights how algorithmic reliance without human cultural oversight, combined with executive reporting disconnects, can entirely dismantle institutional trust and inflict massive financial damages in a highly connected, socially active market.

5.2.3 Case Study 3: Exogenous Shocks and 'Sushi Terrorism' in Japan

In contrast to corporate-inflicted crises, the Japanese market highlights how digital platform dynamics can amplify exogenous reputational shocks. The 'sushi terrorism' ('sushi tero') incidents involved viral social media videos of pranksters unhygienically tampering with food on conveyor belts at major rotating sushi chains (Phan, 2026b). Although these corporations were entirely blameless, the viral spread of citizen-generated short videos on TikTok and X/Twitter dismantled public perceptions of safety and corporate cleanliness, causing immediate drops in stock valuation. Reputation recovery required a coordinated system of operational fixes (installing AI-driven monitoring cameras and physical barriers) and authentic digital PR engagement. By transparently communicating these technical safeguards and leveraging an active community of brand advocates who expressed online solidarity, the affected chains successfully restored institutional trust. This case underscores that crisis management must treat communication as a direct extension of structural and procedural mitigation (Phan, 2023).

6 The contemporary media landscape in the Asia Pacific

6.1 Legacy and digital media ecosystems

6.1.1 Print journalism, broadcasting and news agencies

Print and broadcast media across Asia Pacific operate within constrained and competitive environments that directly shape how public relations practitioners secure visibility and manage stakeholder communication. In China, newspapers, television and radio are embedded in a dual-track management system in which government administrative departments oversee managerial structures while Chinese Communist Party committees control editorial decision-making. This institutional configuration ensures that national mainstream outlets, including Party-led newspapers and state-owned television and radio, function as instruments of "Party Publicity Inc." mandated to propagate CCP ideology and maintain governmental legitimacy. At the same time, these channels serve corporations as influential platforms and as bridges to government, reinforcing their centrality for media relations even as their propaganda role persists. Commercial metropolitan newspapers and web-based news media have emerged without direct government financial support, pushing them toward market-oriented content and more critical reporting in pursuit of audience share. Yet censorship, including specific editorial orders and technical filtering via the Great Firewall, limits the extent to which such outlets can diverge from official priorities, creating a hybrid media system in which public relations activity must negotiate both market and ideological constraints. (Hou, 2019)

Similar tensions between control and market dynamics appear in other Asia Pacific contexts. In Vietnam, a one-party system retains full state ownership and control of most television, radio and print outlets, which greatly restricts prospects for vigorous public debate and dynamic corporate communication. Major scandals, such as the collapse of the state shipbuilding enterprise Vinashin with debt reported at US\$4.11 billion, have been followed by muted media coverage and prosecutions confined to a small number of individuals, despite anecdotal suggestions that losses may equate to around 5 % of Gross Domestic Product. In this environment, national assembly debates, rather than independent media investigation, provide the main arena for public scrutiny. Communication practitioners operating outside government patronage networks often minimize contact with state actors whom they perceive as corrupt or inefficient, highlighting how ownership and regulatory structures can narrow options for media engagement. Authorities have occasionally encouraged journalism that exposes official misconduct, provided the legitimacy of the

governance system itself is not questioned, which illustrates selective openness and conditional space for critical coverage in broadcast and print news. (Domm, 2015)

Across the broader region, structural limits on media space and uneven monitoring capacity complicate efforts to measure and compare visibility in print and broadcasting. Phan illustrates this by imagining a daily newspaper with a finite 100 pages, of which only half a page is devoted to cybersecurity. Within that small space, vendors compete not only with their top five listed rivals but also with other unlisted companies, system integrators, consultants, government agencies, financial and risk management entities, universities, researchers, and wire services, all of which can occupy part of the available column inches. This crowding effect extends to television, radio, magazines, journals and online media, each with finite time or space for industry-specific news. Practitioners sometimes turn to commercial media monitoring services to track coverage, but these services may only capture certain geographic regions or focus solely on online outlets while neglecting broadcast media. As a result, relying exclusively on such monitoring can leave important gaps, particularly in legacy channels that still reach key publics. (Phan, 2023)

