

## Evaluating the Models and Theories that Govern the Practice of International Public Relations

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**ABSTRACT :** International public relations (IPR) plays an increasingly central role in global communication as organizations engage diverse stakeholders across political, cultural, and economic contexts. This study critically examines the theoretical foundations of IPR, including Grunig and Hunt’s Four Models of Public Relations, Excellence Theory, Cultural Communication Theory, and Relationship Management Theory, assessing their relevance in an era dominated by digital media and artificial intelligence (AI). Employing a qualitative, literature-based approach, the study synthesizes research from 2020–2026 to understand how these frameworks guide strategy, relationship-building, and ethical decision-making. Findings indicate that while classical models offer essential conceptual guidance, contemporary IPR necessitates a hybrid approach that integrates cultural sensitivity, strategic relationship management, and technology-driven tools such as AI, algorithmic analytics, and social media monitoring. A conceptual framework is proposed that situates classical theories within digitally mediated, multicultural contexts and highlights avenues for future empirical validation.

**KEYWORDS:** international public relations; communication models; excellence theory; cultural communication; relationship management; digital media; artificial intelligence; stakeholder engagement; digital ethics

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of public relations has transformed dramatically over the past two decades. Local events can rapidly trend globally, while activist networks coordinate campaigns across continents, making traditional domestic-focused PR strategies insufficient for managing intercultural and international communication (Alotaibi & Dennis, 2022). International public relations (IPR) encompasses strategic communication and relationship management between organizations and publics across national and cultural boundaries. Success in IPR depends on more than message translation; practitioners must navigate differing media systems, regulatory frameworks, and cultural expectations. A campaign perceived as assertive in a low power-distance culture, for example, may be considered disrespectful in a high power-distance context (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2022). Simultaneously, digital technologies and AI have revolutionized communication design, targeting, and evaluation. AI tools can scan multilingual conversations, predict emerging issues, and even generate content, while social media platforms empower small organizations and individuals to influence global narratives. These tools enable unprecedented engagement but also introduce ethical challenges related to privacy, algorithmic bias, and transparency (PMC, 2024; Global Alliance, 2024).

Classical PR theories—including the Four Models, Excellence Theory, Cultural Communication Theory, and Relationship Management Theory—remain central to scholarship and practice. However, they were developed primarily in Western, democratic contexts before the rise of digital and AI innovations, raising important questions:

- To what extent do classical models guide effective IPR in AI-driven, globally connected environments?
- How must these frameworks adapt to non-Western cultures, hybrid media systems, and algorithmic communication contexts?

This study addresses these questions by humanizing classical theories for contemporary IPR practice.

**Aim and Significance :** This research evaluates how major PR theories can guide IPR while incorporating cultural and technological complexity. It is particularly relevant for scholars and practitioners in the Middle East and the Global South, where rapid digital adoption intersects with unique cultural and political norms (Fukashere Journal, 2023).

**Specifically, the study:**

- Consolidates a theoretical map for students and practitioners.
- Highlights where Western-based models require contextual adaptation.
- Proposes a hybrid framework integrating classical theories with AI, digital media, and ethical principles.

**Research Questions**

1. Which theoretical models currently guide international public relations?
2. How applicable are classical theories in contemporary global communication environments?
3. What limitations arise when applying these models internationally?
4. How do digital tools and AI influence the adaptation and application of PR theories?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

**International Public Relations: Concepts and Scope :** IPR focuses on managing relationships across borders rather than simply disseminating messages. It encompasses corporate communication, public diplomacy, NGO advocacy, and academic outreach. Effective IPR considers:

- **Political systems:** Democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian contexts shape transparency and dissent (Alotaibi & Dennis, 2022).
- **Media environments:** From liberalized digital markets to state-controlled systems (Xu & Chen, 2026).
- **Cultural norms:** Collectivist versus individualist societies, and high- versus low-context communication patterns (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2022).

Recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts, highlight the global visibility of local issues. Organizations must “think globally, act locally” while increasingly “listening globally” to anticipate stakeholder concerns (PRCA, 2025).

**The Four Models of Public Relations :** Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) Four Models—press agentry/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical—provide a framework for differentiating communication strategies. Organizations often blend these models to suit diverse publics and contexts (Xu & Chen, 2026).

**Press Agentry / Publicity :** Focuses on attention and visibility. Effective for rapid awareness but can clash with local cultural norms (Alotaibi & Dennis, 2022).

**Public Information :** A one-way communication model often employed by governments and NGOs. Effective for multilingual outreach but limited in fostering long-term engagement (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2022).

