

**Ethical Judgments among Public Relations
Officers in Higher Education Institutions**

A Cross-National Study

Mohammed Abed Said El-Astal

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Dedication

To my parents, Abdullah Said El-Astal and Safia El-Astal,
who gave me love, support and always been there for me;
to my brothers, Masoud Abdullah El-Astal and Sa'ad Abdullah El-Astal,
who supported me financially in my first, second, and third degrees;
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Pertimbangan Etika dalam Kalangan Pegawai Perhubungan Awam di Institusi Pengajian Tinggi

Satu Kajian Antara Negara

Abstrak

Kajian bertujuan menentukan: (i) bagaimana beretika atau tidak sesetengah amalan hipotesis perhubungan awam yang diamalkan oleh pegawai perhubungan awam di institusi pengajian tinggi (universiti, kolej, institut, sekolah) di Amerika Syarikat, India, China, Malaysia, Thailand, Israel, Palestin, dan Emiriyah Arab Bersatu; (ii) sama ada jenis institusi, sikap pegawai, ciri profesional dan kebertanggungjawapan memberikan perbezaan yang signifikan dan pertimbangan etika mereka, dan (iii) menentukan sejauhmana agama dan polisi institusi di tempat setiap pegawai bekerja mempengaruhi pertimbangan etikanya.

Populasi kajian terdiri daripada pegawai perhubungan awam di institusi yang mempunyai laman web berbahasa Inggeris. Satu sampel rambang sistematik mengandungi 254 (10%) yang dipilih daripada 2540 institusi di Amerika Syarikat. Sementara itu, semua institusi yang mempunyai laman web berbahasa Inggeris di negara-negara lain dikaji.

Untuk tujuan ini, satu soal selidik yang terdiri daripada tiga bahagian dan mengandungi soal selidik tertutup dan terbuka telah digunakan. Bahagian pertama soal selidik dibentuk untuk mengumpulkan data berkaitan dengan institusi, dan sikap pegawai perhubungan awam serta ciri-ciri profesional. Bahagian kedua soal selidik dibentuk untuk mengumpulkan maklumat berkaitan dengan kebertanggungjawapan pegawai. Pada bahagian ketiga, berdasarkan skala 4-poin jenis likert, pegawai diminta

menyatakan pandangan tentang bagaimana beretika atau tidak 25 amalan hipotesis yang dicadangkan, dan juga faktor yang mempengaruhi atau membentuk pertimbangan etika mereka.

Daripada 573, hanya 99 (17.27%) pegawai perhubungan awam yang melengkapkan soal selidik. Data penyelidikan dianalisis menggunakan program SPSS bagi perisian Window, Versi 10.0. Kajian mendapati:

- (1) Pertimbangan etika responden tentang amalan yang dicadangkan selaras dengan Kod Amalan IPRA yang diterima di Venice dan Athens, dan dengan literatur tentang standard etika perhubungan awam.
- (2) Perbezaan pertimbangan etika responden didapati secara statistik adalah signifikan dengan budaya dan agama.
- (3) Perbezaan pertimbangan etika responden, mempunyai perbezaan ciri profesional didapati secara statistik adalah tidak signifikan dengan pengalaman, tetapi signifikan dengan pengkhususan, ahli rasmi persatuan, dan pemegangan jawatan.
- (4) Perbezaan pertimbangan etika responden, mempunyai perbezaan kebertanggungjawapan profesional, didapati secara statistik tidak signifikan dengan kebertanggungjawapan terhadap pengiklanan institusi, tetapi signifikan dengan kebertanggungjawapan terhadap hubungan komuniti, perancangan penambahan dana, dan penyertaan dalam perbincangan penerimaan sesuatu polisi.
- (5) Akhirnya, polisi institusi merupakan pengaruh yang paling tinggi dalam 25 hipotesis diikuti agama dan polisi institusi, agama, etika diri dan etika profesional.

Abstract

The study determines: how ethical/unethical certain hypothetical public relations practices are as perceived by public relations practitioners in higher education institutions (universities, colleges, institutes, schools) in the United States, India, China, Malaysia, Thailand, Israel, Palestine, and the United Arab Emirates; whether the institution type, practitioners' personal attributes, professional characteristics and responsibilities produce significant differences in their ethical judgments; and finally to determine the extent to which religion and the policy of the institution for which each practitioner serves influence his/her ethical judgments.

The population consists of public relations officers in the institutions that have English web-sites only. A systematic random sample of 254 (10%) institutions was drawn from 2540 of the United States, while all English web-sited institutions of the other countries were surveyed.

