



PROFESSIONAL VALUES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS  
PRACTITIONERS IN MALAYSIA

BY

MOHAMMED F. M. ARANDAS

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the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication)

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to explore the factors influencing professional values of public relations practitioners in Malaysia such as education, length of service, professionalism, and code of ethics. Data were collected by convenience sampling. A total of 427 questionnaires were distributed to public relations practitioners in Malaysia, and 322 questionnaires were returned. The study included 61% female respondents, and 39% male respondents. The analyses of data were done via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. The study was carried out to analyze professional values, and to identify the influence of professionalism and code of ethics on professional values of public relations practitioners. Additionally, the study was conducted to examine whether education and experience influence professional values through professionalism, and code of ethics. The study includes six hypotheses; which were tested to answer the research questions. The results from this study fully support the hypotheses. It has indicated that professionalism and code of ethics have an influence on professional values of public relations practitioners. The results also show that education influences both professionalism and code of ethics, and experience influences both professionalism and code of ethics.

## ملخص البحث

أُجريت هذه الدراسة لاستكشاف العوامل المؤثرة في القيم المهنية لممارسي العلاقات العامة في ماليزيا مثل التعليم، ومدة الخدمة، والكفاءة المهنية، ومدونة قواعد السلوك. تمّ جمع البيانات بواسطة عينة ملاءمة. تم توزيع ما مجموعه 427 استبياناً لممارسي العلاقات العامة في ماليزيا، فيما أعيد 322 استبياناً. وشملت الدراسة 61% من المستطلعين الإناث، و 39% من المستطلعين الذكور. وكانت تحليلات البيانات عن طريق الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية (SPSS) النسخة 20.0. وقد أُجريت الدراسة لتحليل القيم المهنية، وتحديد تأثير الاحتراف ومدونة قواعد السلوك في القيم المهنية لممارسي العلاقات العامة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أُجريت هذه الدراسة لبحث إذا ما كان التعليم والخبرة المهنية يؤثران في القيم المهنية من خلال الاحتراف ومدونة قواعد السلوك. وشملت الدراسة ست فرضيات؛ تم اختبار الفرضيات للإجابة عن أسئلة البحث. نتائج هذه الدراسة تؤيد تأييداً تاماً الفرضيات. وأشارت النتائج إلى أن الاحتراف ومدونة قواعد السلوك لهما تأثير في القيم المهنية لممارسي العلاقات العامة. وأظهرت النتائج أيضاً أن التعليم قد أثر في الاحتراف ومدونة قواعد السلوك على حد سواء، وأن التجربة قد أثرت في الاحتراف ومدونة قواعد السلوك على حد سواء.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).

.....  
Syed Arabi Idid  
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).

.....  
Zeti Azreen Ahmad  
Examiner

This dissertation was submitted to the Department of Communication and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).

.....  
Zeti Azreen Ahmad  
Head, Department of  
Communication

This dissertation was submitted to the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).

.....  
Ibrahim Mohamed Zein  
Dean, Kulliyah of Islamic  
Revealed Knowledge and  
Human Sciences

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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Signature.....

Date.....

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*This dissertation is dedicated to my exceptional and lovely parents, and my siblings. Their support, sacrifices, and encouragement inspired me through this dissertation process, and made my dream come true. Thank you for your unconditional love, patience and believing in me when I was frustrated or discouraged. I am grateful to you for your love, support, and for understanding the importance of completing my Master's degree.*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IPRM	Institute of Public Relations Malaysia
GA	Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management
CIPR	Chartered Institute of Public Relations
CPRS	The Canadian Public Relations Society
CASW	Canadian Association of Social Workers
IPRA	International Public Relations Association
PRSSA	Public Relations Student Society of America
PRSA	Public Relations Society of America
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
UM	University of Malaya
UUM	Universiti Utara Malaysia
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
IUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The current study is undertaken to explore the factors influencing professional values of public relations practitioners, and to explore their perception regarding professionalism, code of ethics, and professional values. Kruckeberg (1998) said that public relations, as a profession or occupation, has its own set of professional values, curricular needs, beliefs, and theories of both humankind and society. The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts (2002) stated that the aim of professional values for 21<sup>st</sup> century was to encourage the development of a new model of professionalism and profession, and to refresh practice and attitudes in the “old professions”. Professional values also aimed to encourage discipline, excellence and service ethics in the “new professions”. Grunig (2000) said that professional values in public relations can be considered the centre of ethical decision making. The ethics of public relations include the application of professional and personal values of individuals beside the values of the public and clients or organizations.