**Two-Way Asymmetrical :** Incorporates feedback to improve persuasive messaging, increasingly enhanced by AI analytics. While effective, it raises ethical concerns about manipulation and privacy (Chen & Zhang, 2022; IPRA, 2025).

**Two-Way Symmetrical :** Emphasizes dialogue, negotiation, and mutual influence. Excellence Theory suggests this approach fosters trust and resilience but requires organizational flexibility and supportive political contexts (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

**Excellence Theory :** Excellence Theory emphasizes strategic, ethical, and two-way symmetrical communication. In the digital era, ethical AI applications extend these principles, ensuring transparency and public-interest alignment. Adaptations are needed in restrictive political settings (IPRA, 2025; Studocu, 2023).

**Cultural Communication Theory** : Culture shapes both communication and interpretation. Hofstede's dimensions help anticipate challenges in high-context or collectivist societies. Digital and AI tools require human insight to prevent bias and misinterpretation (PMC, 2024; Zuo, Chen, & Lee, 2025).

**Relationship Management Theory** : Focuses on long-term relationships rather than episodic campaigns. Trust, commitment, and satisfaction are key for managing diverse international stakeholders. AI can support these functions, but privacy and transparency remain paramount (Oliveira & Mendes, 2023; PRCA, 2025).

### Integrating Classical Theories with Digital and AI Innovations

#### AI and digital media enhance but also challenge classical models:

- AI dashboards enable continuous environmental scanning, extending Excellence Theory (Chen & Zhang, 2022).
- Algorithmic targeting sharpens two-way asymmetrical campaigns but risks intrusion (Global Alliance, 2024).
- Digital ethics frameworks link AI use with PR responsibilities (PRCA, 2025; APAC PRCA, 2025).

A hybrid framework situates classical theories in digitally mediated, multicultural, and ethically governed environments (Figure 1).

Integration of Classical IPR Theories with Digital, AI, and Ethical Considerations



### III. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative, analytical research design centered on a thematic literature review. The approach allows patterns, tensions, and insights to emerge organically from the literature rather than imposing rigid hypotheses.

#### Data Sources and Search Strategy

##### The literature review covered 2020–2026 and included:

- Peer-reviewed articles on IPR, strategic communication, PR theory, AI, and digital ethics.
- Scholarly books and book chapters on international PR, intercultural communication, and relationship management.
- Professional reports from PR bodies addressing AI adoption, ethical guidelines, and future skills.

Keywords included “international public relations,” “Four Models,” “Excellence Theory,” “relationship management,” “intercultural communication,” “AI in PR,” and “digital ethics.” Classic texts were included for theoretical grounding.

**Inclusion criteria:**

- Clear theoretical or conceptual discussion
- Explicit focus on international or cross-cultural communication
- Consideration of digital technologies or AI
- Contribution to ethical or relational understanding

Sources lacking critical reflection on theory or practice were excluded.

**Thematic Coding and Within-Theme Synthesis :** Texts were coded into six categories: PR models, Excellence Theory, cultural communication, relationship management, digital/AI communication, and digital ethics. Key concepts, strengths, limitations, and cross-cultural applications were summarized.

**Cross-Theme Integration and Framework Development :** Themes were compared to identify connections and tensions. Excellence Theory principles were juxtaposed with AI governance; relationship management insights were assessed in AI-mediated contexts; and cultural communication was examined alongside algorithmic targeting. These insights informed a hybrid conceptual framework integrating classical theories with AI, social media, ethics, and global/local contexts.

**Ensuring Analytical Rigor**

- Multiple researchers independently coded literature and reconciled discrepancies.
- Academic sources were triangulated with professional reports.
- The emerging framework was evaluated against illustrative case studies.

**Methodological Limitations**

- Conceptual work based on secondary sources; empirical validation is needed.
- English-language bias may underrepresent regional perspectives.
- Rapid technological evolution may render examples quickly outdated.