For this purpose, a three-part, closed and open-ended questionnaire was designed. The first part of the questionnaire was designed to gather data about the institutions and the public relations officers' personal attributes and professional characteristics. The second part was designed for gathering information about the responsibilities of the officers. In the third part, the officers, through a likert-type 4-point scale, were asked to state their opinions about how ethical/unethical the 25 hypothetical practices suggested are; and to state also the factor/s influenced or shaped their ethical judgments.

Ninety-nine (17.27%) out of 573 public relations officers completed the questionnaire. Research data were analyzed using SPSS- program for Windows software, version 10.0.

The study concluded the following: (1) Respondents' ethical judgments on the practices suggested came consistent with the IPRA Codes of Conduct adopted in Venice and Athens, and with the literature written on public relations ethical standards. (2) Differences in the ethical judgments of respondents were found statistically significant in terms of culture and religion.

(3) Differences in the ethical judgments of respondents, having different professional characteristics, were found statistically insignificant in terms of experience; while significant in terms of: specialties, accredited-pr-association membership, and finally tenure. (4) Differences in the ethical judgments of respondents, having different professional responsibilities, were found statistically insignificant in terms of responsibility for institutional advertising; while significant in terms of: responsibility for community relations, fund-raising planning, and in terms of participating in policy-adopting discussions.

(5) Finally, the policy of the institution was the highest influence in the 25 hypothetical situations followed by religion and institution policy, religion, personal ethics and professional ethics consecutively.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Good relations with the public are very important and critical to the success of any organization. For higher education public relations, globalization, competition and new technology have presented new ethical challenges for practitioners who are supposed to apply their ethical guidelines while conducting their work. If public relations people do not speak in an ethical manner, the future of higher education institutions can be seriously diminished. That is to perform one's duties in an ethical manner and in a capable manner. Accordingly, Cutlip *et al.* (1985) define public relations as: "The management function that identifies, establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and various publics on whom its success or failure depends".

Likewise, Harlow (in Vithakamontri, 1991:19), emphasizing the importance of ethical communication in public relations, defines public relations as: "A distinctive management function which helps to establish and maintain a mutual line of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibilities of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change; and uses research and sound ethical communication techniques as its principal tools". Taking this into consideration, ethical

public relations as a part of the management is very important to the success of organizations. Although all codes of ethics in public relations field call upon practitioners to be ethical, the issue remains individual, voluntary and subjected to some other considerations. This study focuses mainly on these considerations. Some of these considerations are personal like the culture and religion of a practitioner; some of them are professional like the practitioner's experience; and some relate to professional responsibilities of practitioners like marketing the organization for example.

With these considerations in mind, globalizing ethical standards is one of the biggest challenges for public relations ethics in general and educational public relations in particular, because concepts and practices of public relations vary from country to country. Absolutists reject the argument made by relativists that a universal code of ethics is not possible because of the diversity within communities. Relativists argue that practitioners' ethics are dependent on some individual and societal factors. Ethics is not the same in all cultures or societies.

In this regard, Vazquez and Taylor (1999: 433-449) say that the influence of culture reflects a growing concern for the belief that "a single theory is appropriate for all societies". According to them, culture is linked both internally and externally to the practice of public relations. In other words, corporate culture works as an internal influence while societal culture works as an external influence. Societal culture plays an important part in the public relations practice of an organization. Sriramesh, Kim, and Takasaki (in Taylor, 2000: 277-293) argue that societal culture influences the practice of public relations in every nation and region of the world, especially in ethical crises. Taylor *et al.* (2001: 317-336) view organizations as structures that operate within

specific social and cultural environments and these cultural environments shape the organizational values, policies and practices. They add that societal culture affects organizational culture, and organizational culture will determine the strategic choices of public relations.

Religion is another factor which influences the ethical decision making. Empirically, Hunt and Vitell (in Sarwono & Armstrong, 2001: 41-56) noted that religion influences the ethical decision-making process of practitioners. Moreover, Wright (1982: 22-27) says that it is not possible to fully examine communications ethics without some consideration of the religious contributions to ethical theories. This supports the fact that the standards of right and wrong lie at the heart of ethical issues, and historically these ethical issues were derived from religions. It supports the idea that there is a strong relationship between religion and ethical decision making.

