

**Current Trends in Public Relations Industry in Japan and Beyond:
A Round Table Discussion at the 2016 ICA post-conference**

The 2016 ICA post-conference of the Public Relations Division on current trends and issues in strategic communication gathered leading practitioners and academics from Japan and throughout the world to discuss the current trends in the industry. As part of the conference, three prominent practitioners and academics from Japan, Natsuko Mochizuki, Yusuke Ibuki, and Koichi Yamamura, shared their thoughts during the round-table discussion. The following is a summary of that discussion about the current state of public relations and strategic communication in Japan.

Round-table participants from Japan:

Natsuko Mochizuki

Natsuko Mochizuki is the founder of and communication strategist in Moonlight Wave Corporation, a communication design & PR house in Tokyo, Japan. She has worked in marketing and communication in Procter & Gamble in Japan for 10 years and then worked for several global and Japanese companies in Japan. Mochizuki managed strategic communications, including its concept & story development and planning and execution, for the Vidal Sassoon haircare product line in Japan, rejuvenating and rebranding Max Factor as high-end and up-to-date cosmetic brand. She also worked on branding Nike for Women and corporate communication in Mori Building. After founding Moonlight Wave, she has represented and managed strategic communication in Japan for global organizations, for example, Sphero (US robotic company), Parrot (a French IoT company), Catalyst (NPO for diversity and inclusion), and works as a strategic PR partner for Japanese cosmetics/skin care brands.

Koichi Yamamura

Dr. Yamamura is an independent communication consultant with over 15 years professional experience. He has a Ph.D. in communication from University of Miami with a focus in public relations. Yamamura has been involved with many cases, including hostile takeover defense and battles for corporate control that requires communications to be strategic.

Yusuke Ibuki

Yusuke Ibuki is an Associate Professor, Faculty of Business Administration, Kyoto Sangyo University. Currently, he is Visiting Research Scholar in the School of Journalism & Media Studies at San Diego State University, USA (from October 2016 to September 2017). Ibuki is an Executive Director of Japan Society for Corporate Communication Studies and Japan Academy of Advertising. He is one of the authors of the award-winning textbook *Introduction to Public*

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Relations: Theory and Practice. Ibuki is interested in studying the human resource development systems for communication specialists.

Katerina Tsetsura moderated the discussion.

Katerina Tsetsura: Can you please describe your view on strategic communication (and specifically advertising and public relations) practices in Japan. What are the differences, based on your experience and/or in your opinion, between practicing PR and Advertising in Japan and other regions of the world? Can you share some specific examples of case studies or campaigns that come to your mind to illustrate the point?

Natsuko Mochizuki: In Japan, historically, advertising has been considered the first choice and the center in communication as a way to promote sales, that is, to increase awareness and communicate benefits. In other words, Paid (in PESO - Paid-Earned-Shared-Owned Media) comes first in communication planning. Publicity, or Earned, has been regarded as an additional element, supplementary to advertising. Companies partner with advertising agencies for communication strategy development / advertising creative / media buying expertise. They do not look for Public Relations agencies for strategy development, but rather for execution of their media relations. In my opinion, strategic communication should be align with business and marketing strategy, and all the communication activities should be in integration and ongoing. In Japan, the strong leadership and organization structure are often seen through some great leaders, who ensure success for global companies in Japan. Large-scale companies, which can secure advertising budgets, fully utilize and lead outside expertise of both advertising and public relations agencies, including event, social media, and digital strategy, as being executed under one communication strategy. The US is no exception: for example, Japanese companies there would often hire advertising agencies, but not public relations agencies. And, in Japanese organizations, advertising and public relations departments are not often streamlined. Here is a specific case: a small-scale company, Sphero, a U.S.-headquartered 5-year start-up robotic company has been successful in Japan, even without any advertising in Japan. But it has made strategic communication its central activity, with public relations focus on collaboration and values that align with credible Japanese brands, such as a Space Museum in Tokyo, Huis Ten Bosch, which is the largest theme park in Japan, as well as social trends and pop culture news, such as the new Star Wars movie, the robotic movement, IT & education, etc. The important thing here is that the product is promoted with its unique story, which is beneficial and/or interesting to people. This is what public relations can do, even without advertising, as strategic communication. I believe that management and marketers can utilize strategic communication for business development, and strategic communication can be with or without advertisement. Unfortunately, the Japanese PR industry is not matured. Many people think public relations is simply paid, or somehow misunderstood, sponsored articles and native advertising. Such paid materials, for instance, are not described as sponsored or branded, but labeled as PR on one of the biggest Japanese online portal news sites. I think this situation will change as Japanese mega

advertising agencies become global (in a sense, they are already global as they work with non-Japanese clients overseas) and collaborate with public relations and other communication strategy agencies in and outside of Japan. Especially, as we move toward 2020, the year of Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, I believe there are many practices that will shape the future of strategic communication in Japan, and we already see some happenings. And, as a practitioner in Japan, I welcome inspiration outside Japan and look forward to collaborating with my fellow public relations practitioners from around the world.

