

Adaptation of Four Models of Public Relations in Promoting Green Technology: The Role of Green Public Relation in Malaysia

JAMILAH HJ. AHMAD

Assoc. Prof School of Communication
Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11 800 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Email: jahmad@usm.my
Tel: 04-653 3603

KARMILAH ABDULLAH

Postgraduate Student at School of Communication
Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11 800 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Email: karmilah89@gmail.com
Tel: 04-6534143

Abstract

This paper analyses the adaptation of James Grunig and Todd Hunt's Four Models of Public Relations (1984) theory to green public relations roles in Malaysia. This paper also focuses on identifying the green public relations role in promoting green technology and also determines which of this public relations model best describes the practice of green public relations in promoting green technology. Besides, this study also aimed to suggest the best way to promote green technology based on the theory. Data was collected using qualitative methods of in-depth interview. The findings of this study indicate that the press agency and public information models were widely implied in green public relations practice. Thus, this study suggests the practitioners to focus more on two-way symmetrical model which provides a balance communication between organisation and its stakeholder.

Key Word: *Four Models of Public Relations, Green Public Relations, Green Technology, Two-way Symmetrical Model.*

Introduction

Environmental problems arise whenever there is a change in quality and quantity of any environmental factor which directly or indirectly affects the well-being of man in an adverse manner. Environmental issues are the most concern social problem, which include pollution, global climate change and depletion of natural resources and give a negative impact on human, flora, and fauna (Bruni, et.al, 2012). This is due to the phenomenon of global warming which has become a major concern worldwide. Malaysia's Environmental Performance Index on forestry and climate change is recorded very low which is estimated at 28 % and 17.4% (Arith, 2012). Therefore, alternatives to control activities that contributed to climate change are needed. The green technology emerges has strong abilities to stimulate economic growth while mitigating environmental degradation (Muhammad, 2013).

Green technology is believed to overcome the problem of environmental degradation and natural resources, improve their health and life, maintaining ecosystem services, as well as the cost to the government in its

efforts to mitigate the impact of development and serve as an alternative in order to boost the economy without affecting the environment (KeTTHA, 2011). There is a growing momentum in scaling up the green agenda on a global basis, with countries such as Denmark, South Korea, Finland and Germany already embarking on green technology movements in their respective countries (Muhammad, 2013). In Malaysia, a National Green Technology Policy was launched in 2009 by the Prime Minister to accelerate the national economy and promote sustainable development (Ahmad Zairin, 2013). The Malaysian Green Technology Corporation or known as GreenTech Malaysia was established under Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water to provide support for this policy. GreenTech Malaysia serves as the focal point for green technology in Malaysia, with the explicit mission of promoting, coordinating and collaborating programmes towards the realisation of green technology in Malaysia (GreenTech, 2010). However, the level of awareness and knowledge on green technology is quite low in Malaysia (Muzdalifah, 2011). Therefore, public relations practitioners should play a vital role to disseminate information to raise public awareness on the importance of green technology. Public relations generally known as a practice of managing image and reputation of represented organisation. Watson (2012) describes that by the end of 21st century, the role of public relations will be a major practice globally to draw a parallel to the growing number of its practitioners. Wilcox and Cameron (2009) state that, the number of public relations practitioners is estimated at three million practitioners worldwide. The increasing number of public relations practitioners is due to the significance of public relations as a powerful 'weapon' in corporate sectors (Jamilah, 2010). Public relations also serve as the 'eyes and ears' of the Chief Executive Officer as well as a mediator between organisation and its stakeholders (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 2009).

However, the roles of public relations are now expanding to new areas including green public relations. Green Public Relations is a sub-field of public relations that communicates an organisation's corporate social responsibility or environmentally friendly practices to the public. Green public relations practitioners role is to be the agent of change in influencing the public to act positively towards the environment (Singh, 2010). The growth of green public relations field is due to increasing awareness towards global environmental crisis such as global warming, pollution, and extinction of flora and fauna (San & Norzaini, 2011; Jamilah, 2012). According to Polansky (2009), many agencies are now planning and implementing green practice programmes in order to tackle the issues of environmental and sustainability.

The evolution of public relations can be explained through Grunig and Hunt (1984) Four Models of Public Relations which consist of press agency, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric. Scholarship in U.S public relation traditionally has started around 1900 and typically focuses on the relationship between business and public relation (Lamme & Russell, 2010). Grunig and hunt's (1984) model are the earliest, formalised models of public relations practices. Since its inception, this model has become one of the most cited model in public relations studies, mostly on the symmetrical model (example: Broom & Dozier, 1986; Callison & Seltzer, 2010; Welch & Jackson, 2007). This model depicts the different forms of communication between an organisation and its stakeholders. For the purpose of this article, it is appropriate to define each of the models since subsequent discussion are related on these models of Grunig and Hunt (1984).