Besides religion and culture, there are some other variables that are linked to the ethical decision making in public relations. Some research studies in public relations discovered significant differences based on sex, age, and the number of years of working experience on some issues concerning moral values, ethics and responsibility. Pratt (1994: 217-224) indicated that: (1) age has a positive effect on moral values—older public relations practitioners hold stronger moral values than younger practitioners; and (2) in the United States, public relations practitioners' ethical beliefs and behaviors positively correlate with gender, accreditation of Public Relations Society of America, age and income.

Excellence in public relations depends on the responsibility of performing one's duties in an ethical manner and this is closely related to experience. According to Wylie (1989: 63-67) 35 percent of higher education public relations people in the United States have less than 5 years experience, and 50 percent of them have one to five years of college and university public relations experience. Public relations practitioners have a very important role to play in this regard. They can help higher education avoid unethical practices by advising the top management and explaining how unethical practices affect the institution negatively. On the other hand, higher education has to attract capable professionals who developed professional skills and experienced enough to do this job.

Moreover, the ethical decision making in educational public relations is related to the professional responsibilities of practitioners. Marketing the institution, fund-raising and image building are all duties assigned to public relations practitioners in higher education. It appears, according to Martinson (1995-96), to many, that public relations officers play equal roles to those of lawyers who are concerned not about justice only but also getting the client off. For example, if an officer works for a university attempting to increase student enrollment, any successful effort to attract students to the institution could well mean that another area school will not meet its enrollment quota.

Competition among higher education institutions encouraged public relations to focus on fund-raising rather than the desire to keep the public in touch with the purposes and activities of the institutions (Warner, 1996: 36-39). A relative survey, in which presidents of 500 universities were asked to list in order of priority the 20 key issues for their institutions over the next decade, indicates that community relations was ranked 18 and was cited by only 4 percent while declining enrollment was first. Presidents'

answers enhance the impression that public relations is concerned in higher education with increasing students' enrollment (Higgins, 1983: 25-26). In another study conducted by Wylie (1989:63-67), 26 percent of higher education public relations have presented competing interests and 49 percent of them see this as a common practice—it is ethical practice.

Educational public relations officers help build institutional images. They provide data through which public forms its image of the institution. Hechinger (in Keller, 1983: 4) notes that since college public relations is an offshoot of corporate public relations, it tends to concentrate on telling only what is good about the college. It tries to prevent bad news from getting out. This might be understood as a duty to build a good image about the institution but falls in conflict with public relations ethical standards. Educational public relations officers seek to reach the publics with their messages and to get their response in order to build their good-will and get their understanding as well as cooperation and support (Kobre, 1974: 5).

Sullivan (in Pearson, 1989:52-61) writes: "Images are the proper subject matter of public relations". Public relations practitioners are necessarily merchants of images. Sullivan believes that images are important because the "judgment center", as he calls it, of the mind deals with images but not reality. While Finn (in Pearson, 1989:52-61) advises public relations practitioners to stop worrying about images and impressions; to worry about substance and conviction because they are more important.

In a related study conducted by Wylie (1989: 63-67), he found that over 25 percent of college and university public relations people have worked to kill a legitimate news

story which would have adversely affected their institution, and 25 percent see this as common practice in college public relations. Wylie also found that higher education public relations people were asked by presidents to release inflated enrollment figures, decline to admit facts, and to lie to press and faculty; were asked by the senates to give inaccurate information about university planning and budgeting; and were asked by other administrative figures to leak inaccurate information about the university planning, lie and twist data.

In this connection, Ciervo (in Keller, 1983:6-7) says that truth from a college or university public relations officer is important to the reputation of higher education. Credibility is to an institution what morality is to the individual. Without it, acceptance from the public is difficult if not impossible to attain. The credibility of an institution can be established and maintained by an insistence upon the utmost candor and honesty in dealing with various publics. He also adds that distortions of truth or giving half-truths are morally reprehensible and inconsistent with the institution's goal of searching for the truth.

The necessity of higher education ethicality and credibility, and the importance of public relations ethicality, show the need for a study of this kind, especially in the presence of the current information technology which is highly used in marketing. Furthermore, because compliance with codes of ethics in public relations is voluntary, many public relations practitioners really know very little about ethics and this makes studying ethics in public relations very important (Wright, 1989: 3-5). Although most understand the importance of concepts such as honesty, integrity and social

responsibility; ethics in public relations practice often boils down to defend clients' interests.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this cross-national study is mainly to find out how ethical or unethical certain hypothetical public relations practices are as perceived by higher education institutions' public relations officers in the United States, India, China, Malaysia, Thailand, Israel, Palestine, and the United Arab Emirates; whether the institutions' different types, public relations officers' different religions and cultures, as well as their professional characteristics and responsibilities produce significant differences in their ethical judgments; and finally to find out the extent to which religion and the institution policy for which each officer serves influence his/her ethical judgments. In other words, the study, besides identifying the educational public relations officers' ethical perceptions, is to compare and contrast these perceptions, taking into consideration the types of the institutions selected, the officers' different cultures and religions, and some of their professional characteristics as well as responsibilities such as, experience, qualification, membership of any accredited public relations association, tenure, responsibility for community relations, fund-raising planning, advertising, and participating in policy-adopting discussions.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to determine whether the ethical judgments of educational public relations officers are relative or absolute. Specifically, the study attempts to determine:

1. How ethical/unethical certain hypothetical public relations practices are as perceived by educational public relations officers and the extent to which religion, institution policy and any other factor/s influence the officers' ethical judgments.

2. Whether the type of the institution, for which each officer serves, as well as the personal attributes of officers make any significant differences in their ethical judgments.

3. Whether the professional characteristics of officers as well as their responsibilities make any significant differences in their ethical judgments.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The paucity of empirical research and theoretical writing on international public relations ethics makes it difficult to address the issue of implementing a universal code of ethics. This study focuses on educational public relations officers' ethical judgments in eight countries, taking into consideration the officers' different cultures, religions, professional characteristics and professional responsibilities. The regional scope of the study helps determine whether the officers' ethical judgments, in higher education institutions, are dependent on their religions, cultures, professional characteristics and responsibilities or independent—relative to these factors or absolute. This is expected to help determine whether a universal code of ethics can, at least in the countries represented, be implemented or not due to ethical relativism. Upon this, the study is expected to contribute to both theory and practice of educational public relations ethics on a global scale since it is applied to eight countries.

In other words, the study is expected to help both practitioners and theorists understand how educational public relations is practiced in different organizations, cultures, and religions in order to understand each others' perspectives and thus overcome differences by wording universal standards in a way that allows for flexibility in interpretation as concluded by Roth *et al.* (1996: 151-161). Theoretically, the outcome of the study is expected to determine whether educational public relations ethics is dependent or independent—relative or absolute. Practically, the study is expected to enhance the awareness of what is ethical/right and what is not among educational public relations' officers.

1.5 Organization of the Study

The study consists of five chapters. The first chapter contains an overview of the study, the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, significance of the study and the organization of the study. The second provides a review of related literature: an overview of ethics and professional ethics, public relations ethical guidelines, and the theoretical framework of the study—the variables examined. The third deals with the research design and methodology: the study design, sampling procedure, the research questions and hypotheses, conceptualization and operationalization of constructs, research instrument construction, data gathering and data analysis. The fourth is devoted to the study findings. The fifth contains a summary of the findings, discussion and conclusions.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Ethics, as a discipline, involves the study of standards of human conduct and moral judgment. In a broad sense, ethics can be defined as the criteria by which decisions are made about what is right and what is wrong. For individuals and organizations, ethics means defining individual and societal values that are morally acceptable and demonstrating a commitment to uphold those values (Seib and Fitzpatrick, 1995: 29). The criteria that decide what is right and what is wrong might not be the same in all societies and from time to another they might be defined otherwise. People behave and judge the behaviors of others differently, depending on what they believe in and abide by. For example, "right" as an ethical term was defined at times by reference to the consequences and at times by reference to the approval of the community (Ross, 1968:12).

Ethics or morality, according to Black *et al.* (1995), are subjects that deal with the nature of human values and moral conscience of choosing and following the "right" rather than the "wrong", and of understanding and applying standards that have been set down by a group, association, or community.

Jaksa and Pritchard (1994) divide the study of ethics into two broad categories: comparative ethics and normative ethics. Normative ethics are studied by theologians and philosophers. Comparative ethics, called descriptive ethics, are studied by social

scientists that look at the ways different cultures practice ethical behavior (Newsom and Carrel, 1998:22). This study falls within the second category—descriptive ethics.

The phrase “public relations ethics” refers to the professional ethics in the field not morals in general. The term “morals” is broader than the term “professional ethics”. Morality covers the extensive field of personal and social behavior. Professional ethics, as distinct from morals, gives attention to certain ideals and practices that grow out of professional privileges and responsibilities. Professional ethics defines situations and directs the moral consciousness of the members of the profession to its peculiar problems (Titus and Keeton, 1973: 349-350).