The rise of public relations as a profession requires practitioners and organizations to have professional values. This will organize the process of decision making, and control almost of the managerial process within the organizational duties in the workplace. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (2007) stated that values have guided their profession; these values are considered the basis for policies, duties, and principles to follow.

Grunig (2000) mentioned that the idea of a profession was once associated with religion, law, and medicine. But today, the concept has been extended to other

professions such as teaching, journalism, librarianship, engineering, accounting, and computer science. Most of these occupations have public respect, and the professionals enjoy autonomy to practice their professions without undue interference from clients, executives, or others. Relative autonomy and public respect are key characteristics of a profession. These are the characteristics that public relations practitioners must possess to serve only the interests of clients or organizations. Abbott (1988) said that professions dominate the world. However, there are deeply uncertain views about them. For some people, the rise of professions reflects specialization of knowledge in the practice. The concepts of profession and professionalism have been applied increasingly for employees and their work in modern societies (Evetts, 2009). Professions have been studied by sociologists from different theoretical points of view over several decades (Robson, 2006).

Some scholars (Grunig, 2000; Synnott, 2001; Gupta, 2007; and Sha, 2011) considered public relations as a profession, while others (Vaughn, 1997; Baines, Egan & Jefkins, 2004; James, 2011; & Logan, 2011) considered public relations as a field or occupation. However, the characteristics of profession will be explained later in the literature review.

The early development of public relations in Malaysia was strongly influenced by the growth of British public relations. The establishment of Department of Public Relations in Malaysia was in accordance with the decision of the Colonial Office in London that colonies should have Departments of Public Relations. The Department of Public Relations was founded when the Malayan Union was established in 1946 (Idid, 1998).

Abdullah & Threadgold (2008) stated that in Malaysia, discussions about the criteria and concepts of professionalism, and applying those criteria to the practice of

public relations would be useful. Towards the professionalization of public relations, there is a need to develop the universal body of knowledge of public relations. In addition, there is a need for accreditation of public relations practitioners to distinguish between qualified and non-qualified public relations practitioners in Malaysia.

Ahmad (2010) said that public relations practitioners in Malaysia should have good skills, education or basic knowledge, and experience in the public relations field in order to have a major role in an organization.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

There is a need to analyze professional values, and to explore the factors influencing professional values of public relations practitioners in Malaysia such as education, length of service, professionalism, and code of ethics.

MacCarthaigh (2008) said that the weak application of values or reinforcement of inappropriate values leads to dilemmas of both ethics and decision-making based on values. The identification of these values gives practitioners an understanding of how and why certain activities take place in organizations while others do not.

The development in public relations has highlighted the issue of professional values in public relations. The commitment to professional values will improve professional practice, thus affecting the reputation of organizations, and reflect a positive image to their stakeholders.

Organizations without professional values will have a negative influence on the behavior of practitioners, the reputation of organizations, decision-making, and perception among consumers. Professional values are considered the key to success

and advancement of any organization. The absence of professional values in public relations adversely affects the practice of public relations as a whole.

### **1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Some scholars (Grunig, 2000; Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2000; PRSA, 2000 & Boynton, 2006) have dealt with the topic of professional values in public relations. Previous studies focused on one of the factors that influence professional values; Al-Enad (1992) & Rassin (2008) focused on the factor of education; Winston (2005) & Barnard (2008) focused on the factor of ethics; Boynton (2006) & Panina & Bierman (2013) focused on the factor of professionalism; and Synnott (2001) focused on the experience factor. However, this study has included several factors and tested their relationships with professional values.