Within this landscape, clear conceptual distinctions between audience reach and impressions are critical for evaluating the impact of print and broadcast exposure. Macnamara argues that one definition, equating impressions with the number of people who have the opportunity to be exposed to a media item based on audited circulation, broadcast ratings or unique visitors, more accurately describes reach. A second definition, prominent in advertising and digital analytics, conceptualizes impressions as the number of possible exposures of a media item to a defined audience, mathematically expressed as "impressions = reach X frequency."

Opportunities to see, widely treated as synonymous with impressions, are therefore best understood through this second formulation, especially in contexts where online and broadcast audiences may encounter pages, programs, or specific messages multiple times. He notes that dictionary entries which define impressions simultaneously as possible exposures and as audience reach based on audited circulation conflate people, exposures and reach, rendering terms redundant and confusing measurement of traditional and social media. Such conceptual ambiguity hampers efforts by public relations and corporate communication practitioners to move beyond crude estimates of likely exposure toward more precise assessment of repeated message delivery, which is a key factor in audience awareness and retention. (Macnamara)

Legacy media systems also intersect with multilingual and multicultural contexts that shape how print and broadcast news are produced and consumed. In Singapore, print journalism and broadcasting operate in a setting with four official languages and varied proficiency levels across communities, leading to fragmentation and uncertainty in how messages travel between groups. While English has been adopted as the de facto national language for commerce and international access, Malay remains the designated national language, and Mandarin, Hokkien, Cantonese and Hindi are widely spoken in particular communities. Religious broadcasting further mirrors this plurality: mosques predominantly use Malay but increasingly incorporate English in sermons, and the Prime Minister's annual national address is delivered sequentially in Malay, Mandarin and English. These linguistic arrangements mean that public relations professionals engaging with newspapers, television and radio must account for language choice and translation practices that influence reach and interpretation across segments of the population. (Domm, 2015)

Taken together, these examples show that print journalism, broadcasting and news agencies in Asia Pacific operate within finite spaces, contested ownership regimes, complex regulatory controls and multilingual environments. Public relations evaluation therefore must factor in limited media real estate, incomplete monitoring, conceptual clarity about reach and impressions, and the cultural and linguistic textures of legacy channels that remain significant despite rapid digitalization.

6.1.2 Digital platforms, influencers and online communities

Digitalization in Asia Pacific has transformed every smartphone user into a potential content creator, fundamentally changing the conditions under which public relations practitioners work. Phan describes how consumers equipped with desktops, laptops, tablets and progressively smartphones can easily record audio podcasts, short video streams, or text and image content and upload them in real time to social media platforms such as Facebook, X/Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. As a result, news and commentary are no longer the exclusive domain of traditional mainstream media including newspapers, magazines, television and radio, but have become accessible to "just about anyone" with networked devices, enabling organic audience growth far beyond immediate friends and families when content attains virality. This shift to citizen journalism directly affects how organizations must conceive and implement stakeholder communication. Phan argues that public relations can no longer be reduced to media relations targeting legacy outlets, but must be understood as

integrative stakeholder relations reaching all groups with a stake in the organization, including media, suppliers, clients, governments, and institutions. Within this integrative framework, digital platforms function as critical conduits for maintaining simultaneous relationships across diverse stakeholder categories, each capable of both consuming and producing content that influences reputation and public debate. (Phan, 2023)