Professional ethics are viewed, also, as standards of conduct governing members of a particular profession. Engineering ethics, for instance, applies to engineers, legal ethics to lawyers and public relations ethics to public relations practitioners (Davis, 1999:111). If ethics, in general, is seen by Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) as the criteria by which decisions are made about what is right and what is wrong, it can be seen in public relations as the criteria by which decisions are made about what public relations practices are right and what are wrong—ethical and unethical.

2.2 Public Relations Ethical Guidelines

Public relations practitioner does not have to ask only whether something is legal but also whether it is the right thing to do. Budd Jr. (1991:14-18) says that values not rules guide public relations practitioners’ ethical choices. In the United States, according to him, they focus on catching defective products and spend much on improving the

sophistication of detection systems; while in Japan there is a little need for detection. He concludes that it is a matter of attitude not adaptation.

Ethical guidelines must guide practitioners' ethical choices but not laws. Codes of ethics and the ethical standards of public relations work as guidelines for practitioners. The ethical standards of public relations such as, honesty, public interest, justice, accuracy and loyalty, were mentioned in all codes of ethics that exist worldwide, including those of Europe, the United States and Latin America because these codes were based on the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) Codes of Conduct (Denig and Meiden, 1985: 286).

Although ethics is an individual issue and compliance with codes of ethics is voluntary, codes of ethics assist practitioners by providing some ethical guidance. Kruckeberg (1989: 6-18) suggests that codes of ethics serve at least four important functions: (1) they provide guidelines for practitioners; (2) they illustrate what clients and supervisors should expect from practitioners; (3) they provide a basis for charges that wrongdoing has occurred; and (4) they can provide a defense against charges of wrongdoing.

In this study, because of its nature being a cross-national study, the most suitable codes to refer to are IPRA Codes of Conduct: both the code adopted by IPRA in Venice in 1961 and the Code of Athens in which IPRA members modified Venice Code when they met in Athens in 1965 (Appendix A). Considering that all member countries of the United Nations Organization have agreed to abide by its charter, public relations associations in these countries declared that they accept as their moral charter both the Code of Venice and the Code of Athens.

Giving gifts to media representatives and giving/accepting gifts from publics are, for example, two issues examined in this study. According to the eighth paragraph of Venice Code, members shall not engage in practices which tend to corrupt the integrity of channels of public communication. Among the practices prohibited by this paragraph are those that tend to place representatives of media under any obligation to the member, or the member's employer or client, which is in conflict with their obligations to media such as: (a) the giving of gifts of more than nominal value; and (b) any form of payment or compensation to a member of the media in order to obtain preferential or guaranteed news or editorial coverage in the medium. While this paragraph does not prohibit hosting media or government representatives at meals, cocktails, or news functions and special events that are occasions for the exchange of news information or views, or the furtherance of understanding, which is part of public relations function.

Regarding giving/accepting gifts from publics, Venice Code in its fifth paragraph made it clear that members, in performing services for a client or employer, shall not accept fees, commission or any other valuable consideration in connection with those services from any one other than his/her client or employer without the express consent of his/her client or employer, given after a full disclosure of the facts. The rest of ethical issues examined in this study will be discussed in relation with public relations ethical standards as follows:

2.2.1 Honesty

Virtually all codes of ethics begin with the duty to tell the truth under all conditions. Credible words are pivotal to the communication enterprise. Although there is much difference on truthfulness, it simply can be defined as the opposite of deception which is

a deliberate intention to mislead (Christian *et al.*, 1987: 49). Showing the importance of honesty, a philosopher and author Bok (in Newsom *et al.*, 1996: 200) asserts that the presumption, while choosing between lying and truth-telling, is always against lying for the following reasons: (1) dishonesty leads to lack of trust and cynicism—such as when a reporter later discovers that a PR person has told half-truths resulting in an inaccurate story; (2) lying is resented by those deceived, even if the deceived are liars themselves; (3) dishonesty is likely to be discovered, and no climate for credibility can be reestablished; (4) decisions about when to lie are often made without calculating either alternatives or consequences; (5) a lie always demands another lie to cover it up, and then others to maintain the prevarications; and (6) lying forces people to act differently from the way they would have behaved if given the truth. Accordingly, the Code of Athens in its twelfth paragraph states that a member shall refrain from taking part in any venture or undertaking which is unethical or dishonest or capable of impairing human integrity.

Moreover, Immanuel Kant says that truth is important because without it social intercourse and conversation become valueless. The exchange of our sentiments is the principal factor in social intercourse, and the truth must be the guiding principle herein (Donaldson and Werhane, 1999:27). Telling the truth, according to codes of ethics adopted by various communications and public relations professional organizations, underpins the work of those in communication professions, including various public relations fields (Keller, 1983:1). The very possibility of a society depends, Winch (in Jaksa and Pritchard, 1994:65-66) claims, on the general acceptance of truthfulness as a moral norm. He also adds that speaking truthfully is a norm and speaking untruthfully is a deviation.