Press agency model is defined as activities designed to achieve favourable media attention. The functions of press agency public relations mainly consist of publicity, promotion and propaganda to influence audience to behave as the organisation desires. Grunig and Hunt (1984) state that propaganda and persuasion were the main functions of the model and often were achieved through giving incomplete information to the audiences. Press agency public relations maximise the media as a medium to publicise their organisation (Grunig & White, 1992). In this model, the propaganda was a one-way flow of information in which accuracy of the information is not an important agenda.

After press agency, the second model formed is known as the public information model. This model allows a one-way distribution of objective information regarding the organisation to the public. In the mid 20th

century, most of larger companies started to use press releases and other communication techniques to disseminate the information. Public relations practitioners who are using this model are often referred as the journalist in residence for their organisation (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

The third model is two-way asymmetric. This model applies persuasion theory in order to persuade public to act as required by the organisation. After World War I, some professionals began tackling the social and behavioural sciences areas for ways to improve their communication technique and cause the flow of communication changed from one way to two-way flow of communication (Grunig & White, 1992). According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), this model allows an organisation to give their messages and to receive feedback from its public. However, it is not necessary to respond on the feedback in the way the public has requested. Furthermore, this model would not change their decision as a result of feedback but might instead concentrate to publicise in a more favourable and effective way (Lane, 2002). Public relations practitioners conduct researches to ensure the accuracy of the information to change public's behavior in favour of their organisation (Grunig & White, 1992).

The final public relations model defined by Grunig and Hunt is the two-way symmetrical. A model that advocates free and equal information flow between an organisation and its publics, leading to mutual understanding and responsiveness differentiates this model from the asymmetrical concept (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). The model incorporated a two-way communication and research-based approaches to provide messages, but practitioners are using a symmetrical approach which consider the principle objectives to develop understanding between the organisation and its public (Black, 2011). The public opinion and responses will be considered and this may result in either the organisation or the public being persuaded to change their position (Lane, 2002). Grunig (2001) also called the two-way symmetrical model as mixed motive, collaborative advocacy and cooperative antagonism (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman & Toth, 2009). All the terms given indicated that this model is balanced in the process of delivering and receiving information (Grunig, 2001). In other words, this model uses communication to negotiate with the public, to solve problems and to encourage understanding between two parties.

This research is mainly aimed to discover whether the green public relations practitioners adapt this four models of public relations in order to promote green technology in Malaysia. The objectives of this research are:

- To explore the practice of green public relations practitioners in Malaysia to promote green technology.
- To identify which, if any of Grunig and Hunt's Four Models of Public Relations best describes the practice of green public relations in promoting green technology
- To suggest the best way based on the Four Models of Public Relations theory to promote green technology.

The research questions of this research are:

- What is the nature of green public relations practice in promoting green technology in Malaysia?
- Are Grunig and Hunt's theoretical models identified in green public relations practice?
- What is the best way to promote green technology based on the Four Models of public relations theory?

Materials and Method

The method used in this study is the qualitative methodology. An intensive face-to-face interview is suitable because of its ability to obtain sufficient information for the research. The sample of the research is

chosen using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to the sample that involves participants who have specific characteristics of features (Coyne, 1997). In this study, four public relations practitioners from GreenTech Malaysia who are involve directly in managing public relations activities and strategic planning are chosen as samples. This is because, GreenTech Malaysia is acting as the implementing arm for the Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water which serves as the focal point to drive and facilitate the implementation of the development and promotion of green technology in Malaysia (GreenTech, 2010). Marshall (1996) states that only certain parties rich with information could provide an insight which is required by the researcher. The green public relations practitioners interviewed and asked about their public relations practices in details. The interviews were took place at the Malaysian Green Technology Corporation building in Bangi, Selangor. The data gathered from the respondents was then transcribed and evaluated for identification of green public relations practices in Malaysia.

Results and Discussion

This study investigates three research questions which are: (1) What is the nature of green public relations practice in Malaysia; (2) Are Grunig and Hunt's theoretical models identified in green public relations practice? (3) What is the best way to promote green technology based on the Four Models of Public Relation theory?

1. What is the nature of green public relations practice in Malaysia?

According to the findings, majority of the respondents were agreed that the nature of green public relations practices was quite similar to general public relation. However, respondents (R2 and R3) believed that the practice of public relations depended on what type of services was implemented.

This study indicated that the roles of green public relations practitioners at GreenTech Malaysia are to promote corporate green image of the organisation, to provide information on green technology, to enhance public's awareness related to green technology, to liaise with the media and to manage stakeholders and the organisation's membership. Besides, the findings also showed GreenTech Malaysia's public relations practitioners were also served as communication technician and facilitator. As a communicator, they were responsible to communicate and convince the public to choose green technology.

From the face-to-face interview, the respondents mentioned strategies that have been used to approach the audiences. The strategies applied to promote green technology were through publicity, event management and publications. This study proved that there were similarities between the roles of green public relations and public relations practitioners.