Digital platforms in Asia Pacific are far from uniform replicas of Western networks and instead form culturally differentiated ecosystems requiring locally tailored strategies. Phan explains that China's social media environment is "entirely different" from the rest of the world, with platforms such as WeChat, RedNote, Weibo and Douyin dominating. WeChat in particular is characterized as a comprehensive environment that integrates messaging, social networking, e-commerce and financial services, offering brands engagement opportunities that are not available on Western platforms. Effective digital public relations therefore demands familiarity with platform-specific features and user behaviors, as well as the ability to localize communication while maintaining a consistent brand voice across markets. Across the broader region, social networks are described as a "vibrant tapestry" of country-specific platforms and cultural preferences, with global services such as Facebook, X/Twitter and Instagram coexisting with local or regional networks. Success in digital public relations is framed as requiring deep understanding of local digital ecosystems, consumer behaviors, and cultural contexts, rather than simple transfer of global strategies. Phan emphasizes that by grasping these nuances and adapting campaigns to platform characteristics, practitioners can design social media initiatives that not only achieve reach but "truly resonate" with diverse audiences. This underscores that in volatile media environments, mastery of digital platforms' affordances and cultural embedding is central to effective stakeholder engagement. Influencer marketing is highlighted as a particularly significant feature of Asia Pacific's online communities. Phan notes that in the region, influencer landscapes are distinguished by diversity, scale and unique cultural contexts, extending far beyond celebrity endorsements familiar in Western markets. In China and South Korea, for example, influencers are commonly referred to as Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) or Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs), signaling their perceived authority in shaping consumer opinions and behaviors. These actors range from mega-celebrities with millions of followers to micro-influencers with smaller but highly engaged niche audiences, and the trust and authority they command can be substantial in local markets. From a strategic communication perspective, online communities coalesce around these influencers and around content flows

on the dominant platforms, creating networked publics that can either support or challenge corporate reputations. Crisis communication analysis in APAC, as presented by Phan, indicates that effective reputation management requires leveraging digital platforms proactively, engaging with key stakeholders and influencers, and tailoring responses to specific cultural and political contexts. Real-world case studies are proposed as tools for understanding how digital communities respond to crises and how organizations can adapt global best practices to local conditions to protect and rebuild brand images. (Phan, 2025)

Digital visibility and branding in online environments are further complicated by finite attention and intense competition. Phan illustrates this through the example of niche news coverage in a daily newspaper with 100 pages, where only half a page might be devoted to cybersecurity, and where this space must be shared among vendors, integrators, consultants, government agencies, universities, researchers and wire services. This scarcity extends to online and social channels that, despite theoretically unlimited space, confront practical limits determined by algorithms and audience attention. In such crowded digital arenas, clients may mistakenly treat public relations as cheaper advertising and demand guaranteed prominent placement, prompting practitioners to explain that while paid advertorials can ensure specific messaging, editorial and community-driven exposure depends on content relevance and engagement rather than purchase. (Phan, 2023; Phan & Peng, 2014)

At the individual level, digital platforms shape professional opportunities and expectations. Phan and Peng report that when seeking candidates, they look beyond resumé to examine social media presence in order to infer personality and attributes, especially for roles involving communication in social contexts. Candidates with little or no social media footprint are harder to assess compared with those who maintain visible online profiles. They argue that escalation of the social media phenomenon means that projections about online presence replacing traditional resumé may materialize sooner than expected, implying that professionals in communication and other fields must cultivate consistent, substantive participation in online communities as part of career management. For practicing communicators and leaders, maintaining active digital profiles is framed as necessary rather than optional. Phan and Peng contend that it is no longer sufficient to keep knowledge private and deploy it only when engaged; prospects and clients increasingly expect public displays of content, knowledge and even wisdom. They recommend that business and communication leaders publish frequently through social media and web platforms that can propagate content widely, both to share expertise and to alert others to

potential pitfalls in running businesses. This continuous publishing contributes to building reputational capital within online communities and expands collective knowledge through cumulative exchange and feedback.