The present study provides added information by finding out the perception of public relations practitioners regarding professionalism, code of ethics, and professional values. This study will contribute to the growing interest of public relations in Malaysia and other countries as well.

It is important to conduct this research since professional values influences ethical decision making, behavior of public relations practitioners, reputation of organizations, attitudes and practices of practitioners, and encourages excellence and discipline.

Applying this study in Malaysia will develop both local and global practice and body of knowledge of public relations. Synnott (2001) mentioned that Malaysia includes issues of modernization, westernization and globalization. Malaysia is also considered one of the most economically developed countries among Muslim societies. It has a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic environment. Kaur

(2002) said that Malaysia may aspire and lead its Asian neighbors and other parts in this world through enacting a character of public relations for better enhancement and recognition of profession.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To achieve the research objectives, the findings are focused on answering the following questions:

1. Does education affect the professionalism of public relations practitioners?
2. Does education affect the code of ethics of public relations practitioners?
3. Does experience affect the professionalism of public relations practitioners?
4. Does experience affect the code of ethics of public relations practitioners?
5. Does the perception of public relations practitioners on professionalism affect their perception on professional values?
6. Does the perception of public relations practitioners on code of ethics affect their perception on professional values?

#### **1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The main purpose of this study is to explore the factors influencing professional values in the practice of public relations in Malaysia, and to find out the perception of public relations practitioners regarding professionalism, code of ethics, and professional values.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the influence of education on the professionalism of public relations practitioners.

2. To identify the influence of education on the code of ethics of public relations practitioners.
3. To identify the influence of experience on the professionalism of public relations practitioners.
4. To identify the influence of experience on the code of ethics of public relations practitioners.
5. To find out whether the perception of public relations practitioners on professionalism affects their perception on professional values.
6. To find out whether the perception of public relations practitioners on code of ethics affects their perception on professional values.

## **1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

This study has five main chapters, including the introductory chapter, literature review, research methodology, findings of the study, and conclusion of study.

Chapter One discusses the introduction, statement of the problem, significance of the study, research questions, research objectives, and organization of the study.

Chapter Two contains literature review of the issues related to professional values such as profession, professionalism, professionalization, and ethics. The second chapter also contains representative literature on the characteristics of some of these concepts.

Chapter Three discusses the research methodology in this study such as research design, population and sampling procedure, sample size, locality of the study, research instrument, operationalization of definitions, validity and reliability, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter Four presents the analyses of findings, the answers of research questions, and the hypotheses. In addition, it evaluates the overall process of the research procedures. Chapter Five is the conclusion of the study which contains the findings, and limitations of the study, and future recommendations in this area for studies and research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reviews literature related to professional values. The literature review covers the concepts pertinent to this topic including profession, professionalism, values, and ethics. Glen (1999) stated that values are behaviors or standards of conduct that a person tries to adopt and maintain. There is a necessity to clarify the professional values of members for each profession and communicate these values honestly to other groups. In addition, to make these values accessible to people outside the profession, Parsons (1993) also said that practitioners need to clarify their values and determine their readiness to uphold these values. Dose (1997) mentioned that the development of values occurs through the influences of personality, society, and culture. Values have a central position in the personality of individuals they determine the attitudes of individuals, and are more closely linked to motivation. Schank & Weis (2001) said that the development of professional values occurs through connected series. It begins during the years of practice and experience of professional education. In the workplace, this development is considered an essential part of professional socialization of practitioners. Wong (2011) mentioned that professional values play an integral role in maintaining the viability of a profession. This highlights the significance of professional values to a profession. Explaining core professional values allows professionals to convey their societal contributions to the public, and to conceptualize their work.