## **IV. DISCUSSION**

**Relevance of Classical Frameworks :** Classical public relations theories continue to offer valuable conceptual scaffolding for international practice, yet they are no longer sufficient in isolation. The Four Models of Public Relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) provide a systematic way to differentiate between publicity, information dissemination, persuasive communication, and dialogic engagement. However, contemporary organizations rarely operate strictly within a single model. Instead, they blend multiple approaches depending on the issue at hand, the political and regulatory environment, and the cultural characteristics of target audiences (Xu & Chen, 2026). Excellence Theory (Grunig et al., 2002) remains particularly influential in promoting strategic, ethical, and symmetrical communication. Its principles continue to guide organizational decision-making, crisis management, and reputation building. Nonetheless, its assumptions—such as open dialogue, participatory civil society, and media freedom—must be adapted when applied in contexts with restricted press freedom, strong hierarchical governance, or hybrid political systems. Cultural Communication Theory and Relationship Management Theory further extend classical frameworks by emphasizing the need for intercultural competence, long-term relational strategies, and stakeholder-centered approaches. These theories highlight that success in international public relations is not measured solely by short-term visibility or reach but by the quality of relationships built, the alignment of messages with local norms, and the capacity to foster trust and legitimacy over time (Oliveira & Mendes, 2023; Zuo et al., 2025).

**Practical Implications :** The review underscores several actionable lessons for IPR practitioners navigating complex, digitally mediated, and culturally diverse environments:

**Hybrid strategies:** Classical models serve as analytical maps, but flexible hybrid strategies are essential. Organizations should combine elements from multiple models to respond dynamically to different publics, channels, and cultural contexts (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2022).

- **Embedded cultural insight:** Effective international communication requires early involvement of local stakeholders and experts. Cultural intelligence should inform message design, channel selection, and stakeholder engagement strategies, rather than being treated as an add-on or translation task (Fukashere Journal, 2023).
- **Ethical AI use:** Artificial intelligence and algorithmic tools should be employed primarily to enhance listening, issue identification, and understanding of stakeholder sentiment. Ethical considerations—including transparency, fairness, and bias mitigation—must guide any deployment of automated communication or predictive analytics (Global Alliance, 2024; PMC, 2024).
- **Digital governance:** Organizations must establish robust internal policies covering data privacy, algorithmic accountability, and responsible digital engagement. This ensures alignment between operational practices, legal requirements, and professional ethical standards (PRCA Asia Pacific, 2025; IPRA, 2025).

### Theoretical Gaps

**Despite their enduring value, several gaps remain in current IPR theory:**

- **Persisting Western-centric assumptions:** Many models continue to reflect the political, cultural, and technological assumptions of Western contexts, limiting their explanatory power in non-Western, hybrid, or authoritarian settings (Chen & Zhang, 2022).
- **Under-theorization of technology:** Classical frameworks largely predate widespread AI and algorithmic media use, leaving limited guidance on integrating these tools strategically and ethically (Alotaibi & Dennis, 2022).
- **Limited empirical validation:** Hybrid approaches combining classical theories, cultural insight, and AI-enhanced strategies remain largely conceptual, with minimal systematic, comparative, or longitudinal evidence (Zuo et al., 2025).

### Future Research

**Several avenues emerge for further scholarly exploration:**

- **Comparative studies:** Examine how hybrid theoretical frameworks function across different political systems, media landscapes, and cultural settings, highlighting context-dependent variations in strategy and outcomes (Xu & Chen, 2026).
- **Ethical AI implementation:** Investigate how organizations operationalize AI ethics in practice, including decision-making processes, accountability structures, and stakeholder perceptions of fairness (Global Alliance, 2024).
- **Longitudinal research:** Assess the long-term impact of AI-mediated communication—such as chatbots, automated responses, and personalized algorithmic content—on trust, loyalty, and relationship quality (PMC, 2024).
- **Culturally sensitive digital metrics:** Develop and validate evaluation tools that account for cultural differences in measuring engagement, influence, and relational outcomes, ensuring that indicators are meaningful in diverse global contexts (Zuo et al., 2025; Fukashere Journal, 2023).

## V. CONCLUSION

International public relations today operates at the intersection of classical theory, cultural diversity, and rapid technological innovation. Classical frameworks—including the Four Models, Excellence Theory, Cultural Communication Theory, and Relationship Management Theory—provide essential conceptual guidance, offering practitioners a shared language and strategic orientation for engagement. However, these models must be contextualized and extended to accommodate the realities of contemporary IPR practice. Digital and AI tools offer unprecedented opportunities for listening, engagement, and analysis, but they also introduce ethical and relational challenges that cannot be ignored. By integrating cultural insight, ethical governance, and digital technologies, practitioners can adopt hybrid approaches that are flexible, responsible, and contextually sensitive. The hybrid conceptual framework proposed in this study situates classical theories at the center of digitally and culturally mediated practice, offering a roadmap for scholars and practitioners to navigate the complexities of global communication. Ultimately, the fusion of enduring theoretical principles with modern digital and ethical considerations ensures that international public relations remains both effective and responsible in an increasingly interconnected world.

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