2.2.2 Public Interest

Service to society is a key component of every profession and high on the list of professional values. Public interest can be assumed to mean the interest of the public as a whole (Howard, 1985:184). How can public interest, defined shortly as “serving society”, be served by public relations professionals? How can public relations be practiced in the interest of the public? Public relations serves the public interest by making all points of view articulate in the public forum (Cutlip *et al.*, 2000:147).

Bivins (in Seib and Fitzpatrick, 1995:19), a public relations scholar, suggests four possible paradigms for serving the public interest in public relations. The four paradigms are: (1) if every individual practicing public relations acts in the best interest of his or her client, then the public interest will be served; (2) if, in addition to serving individual interests, individual practicing public relations serves public interest causes, the public interest will be served; (3) if a profession or professionals assure that every individual in need of or desiring its/their services receives its/their services, then the public interest will be served; and (4) if public relations as a profession improves the quality of debate over issues important to the public, then the public interest will be served.

The paradigms suggested by Bivins can clearly be seen in the Code of Athens. For example, the eighth paragraph of the code, which asks members to undertake to take, in all circumstances, into account the interests of the organizations they serve and the publics concerned, falls in harmony with the first two paradigms suggested by Bivins. In both, the sixth and seventh paragraphs, the code asks members to undertake to pay due regard to recognize the right of judgment of each individual, to establish moral,

psychological and intellectual conditions for dialogue in its true sense, and to recognize the right of the parties involved to state their case and express their views. These two paragraphs are consistent with the last paradigm suggested by Bivins.

2.2.3 Justice

Black *et al.* (1995) define justice in terms of fairness as pursuing the truth with both vigor and compassion, and reporting information without favoritism, self-interest, or bias. According to them, it also means portraying individuals, organizations, and issues with a basic sense of open-mindedness, avoiding biased reporting and unsubstantiated allegations. In a simple way, justice was defined by Williams (1992) as rendering each person his/her due. In this regard, the International Code of Ethics adopted in Venice states that a member has a general duty of fair dealing towards publics, colleagues and employers.

Woozley (in Blatz *et al.*, 1973:109) argues that justice in terms of fairness and in terms of equality are not merely different claims but claims of different kinds. That is, a given unequal distribution among recipients may and, depending on the context, may not be unfair. We can ask whether a distribution is fair, and whether it is equal but when we ask why it is fair and why it is equal, we are asking questions that are very different from each other: in the first case we are seeking a justification of the claim that the distribution is fair; in the second case we are accepting that the distribution is equal, and seeking a justification of it being so. In short, even if it were true that the only way to treat men fairly is to treat them equally, treating them fairly would not be conceptually identical with treating them equally. The core meaning of "fair" is moral meaning, the

core meaning of 'equal' is not. "It is unfair to treat men unequally" is a moral assertion but "it is unequal to treat men unfairly" is not.

2.2.4 Accuracy

Accuracy means "getting it right". It is an essential responsibility of journalists to provide correct information otherwise they will disserve the public and erode credibility. Information provider must be highly confident that all the factual statements in the story reflect the truth (Black *et al.*, 1995: 53-54). What can be applicable, in this regard, to journalists can be applicable to public relations practitioners as long as they are responsible for reporting information. Accordingly, public relations practitioners should make every possible effort to ensure that facts are correct, information is presented carefully, and it all relates to the context. Black *et al.* (1995) add that it is not appropriate to use personal excuses, or equipment problems, or staff shortages, or any other reason to justify inaccuracies. Goodwin (1987) says "no excuse for inaccuracies or lack of thoroughness". He also adds that newspapers should guard against inaccuracies, carelessness, bias or distortion through either emphasis or omission. Truth, according to the tenth paragraph of the Code of Athens, should not be subordinated to other requirements. The eleventh paragraph of the same code states that a member shall refrain from circulating information which is not based on established and ascertainable facts.

2.2.5 Loyalty

To show loyalty, public relations practitioners have dual obligations to repay. The first is loyalty to a client or employer while the second is to publics. Both might seem

contradictory, simply because public relations practitioners might be seen as hired persuaders so loyalty to their employers or clients is a fundamental (Johannesen, 1967:180). Wilcox and Nolte (1995) say that public relations writer is an advocate and must convey information in a persuasive way, but this does not excuse the presentation of false or misleading information. They also add that he has to ask not only whether something is legal but also whether it is the right thing to do. Christians *et al.* (1987) share their opinion, saying that both reporters and public relations specialists are persuaders and providers of news, advocates with a professional's sense of obligation to truth and fairness.