2. Are Grunig and Hunt's theoretical models identified in green public relations practice?

This study is structured based on the theory of Four Models of Public Relations by Grunig and Hunt (1984). This theory examines the practice of public relations in organisations. The theory of Four Models of Public Relations includes Press Agency, Public Information, Two-way Asymmetric, and Two-way Symmetrical. From the in-depth interviews, the Malaysian Green Technology Corporation revealed that their public relations practitioners have adapted this public relations model to promote green technology.

2.1 Press Agency

According to Grunig and Hunt's explanation of press agency model, the researcher indicates that a few occurrences can be categorised under this model. Malaysian Green Technology Corporation has organised various national and international level events which the press were invited. The events are listed as below:

Table 1: List of GreenTech Malaysia's events.

Category	Event
Carnival and special event	MyGreen Carnival, <i>Karnival Jom Heboh</i> TV3, <i>MyHijau</i> Youth Camp, Green Kids TV Show, and Green Academy.
Workshop and seminar	AEMAS Energy Management Training Course, GreenTech Competency Development Centre (CDC) training, Green Thinking in Construction, Seminar on Development of Industry and SMEs toward Green Technology, The Global Carbon Economy and many more.
Exhibition	International GreenTech and Eco-product Exhibition and Conference (IGEM), Green Technology Roadshow.

The media were often invited to cover these events and to help disseminate green technology messages to the wider public. However, the aim was to publicise the corporate image of Malaysian Green Technology Corporation image. The findings indicated that green public relations were prone to use traditional media like television, newspapers, radio, brochure and etc as a medium to promote green technology. In addition, majority of the respondents agreed that their main role was to serve as media relation. This study proved, the green public relations practitioners at GreenTech Malaysia were actively using the media.

2.2 Public Information

The public information model was found to occur repeatedly. One of the green public relation practitioners' role initiated by Malaysian Green Technology Corporation is to educate the public on green technology. Tools such as press releases, brochures, and advertisements provide green public relations practitioners the chance to provide information to its audiences. Moreover, information on green technology is also distributed through Malaysian Green Technology Corporation and Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water official website. The information is expected to increase the public's understanding on the matter while raising their awareness on the importance of green technology. This practice was in line with the study conducted by Jamilah et al., (2011) on the knowledge, attitude and practices of Malaysia society regarding environmental issues, which stated that by giving the right information to the public could indirectly alter their behaviour towards the environment.

The information is basically very objective and is considered persuasive and convincing. However, the Malaysian Green Technology Corporation only delivered information regarding what they think the public should know about green technology, corresponding to Grunig and Hunt's (1984) public information model which describe that only one-way flow of communication exists. In short, the green public relation practitioners at Malaysian Green Technology Corporation were applying the second model of public relation. Grunig and Hunt (1984) stated that the government, nonprofit organisations, business relied on this model.

2.3 Two-way Symmetrical

Public relations activities involve a communication process which required the practitioners to educate and persuade the public to act positively toward their messages. However, effective public relations started with the ability of listening to the public's responses which is in line to Grunig and Hunt's public relations model. This model promotes the importance of good relationship between organisations and its audiences.

3. What is the best way to promote green technology based on four models of public relations theory?

Adhering to Grunig and Hunt (1984), a two-way symmetrical model which incorporates negotiation and equal communication between both parties is believed to be the best way for conducting public relations. The emergence of social media gave added advantage to organisations. For example, Facebook is one of the best mediums to provide equal communication and interaction between organisations and the stakeholders where the organisation will receive immediate feedback when they posted something on their official Facebook wall. Research conducted by (Nur Nasliza Arina & Jamilah, 2013; Jauhariatul & Jamilah, 2011; Acquisti & Gross, 2006) showed that Facebook is a good medium to interact and disseminate messages. GreenTech Malaysia also integrated Facebook as a tool to promote their activities. However, they have not used it intensively in the promotion of green technology. They were focusing on the traditional media to do green technology campaigns. From the findings, most of the respondents stated that they have actively used all the traditional media to advertise and deliver information to the public. Therefore, this study encourages that green public relations practitioners give more attention on the uses of social media.

Conclusion

In general, the findings showed that green public relations practitioners at GreenTech Malaysia adapted the four models of public relations theory in their public relations practices. The roles of green public relations include to promote corporate green image of the organisation, to provide information on green technology, to enhance public's awareness related to green technology, to liaise with the media and to manage stakeholders and membership. The findings proved that, the practice of green public relations were quite similar with the general practice of public relations. Moreover, adhering to the four models of public relations, this study viewed that practitioners adapted the press agency and public information model as their most preferred in their public relations practice. Thus, this study recommended that practitioners focus more on Grunig and Hunt's two-way symmetrical model by using social media as a medium of interaction. Hence, for future research it is suggested that the researcher include another green organization as sample for the study.

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