7 Stakeholder landscapes and publics in the Asia Pacific

7.1 Stakeholder typologies and publics

7.1.1 Government stakeholders and regulators

Government actors and regulatory authorities across the Asia-Pacific region occupy pivotal positions in shaping communication environments through their control of media systems, legal frameworks, and crisis governance. In China, press management operates via a dual-track system where administrative oversight pairs with ideological management to guide print, broadcast, and digital platforms like Weibo and WeChat. Mainstream state media simultaneously propagate official narratives and serve as essential bridges for corporate-government relations. While commercial metropolitan newspapers and web media pursue larger audiences through market-oriented coverage, their autonomy remains constrained by systemic content regulations and technical filtering. For organizations, this hybrid structure requires an understanding of how regulatory imperatives intersect with commercial media logics, positioning government stakeholders as both gatekeepers and primary interlocutors (Hou, 2019).

Similarly, centralized media ownership models heavily condition public discourse and risk management strategies across the region. In countries such as Vietnam, extensive state control over media outlets limits independent public dialogue, bounding communication strategies regarding institutional accountability or economic scandals. Although regulatory authorities occasionally permit selective media exposure of official misconduct to address public awareness of international governance standards, the systemic framework remains highly protected. Within broader regional contexts, the clarity and independence of legal frameworks dictate the efficacy of public advocacy. Opaque legal structures that mirror executive or social codes often deter civil society from open lobbying, demonstrating that strategic, dialogic communication depends on independent and transparent regulatory systems (Domm, 2015).

Consequently, robust government relations remain a cornerstone of effective stakeholder engagement and crisis communication throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Practitioners are advised to systematically map and build pre-crisis relationships with regulatory bodies, officials, and community leaders, as state actors heavily influence how

crisis narratives circulate. Digital regulation introduces further complexity; state-specific platforms like Line, KakaoTalk, and Weibo require continuous monitoring to mitigate misinformation under varying degrees of state technical and legal control. As rapid technology adoption across developing economies like Indonesia enables broader public participation, regional governments must navigate the intersection of expanding communication capabilities and underlying social anxieties. Strategic communication readiness thus demands ongoing regional simulation and post-crisis evaluation to ensure compliance with highly localized regulatory requirements (Phan, 2025).

7.1.2 Employees, internal publics and organizational culture

Internal publics in Asia-Pacific communication organizations are often characterized as small, flexible teams with minimal formal hierarchy and multifaceted skill sets. Organizational cultures within these firms prioritize adaptability and collaborative problem-solving over rigid role demarcation, allowing employees to operate as cross-functional production and technology teams. Historical trajectories show that these internal cultures have been consistently shaped by technological experimentation, moving early into digital media and developing self-hosted editorial hubs complemented by tailored social media strategies. Furthermore, internal service cultures are heavily tested by digital platforms, where the anonymity of online communication heightens public complaints. Consequently, organizations must develop robust back-end systems, recognizing that maintaining service quality and brand integrity on social media is a structural and technological challenge, rather than a purely behavioral one (Phan & Peng, 2014).

These internal dynamics are further influenced by the personal ethical frameworks that employees bring to organizational life. Research indicates that a vast majority of communication professionals feel compelled to question campaign goals based on their personal values or the perceived attitudes of target audiences, fostering internal environments that normalize the scrutiny of client mandates. Additionally, a significant majority of practitioners recognize the importance of local knowledge and cultural variables—such as deference to authority, collectivism, and risk tolerance. Because communication infrastructure and information-sharing preferences remain uneven across the region, organizational cultures that actively cultivate localized knowledge are better positioned to design realistic stakeholder strategies (Domm, 2015).

At the regional level, survey data reveal that while Asia-Pacific practitioners remain confident in strategic planning

and relationship management, gaps persist in human resource and financial management capabilities. The majority of professionals acknowledge that their business management skills require improvement, with female practitioners expressing a particularly strong desire for advanced professional development. For communication organizations operating in volatile media environments, fostering an internal culture that systematically addresses these resource management deficiencies through ongoing training is critical to sustaining regional competitiveness (Domm, 2015).