With this in mind, it really seems for public relations practitioners that maintaining balance while carrying out their duties towards the public and their employers or clients is a tough job. Simply because being committed to truth and fairness might not appeal to their employers or clients. In sum, loyalty, here, means that a public relations practitioner has to be true and faithful to both the public he is supposed to serve and the employer or client with whom he signed a contract.

Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) identified four loyalties that public relations practitioners must consider and decide which one should take precedence in particular situations. These loyalties are:

1. Loyalty to Self—professionals in public relations must first consider loyalty to self. They must define their own value system and decide whether their personal values should be sacrificed for the sake of the firm or client. Christians *et al.* (1987) say, in this

regard, that maintaining a sense of integrity and following our conscience may finally be the best alternative in many situations.

2. Loyalty to Client Organization—many professional services providers believe that the professional's first loyalty should be to the client organization that he/she agrees to represent. Determining when organizational loyalty may be misplaced involves agonizing decisions on the part of employees. For instance, professional disagreements about the way a company operates is a situation; and condoning activities that place others at risk of harm is another. The professional who knowingly allows potentially harmful deeds to continue violates his duty to public, which must take precedence over duty to the employing organization (Seib and Fitzpatrick, 1995:17). In this regard, Bayles (1981) adds that the professional is an expert acting in the interest of the client. He is hired to protect his client's interests and to achieve his/her goals.

3. Loyalty to Profession—a public relations professional has an obligation to support his/her chosen profession and the colleagues with whom he/she associates. Some suggest that if public relations is to be considered a professional discipline rather than a technical skill, then practitioners must be responsible to their peers. One scholar says that the true professional will place recognition from a fellow above recognition from an employer, while a careerist will indicate more concern for acceptance from an organizational superior who has input into salaries and promotions.

4. Loyalty to Society—loyalty to society has been highlighted in communication ethics under the term "social responsibility" and is an increasingly important dimension of ethics (Christians *et al.*, 1987:18). Showing its importance, Bayles (1981) says that most

ethical codes recognize a responsibility for the public good. This responsibility reflects the respect of professionals for their profession.

Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) say, in this connection, that the nature of the public relations function and the variety of ways in which it is practiced create special difficulties in clarifying how public interest can best be served. They illustrate this point by applying the four public relations practice models proposed by Professors Grunig and Hunt. Under the press agency, or publicity model, the purpose of communication is merely to place information in the mass media for gaining recognition. In the public information model which is one-sided approach, the practitioner serves the journalistic function of making objective but favorable information about the company available to publics. In the two-way asymmetric approach, professionals conduct social science research to gather information that helps in adjusting messages to influence the behavior of publics.

In contrast to these unilateral approaches, practitioners play the role of mediators in the two-way symmetric model and promote understanding between an organization and its constituents. The organization, here, attempts to reach a situation with its publics that is acceptable to all. According to Professor Grunig, the two-way symmetrical approach may be the only ethical way to practice public relations.

All these loyalties are mentioned in the Code of Athens, laid down by the International Public Relations Association, on which the other public relations codes of ethics were based. Code of Athens states in its ninth paragraph that a member shall undertake to carry out his/her commitments and to show loyalty and integrity, in all circumstances, so as to keep the confidence of his/her client or employer and all the publics affected.

This makes it difficult and complex for public relations practitioners to give prioritization to one or more of these diverse loyalties when they face an ethical decision.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The issue of global ethics is not always a question of a country's values being right or wrong, or better or worse than another's. Although corrupt practices do occur, customs of other nations are not necessarily bad just because they are different. Practitioners must be sensitive to social, cultural, and other differences that determine what is ethical and what is not (Seib and Fitzpatrick, 1995: 51). In principle, a universal code of ethics is possible given the definition that: "Ethics are principles of conduct based on distinction between right and wrong", says Sjöberg (1991:24-27). But, he adds, it is not possible when we go from principle to practice because our day-to-day practice is based somehow on our cultural heritage, local customs and circumstances. For example, taking one of the general principles laid down in the Code of Venice, adopted by International Public Relations Association (IPRA), that a member has a duty of fair dealing towards his clients or employers, past or present. Here, Sjöberg wonders whether or not the phrase "fair dealing" is understood in the same way in all countries.