Koichi Yamamura: East Asian countries, for the most part, are high-context cultures, and I think such cultures have affinity with strategic communication in which strategic intent of the communicator should not be too obvious. On the other hand, the East Asians are not skilled at structuring communications systematically. I think strategic communication is characterized by intention, concerted efforts, and societal context. Although there are certain public relations firms that emphasize strategic public relations, the lack of (or weak) public relations education in Japan and narrow focus on media relations lead to the paucity of strategic communication in its true sense. Japan is a high-context culture and, at times, a good communication strategy is "not to communicate," or at least "not to be too verbal." This is illustrated in the case of Yamato Transport's post Great East Japan Earthquake relief efforts. I wrote a chapter about this case a couple of years back (Yamamura, K. (2014). Yamato employees lead response to earthquake efforts. In J. VanSlyke Turk, J. Valin & J. Paluszek (Eds.), *Public relations case studies from around the world* (pp. 259-280). New York: Peter Lang.)

Yusuke Ibuki: In general, Japan has a unique human resource management system compared with the other countries. As I wrote in my book in 2016, there are only several communication schools and just a few departments of public relations across Japan. They have a lot of public relations courses in Japan, but many of them are in the schools of business administration or commerce. Students cannot generally hope to take the multiple courses in public relations in one department, which means the undergraduates in Japan cannot be taught public relations systematically. And the firms (both agency and client-side companies) do not require the experience of practice or study of public relations. They do not hire new graduates based on their majors (and minors), as in the USA. Another unique point is that advertising agencies (e.g. Dentsu and Hakuhodo) do both "above-the-line" communications and "below-the-line" communications in Japan. Public relations is also done by advertising agencies. Japan has many public relations agencies, but the biggest player (Dentsu Public Relations) is the subsidiary of the advertising agency (Dentsu), and they often work together.

Katerina Tsetsura: Can you please identify top three trends (or most important directions to watch) in the next five years in strategic communication education and professional practice in Japan or in the whole region in Asia?

Natsuko Mochizuki:

1) 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics

It is the time for Japan to get attention globally. Any Japanese organization should start thinking about communication targeting non-Japanese. This is the good chance for Japanese to find a global appeal for their products and services and learn from others. This practice will help Japanese to understand different cultures more. Olympics will not only help Japanese to become global citizens, in a way, but will also help Japanese companies and organizations to enter the global market. For those outside of Japan, you'll know more about Japan!

2) The era of AI, Robot and beyond.

There will be fewer boundaries between articles, advertising, curated contents, blogs, SNS... New formats and new providers will come in the future, evolving and non-stop, and even unpredictable. We should be keen on that move, yet we should not forget the valuable communication content and moral values. It is hard work to keep up with trends constantly, but this could be a mission for those in the communication industry: not to control or complain, but to give in to moral values and creativity as human beings. Fake news? False or discriminating bot? The use of AI is evolving further every day. What can we, the professionals in communication, do to help that move to be beneficial and valuable to all? Today in Japan, technology of Robotics is quite advanced, and the Robots themselves are already in our daily life. For example, Pepper by Softbank is welcoming people at the stores or banks, and the first hotel Robots work as employees is the Henn na Hotel (the Guinness record) in Japan.

3) Business development & PR evolution.

It is my belief that the PR mindset and practice can contribute to business. In Japan, there are no PR agencies except in Tokyo, a capital city. This is different from the USA, where the industry covers the whole country. There are not many industry-specific PR firms in Japan (, for local government, hospitality, university & education, hospital, tourism, etc.), where advertising is not the main communication. Public relations could play bigger and more important roles by closely working with CEOs and C-suit management directly. In my view, there should be expertise that is industry or business specific. This could be an individual professional public relations person or a firm. The more industry evolves, the more it could include more strategic consulting work.

Koichi Yamamura:

1) The accommodation of social media in the public relations practice.

More and more companies and organizations are using social media; however, many organizations still seem to be in the learning phase in terms of full utilization of social media.

2) Internal communication.

There is a legacy of family-like business organizations in Japan, but globalization and social media have influenced young Japanese workforce, and, unlike before, it is now very important to communicate with them to motivate them and to align their behaviors with business goals.

3) "Domestic globalization."

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For Japanese organizations, globalization first used to mean the export of products, then, second, dealing with foreign companies and organizations, whether in Japan or abroad, and, finally, third, investing overseas, either managing the investments a Japanese way or leaving everything to the local management team. Today, globalization for Japanese organizations means to have employees with diverse cultural backgrounds. Japanese firms must search for a management style that can be effective in every corner of the globe. Globalization is not going out or taking in anymore -- it is to change oneself and be truly intercultural.

Yusuke Ibuki:

1) Behavior of young people.

Young people in Japan neither read newspapers nor watch TV. They don't want to send e-mails. They feel so nervous when they call others on the phone. They seem to be comfortable with smart phones, and they will have more buying-power in the next five years. The challenge is to understand who they are, how to reach them, and what motivates them.

2) Globalization.

Globalization needs Japanese people who know English well, especially in the business world. But many Japanese are not good at speaking or listening in English. One of the most developed countries may weaken their power because of the language.

3) Emphasis on social good.

Social good is discussed mainly in the public relations sphere, but these days advertising also tends to pursue the social good, especially in Japan. The 3.11 East-Japan Earthquake and Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant Disaster made many Japanese feel that social good is important and must be pursued.

Katerina Tsetsura: Thank you, all, for sharing your thoughts!