8 Strategic planning and execution of public relations in turbulent environments

8.1 Analysis and strategy formulation

8.1.1 Environmental scanning, risks and stakeholder analysis

Effective communication planning in turbulent Asia-Pacific environments rests on the systematic identification of market-specific risks and precise stakeholder mapping to protect corporate reputation. Crisis strategies require disaggregated environmental scanning rather than generalized regional profiles; for instance, operations in Indonesia must prioritize risks surrounding environmental issues and natural disasters, whereas planning in South Korea must focus on cybersecurity threats tied to advanced digital infrastructure. Differentiated risk matrices must be embedded within flexible management frameworks that establish clear protocols for crisis identification, escalation, and centralized decision-making. Communication execution within this framework must be multilingual and channel-specific, utilizing dominant local platforms such as X/Twitter or Line in Japan, and WeChat in China. Anticipatory stakeholder engagement with government officials, regulatory bodies, and community leaders before a crisis occurs remains essential, as strong state relations heavily influence how corporate responses are authorized and public narratives are shaped (Phan, 2025).

Digital platforms function simultaneously as risk vectors and critical management tools, requiring continuous monitoring to neutralize misinformation. Because regional platform governance, policies, and algorithms shift fluidly, corporate training must adapt to ongoing technical changes that can abruptly alter reach or visibility. To mitigate the vulnerabilities of relying on third-party commercial applications that retain the authority to disable or delete corporate accounts, organizations are encouraged to develop robust, owned web properties—such as self-hosted newsrooms and internal wikis. These content management systems provide secure, controlled hubs for direct

stakeholder communication during crises, making infrastructure redundancy an essential component of comprehensive risk analysis (Phan, 2025; Phan & Peng, 2014; Phan, n.d.).

Finally, environmental scanning must account for deep-seated disparities in communication infrastructure and localized information-sharing habits. Research indicates that uneven mobile network access and community-specific preferences for exerting influence can limit the reach of mainstream or digital campaigns, requiring localized adaptations to engage underserved publics. Given that the regional business landscape is constantly evolving, risk analysis and stakeholder mapping cannot be static exercises. Organizations must institute continuous learning cycles, utilizing market-specific simulations and post-crisis evaluations to address coordination gaps between central and local units and to systematically absorb new regulatory, infrastructural, and stakeholder data (Domm, 2015).

8.1.2 Communication objectives and relationship building

Effective communication planning within volatile Asia-Pacific media environments relies on the alignment of clear objectives with robust relationship-building practices. Research indicates that objectives are not accepted uncritically; 86% of regional practitioners have scrutinized campaign goals based on personal values, and nearly 70% have done so based on target audience attitudes. This underscores that internal ethical alignment and stakeholder-sensitive objective setting are foundational to subsequent public relations activities. Furthermore, crisis communication objectives must balance global best practices with market-specific cultural, economic, and regulatory landscapes. Refinement requires continuous learning, pre-crisis stakeholder mapping, and proactive relationship cultivation with media, community leaders, and government officials to ensure systemic cooperation and trust during disruptions (Domm, 2015; Phan, 2025).

Digital platforms and owned media dictate contemporary objective setting and engagement strategies. Regional crisis frameworks prioritize monitoring local networks like Line, KakaoTalk, and Weibo to mitigate misinformation, though practitioners are cautioned against over-relying on volatile third-party algorithms and changing monetization models. Organizations are encouraged to leverage multi-channel toolboxes, utilizing digital video and virtual technologies—such as synthesized voices and animated casting—to maintain audience engagement when budgets or physical parameters are constrained. This strategic diversification secures direct communication hubs that protect brand messaging from unpredictable platform disruptions while

enhancing interactive dialogue (Phan, n.d., 2025; Phan & Peng, 2014).

Ultimately, sustainable relationship building in the region values long-term mutual respect over short-term key performance indicators, which can backfire in volatile market sectors. This external relationship management must be mirrored internally by addressing documented gaps in professional capability. Although Asia-Pacific practitioners report high confidence in strategic planning, large-scale survey data reveal that fewer than two-thirds rate themselves highly in human resource or financial management. Addressing these internal administrative deficiencies through ongoing professional training allows industry practitioners to better execute sustainable, culturally nuanced communication objectives that withstand regional market shifts (Phan & Peng, 2014; Macnamara et al., 2019).