2.3.1 Ethical Absolutism versus Relativism

Absolutism holds that all moral statements are absolute, whether they are broad general moral principles or detailed moral codes of behavior containing absolute moral rules. This implies that ethics is absolute/independent; not dependent or relative to any variable (Shomali, 2001:26). In contrast to the tenets of relativism, Husted *et al.* (1996) concludes that despite the dominance of ethical relativism in international marketing

ethics, a global moral order is emerging. According to Husted *et al.* (1996), this emergence of a global moral order reflects a maturing consensus among different cultures on evaluating moral judgments and attitudes regarding questionable international business and marketing practices.

Absolutists or universalists argue that there are constants in most fundamental human values and there are basic concepts of good and evil that transcend cultural boundaries. Such concepts of good and evil are reflected in the common values and practices of the world's major religions. Because of these constants, argue the absolutists, there are no special ethical problems inherent in the interactions of different peoples. Kruckeberg (1993: 21-31), for example, concludes that a universal code can be devised and it will be satisfactory to those within different social/cultural/geopolitical systems.

Consistently, Roth *et al.* (1996: 151-161) argue that an international set of principles for practice is feasible. They add: "Such a set of principles can only be agreed upon if representatives of diverse organizations and cultural values will work together to understand each others' perspectives". This argument shows a strong agreement with the advocates of absolute ethics.

The opposite view to ethical absolutism is ethical relativism, says Unerman (in Shomali, 2001:26). Ethical relativism, according to a common definition, is the view that there are no universally valid moral principles: the validity of all moral principles is relative to culture or individual choices. Wong (in Shomali, 2001:25) describes ethical relativism as: "A cluster of doctrines arising from reflection on differences in ethical belief/judgment across time and between individuals, groups and societies".

According to one classification, ethical relativism is divided into individual and social relativism. Individual relativism is the theory that each individual justifiably determines his/her own moral codes. Social relativism is the view that each society justifiably determines its own moral standards (Shomali, 2001:26). This implies that ethics is not absolute or dependent—it is independent. In other words, no ethical rules that can be applied universally: what is considered right in a society might be seen wrong in another society with a different cultural experience.

Situational ethics theory (or individual relativism), which is some kind of relativism, condemns rigid legalism and subjects each act to individual scrutiny. Situational ethics, called “The New Morality”, judges that there is no law or principle absolute. More specifically, the situation alters rule, and it is part of the moral responsibility (Pratt, 1994: 25-71). Merrill (in Martinson, 1997-98: 39-43) rejects both asserting that such ethics is a “non-ethics” or an “anti-ethics”. He argues that when the matter of ethics is watered down to situations or contexts, it loses all meaning as ethics. If every case is different and if every situation demands a different standards, then we should scrap the whole subject of moral philosophy and simply be satisfied that each person run his life by whims which may change from situation to another.

Empirically, Lewis, 1984; Olasky, 1985; Pearson, 1989; and Wright, 1982a, 1982b and 1989 (in Pratt, 1994: 25-71) found that public relations practitioners’ standards tend to change from situation to situation, which means they tend to apply the ethical theory of individual relativism to their activities. Moreover, Ryan and Martison’s survey (1985) of public relations practitioners in the United States indicated that subjectivism (or individual relativism) is the prevailing moral-ethical theory because practitioners

respond in different ways to moral-ethical dilemmas. Consistently, Pratt (in Martinson, 1997-98: 39-43) says that situational ethics is the dominant moral value in the decision-making process of U. S. public relations.

Starck and Kruckeberg (in Kruckeberg, 1996: 181-189) say that one, intuitively, would posit that different cultures and different social, political and economic systems would require different public relations theories and practice with a corresponding need for different ethics. Kruckeberg asks whether or not public relations ethics is culturally specific and ideologically based. He believes that religion heavily influences public relations practice throughout much of the Middle East—that public relations ethics is relative to culture and religion. Sriramesh and White (in Kruckeberg, 1996: 181-189) after reviewing the literature of cultural anthropology and organizational dynamics concluded that they are in a strong agreement with the advocates of the culture-specific approach and contended that organizations are affected by culture. This linkage between public relations ethics on one hand and religious, cultural, social, political and economic systems on the other hand clearly shows the dependency of public relations ethics.

El-Enad (in Kruckeberg, 1993:21-31) argues that public relations in the Western societies plays a different role than that in the Third World. El-Enad observes that Western public relations literature places public relations between an institution and its public while in developing nations it is located between the material and nonmaterial aspects of culture. Thus public relations' role may not meet the standards as stated by public relations theoreticians.