

MODELS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations practitioners have developed some models that would help explain certain phenomena in public relations practice. At the base of public relations is communication, and communication is a dynamic process of sharing ideas and information. Models are often used as a basis for understanding communication. Generally speaking, a model is a representation of something. It is a small-scale or miniature representation of something that serves as a guide in constructing the full scale version of that thing.

A model is a representation of an object, idea or process. It is a simple way of describing a seemingly complex process or system to enhance a quick understanding of it.

Public relations practice follows a defined process which over time has remained constant in spite of changes in society, technology and man. This goes to say that whenever you employ the defined processes of public relations as laid down by its practitioners (barring other situational factors) you would very likely get the similar results.

The RACE Model

There are several models of public relations. We shall examine a few of them in this unit. Let's begin with the classical John Marston's RACE model which he created in 1963. The acronym RACE stands for:

Research

Action

Communication

Evaluation

According to Marston, any public relations process must follow the above four steps.

Research

Research is the discovery stage of a problem-solving process. As a practitioner of public relations, you would need research to gather information that would help you take the right decisions. Research would help you to discover the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to your clients' image. You would also discover the make up of your clients' publics as well as their perception of your client.

Action

Blind decision-making in public relations can have unsavoury consequences. Information gathered through research would help you to take appropriate actions.

Communication

This is the execution stage of the public relations process. Here, practitioners direct messages to specific publics in support of specific goals. Any communication strategy

that is worth its salt is usually two-way in format; the organisation speaks to its publics and equally listens to those publics when they speak.

Evaluation

Evaluation asks the question ‘how effective have our strategies been’? No one public relations approach is a sure-fire for success. Usually, you adopt one method, evaluate its effectiveness and continue with it if works right, or overhaul it if it does not. Any public relations process without built-in evaluation mechanisms would at best be a guess work. You never know what worked, what did not work, and why.

The Hunt- Grunig Models of Public Relations

These models were developed by professors Hunt and James Grunig.

The models include:

1. The press agency/ publicity model
2. The public information model
3. The two– way asymmetrical model
4. The two–way symmetrical model.

1. The Press Agency / Publicity Model

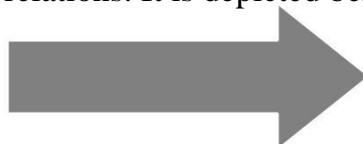
In this model, the focus of public relations effort is on getting favourable coverage or publicity from the media. It is a one-way communication with propaganda (one-sided argument) as its purpose. The model projects an approach that thrives on falsehood, thus accuracy, ethics and truth are not seen as essential. According to Guth and Marsh (2000), a study in 1989 had revealed that this was the most practiced model of public relations with P.T. Barnum as one of the prominent figures in the practice of the model.

The model can be depicted as shown below:



2. The Public Information Model

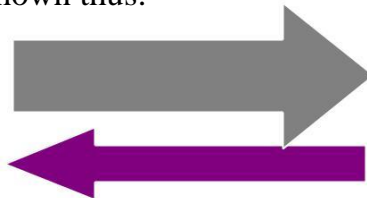
This model equally **adopts a one-way approach of dissemination of information.** However, unlike the press agency/publicity model, it disseminates truthful and accurate information. It is a model in which the public relations professional acts much like a typical journalist or news reporter ‘in residence’ in the organisation and the information he or she disseminates is relatively objective. Indeed, the purpose of public information here is the dissemination of truthful information. The model was developed by Ivy Lee, an early expert in public relations. It is depicted below:



Guth and Marsh report that the 1989 study showed that this model was the second most practiced, but it ranked last in order of preference among practitioners.

3. The Two–Way Asymmetrical Model

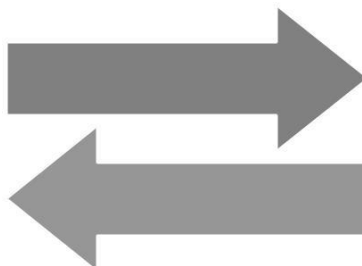
The trust of this model is scientific persuasion. It uses research **as a way of influencing vital publics towards the organisation’s point of view**. The model also attempts to create mutual understanding between the organisation and its publics. Here, the public relations communicator gets feedbacks from the government and then employs appropriate communication theories to persuade the public to accept the organisation’s point of view. The essence of research here is to reveal how best to persuade the audience or public. According to Guth and Marsh, the 1989 study showed that it was the least practiced of the four models but it ranked first in order of preference among practitioners. It can be shown thus:



4. The Two–Way Symmetrical Model

In this model, public relations communicators **make every attempt for each side to understand the other’s point of view**. The goal here is to achieve mutual understanding albeit in a deeper and more profound way that puts the two parties in a win-win situation. It is a useful model for conflict resolution within an organisation and especially between an organisation and its publics. The public relations communicator here is a middleman between the organisation and its publics striving always at achieving mutual understanding rather than an adversarial relationship. The model is the most preferred by Hunt and Grunig who did the 1989 study. They reported that it was the most practiced model of public relations but ranked second in order of preference among practitioners. Edward Bernays and most communication educators are major supporters of this model. The model is depicted below:

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Now which of these models would you adopt for your practice as a public relations practitioner? Well it depends on a number of factors such as the size of your organisation, the distinctive personality of the organisation, its corporate goals and

objectives as well as its history and what it has learnt from it. For instance a university of Kansas study showed that the more experience an organisation has in dealing with crisis, the greater the likelihood that the public relations' role is closely tied to the organisation's management. A tabular explanation of the Grunig's model is presented below

GRUNIG'S FOUR MODELS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

MODELS	PRESS AGENCY	PUBLIC INFORMATION	TWO-WAY ASYMMETRIC	TWO-WAY SYMMETRIC
Purpose	Propaganda	Dissemination of information	Scientific persuasion	Mutual understanding
Nature of communication	One-way, truth not essential	One-way, truth important	Two-way imbalanced	Two-way balanced
Research	Little, press clippings only usually	Little – readability tests possibly, readership surveys sometimes	Feedback Formative research Evaluation of attitudes	Formative research Evaluation of understanding
Historical figures	PT Barnum	Ivy Lee	Edward Bernays	Bernays, educators
Where practised	Sports, theatre, product promotion	Government, non-profit orgs, structured companies	Competitive business	Regulated business and modern flat structure companies
% of market	15%	50%	20%	15%

CONCLUSION:

Attempting to study public relations without models is like building a house without a plan. Models form the basis for a good understanding of the practice of public relations. They also preempt the problems inherent in some public relations programmes by providing basis for resolving them. Again, models are predictive signposts that could tell the consequences and implications of certain public relations decisions.