9 Tactics, tools and techniques for Asia Pacific stakeholder communications

9.1 Media relations and digital engagement

9.1.1 Newsroom engagement and media events

Engaging effectively with newsrooms and organizing media events in the Asia-Pacific region requires close attention to changing channel dynamics, measurement concepts, and the evolution of digital and social platforms. Large-scale studies show a decline in the perceived importance of traditional print, television, and radio relations, with a corresponding surge in social media importance, which now exceeds 90% among practitioners. This shift necessitates media strategies tailored to country-specific media hierarchies. Within legacy newsrooms, understanding evaluation terminology remains vital; research distinguishes between "reach" (the number of unique individuals exposed to content) and "impressions" or "opportunities to see" (the total number of possible exposures calculated as reach multiplied by frequency). Conflating these terms can undermine communication analysis by confusing true audience size with message repetition across media outlets (Macnamara et al., 2018; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2017; Macnamara).

Despite the conceptual clarity of these frameworks, empirical data reveal that the measurement of newsroom engagement remains heavily focused on outputs, such as media clips and content production, with 76.7% of regional practitioners operating at this level. Conversely, fewer than half demonstrate advanced competence in interpreting social media monitoring data, and only slightly more than half measure impact on strategic or financial targets. This output-centric evaluation is further complicated by the volatile nature of external digital platforms. Shifting algorithms,

fluid monetization models, and unpredictable platform governance frequently disrupt organic outreach and live-stream event visibility. Furthermore, superficial metrics like page follows can be deceptive; when content lacks relevance, users often block or hide corporate posts, resulting in silent disengagement without formally unfollowing (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2017; Phan & Peng, 2014).

To mitigate the instability of externally owned digital channels, practitioners advocate for building and utilizing owned media—such as self-hosted corporate newsrooms and websites managed through robust content management systems. These platforms serve as controlled anchors for digital press kits, event microsites, and streaming pages, insulating organizational content from algorithmic shifts or account suspensions while using social channels primarily as distribution amplifiers. Ultimately, crisis governance and reputation management within the Asia-Pacific region demand an integrated approach that respects local media regulations and regional dynamics. Organizations must couple legacy and digital channel engagement with continuous post-event reviews, refining future communication strategies to align with localized audience behaviors and global best practices (Phan, n.d., 2025).

9.1.2 Social media content and analytics

Effective social media content strategies in the Asia-Pacific region combine owned, long-form channels with real-time networks rather than treating external platforms as standalone solutions. While corporate use of networks like Facebook and X/Twitter continues to expand, self-hosted corporate blogs remain a foundational tool because organizations retain full ownership of their content. Integrating a self-hosted blog with an extended plug-in architecture allows automated cross-platform streaming, providing deep multimedia insights on the main hub while distributing brief excerpts to networked communities. This approach underscores that substantive, high-quality information—rather than transient design trends or deceptive search engine optimization schemes—forms the basis of a sustainable digital presence (Phan & Peng, 2014).

Accurate performance measurement across these channels requires conceptual clarity regarding core analytics definitions. Industry standards distinguish between "reach" (the total number of unique individuals with an opportunity to see an item) and "impressions" (the total number of times an item is displayed, including repeated exposures to the same user). Confusing these concepts undermines measurement confidence, meaning that digital dashboards reporting impressions must be interpreted as exposure counts rather than absolute audience size. Despite these

established metrics, evaluation remains an industry challenge in the region. Only about 45% of practitioners report competence in interpreting monitoring data or evaluating social media activities. Furthermore, while 66.7% excel at message delivery, only 39% demonstrate strength in initiating web-based dialogues, indicating that social media content remains predominantly used for one-way information transmission rather than interactive engagement (Macnamara, 2014; Macnamara et al., 2018; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2017).