Toth & Pavlik (2000) stated that professions are based on both body of knowledge and values to enhance and teach values. In addition, professionals have to

make choices in the workplace based on their values. Grunig (2000) stated that professions are based on core values and body of knowledge which provides expertise by way of implementation. Grunig & Hunt (1984) stated that there have been three learned professions clergy, law, and medicine. Recently, education, business management, engineering, social work, dentistry, and others have been added as professions. Professions have a better situation compared to occupations due to their self-interests as well as contributions to society. An occupation could become a profession when the quality of the majority of its practitioners becomes as professional.

Wright & Turk (2007) mentioned that the interpretation of a profession is confusing, since the term does not clearly identify any group or body. A profession requires both academic perception and specialized knowledge, while an occupation does not. Many occupational groups have continuously strived for recognition as profession. Some occupations require adherence to code of ethics, accreditation or licensing, national professional society membership, a body of knowledge, and so on. In public relations, these requirements are considered as more voluntary than required elements.

However, there is no agreement on the meaning of “profession” among scholars and educators. There is also no agreement about the difference between “occupation” and “profession”. The argument on whether public relations is a profession or not is part of the discussion. Several definitions of “profession” will be discussed later in the literature. Some scholars (Grunig, 2000; Gupta, 2007; and Sha, 2011) consider public relations as a profession, while other scholars (Vaughn 1997; L’Etang 1998; James 2011; and Logan 2011) consider public relations as a field or an

occupation. However, based on the characteristics of profession explained in the literature review, it can be understood that public relations is still not a profession.

Kaur & Shaari (2006) mentioned that the notion of professionalism in public relations has not been defined properly. The Code of Ethics of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) is nonobligatory. Most practitioners are hardly familiar with these codes. Overall, their guidelines come from their cultural, social, and religious norms along with government instruction on business. Chay-Németh (2003) stated that professionalism of public relations is related not only to its tactical or strategic practice, but also to its importance as accorded by organizations.

## **2.2 PROFESSIONAL VALUES**

### **2.2.1 Definition of Professional Values**

In recent years, the need to have professional values in public relations has global emphasis. Schank & Weis (2001) defined professional values as standards of work that are acceptable to both professionals and practitioners, and influencing behavior by providing a framework for evaluating attitudes and beliefs.

Kubsch, Hansen & Huyser-eatwell (2008) defined professional values as work standards accepted by both professional groups and practitioners which provide a framework influencing group behavior. Singhapakdi & Vitell (1993) defined professional values as values related to the professional conduct of individuals that are commonly shared by members of a particular profession. Leners, Roehrs & Piccone (2006) said that professional values are beliefs about the quality and worth of both behavior and concepts in a discipline. Badcott (2011) stated that professional values should become an essential part of both private life and professional practice, and the adoption of these values should consider a condition of membership of a profession.

Weis (1997), in Hayes (2006), defined professional values as standards for action of behavior that are accepted by practitioners and professional groups. These professional values provide a framework for evaluating beliefs and attitudes that influence behavior.

Lee, White & Walters (2006) defined professional values as values placed on interpersonal skills, technical abilities, and professional development. Suresh & Raghavan (2005) defined values as unquantifiable attributes that are assessed only by signals and behavior; they are basic supposition about which ideals are desirable or worth striving for. They represent preference for the ultimate end states, and are key determinants of attitudes, which in turn affect work and all other behaviors.

### **2.2.2 The Significance of Professional Values**

Professional values influence the practice of practitioners in the workplace. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2008) mentioned that professional values are considered the foundation of the practice. Also, Hoffart & Woods (1996) mentioned in their professional practice model (PPM) that values are considered an essential supporting component. Leners, Roehrs & Piccone (2006) stated that the embrace of professional values will guide decision making, practice, and behavior. Weis & Schank (2000) stated that values are considered essential to decision which influences a practice, and integral to professional socialization. Schank & Weis (2001) also said that recognition and understanding of values and standards of practice will support the achievement of quality outcomes.

Hoyuelos, Fraile, Weis, Urien, Elsdén & Schank (2010) stated that knowing professional values allows planning, evaluation, and execution of specific interference directed to have better integration and transmission in the professional practice.