Navigating the unique regional platform ecosystem further conditions content design and analytics configuration. In China, comprehensive networks such as WeChat, RedNote, Weibo, and Douyin dominate, necessitating strategies tailored to localized functionalities—such as WeChat mini-programs—rather than the direct transplantation of Western models. Because Asia-Pacific leads global mobile-first and mobile-only internet use, public relations strategies must adopt a mobile-first approach that accounts for device-specific interfaces, screen sizes, and tap-based conversion metrics. Ultimately, viewing social media through Web 2.0 frameworks frames these platforms as environments centered on openness, authenticity, and participatory culture. For analytics, this implies that comprehensive measurement should extend beyond exposure counts to assess user collaboration, collective intelligence, and content co-creation within online communities (Phan, 2025).

10 Conclusion and Future Directions

10.1 Synthesis of Key Findings

This study has synthesized the complex, deeply fragmented public relations landscape of the Asia-Pacific region through a deliberate socio-political and techno-cultural lens. The review yields three critical insights. First, universalist, Western-centric communication models fail to map onto the structural realities of APAC's media ecosystems, which range from rigid, party-led dual-track systems to highly volatile, hybrid pluralistic markets. Second, the region's unique leapfrogging into mobile-first super-apps (e.g., WeChat, Line) has fundamentally rewritten the rules of organic reach, making owned digital infrastructure far more resilient than volatile third-party platforms. Finally, structural capability gaps persist across the region; practices remain dominated by tactical, one-way transmission techniques and superficial output monitoring, exposing an urgent need for data literacy and culturally synchronized strategic frameworking.

10.2 Study Limitations

While this review offers an intersectional framework for regional communication, certain limitations must be

acknowledged. Due to the rapid pace of technological policy shifts within localized super-apps, the specific algorithmic dynamics detailed herein are subject to swift variation. Furthermore, given the immense socio-political heterogeneity across the broader APAC region, this framework primarily synthesizes dynamics within major ASEAN economies and East Asian hubs; it may not fully capture the distinct nuances of smaller, emerging island nations or specific sub-regional indigenous media ecologies.

10.3 Future Research Agenda

To move the field beyond descriptive case studies, future scholarship should focus on empirical, comparative investigations driven by the following testable research questions:

Research Question 1: How do variations in state-administered legal codes and dual-track media constraints across ASEAN markets quantitatively correlate with the rate of corporate self-censorship during cross-border crises?

Research Question 2: To what extent does a brand's transition from a third-party social media reliance to an "owned-infrastructure hub" minimize algorithmic visibility drops during platform policy shifts?

Research Question 3: What measurable metrics best evaluate the impact of ethno-religious trust networks (such as halal crises or cultural taboos) on stakeholder relationship restoration in localized environments?

10.4 Prioritized Stakeholder Recommendations

10.4.1 For Communications Directors & Agency Leaders

Pivot to Owned-Infrastructure Hubs: Mitigate the unpredictability of third-party platform algorithms by positioning corporate-governed content hubs at the center of the ecosystem, using super-apps as amplification nodes rather than primary repositories.

Institutionalize Culturally Synchronized Red-Teaming: Before deploying cross-regional campaigns, implement localized "red teams" to actively stress-test messaging against regional semantic variations, historical sensitivities, and ethno-religious expectations.

10.4.2 For Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) & Corporate Boards

Reform Capability and Evaluation Metrics: Mandate a shift away from superficial output measurements (such as AVE or basic impressions) toward rigorous, dialogic evaluation models that quantify long-term trust, sentiment shifts, and genuine stakeholder goodwill.

10.4.3 For Regional Educators & Professional Bodies

Overhaul Digital Analytics Curricula: Address widespread monitoring and interpretation deficiencies by embedding data literacy, advanced sentiment analysis, and cross-platform algorithmic mechanics into professional development frameworks.

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