

PUBLIC RELATIONS
IN ASIA PACIFIC

As Asia Pacific continues to drive global economic, technological, and cultural shifts, public relations professionals must develop a deeper understanding of its rich diversity and evolving media ecosystems. This second edition of *Public Relations in Asia Pacific: Communicating Across Cultures* provides a timely, practitioner-informed exploration of the strategies, challenges, and cultural contexts shaping communication across this vital region. From corporate reputation and crisis management to AI and measurement frameworks, the book offers both foundational insights and advanced tools for communicators operating across borders. Featuring local expertise, real-world case scenarios, and forward-looking analysis, it is an essential resource for professionals, students, and global leaders seeking to engage authentically with Asia Pacific stakeholders.

Patrick Ford, professional-in-residence, University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications, Former Asia Pacific chair and global chief client officer, Burson-Marsteller.

Public Relations in Asia Pacific 2nd Edition is required reading for any person, company or institution wanting to succeed in the diverse landscape of the Asia Pacific region.

With decades of practical experience, Devereux and Peirson-Smith cover the essentials of what is needed in using communication as a catalyst to build meaningful, valuable and long-lasting relationships. The lessons shared in this book will save you time, money and protect you from missteps. This book is both an insurance policy and a guide to how to be successful in Asia.

Scott Kronick, Former CEO, Ogilvy Public Relations, Asia-Pacific, and China Chair, The Page Society

Mary Devereux and Anne Peirson-Smith's timely update of their breakthrough treatise *Public Relations in Asia Pacific*, is a must read for communications professionals in this constantly evolving and now undisputedly global economy shaping part of the world.

Covering off on the basics through to insights and advice on emerging issues and themes from AI to CSR and managing activists, the 2nd edition arrives at a time when recent geopolitical events have focused so much more attention on this often-misunderstood part of the world.

From PR 101 through to navigating complex issues and crises, this refreshed edition will guide students and CEOs alike with commonsense, easy to digest advice and guidance on this increasingly vital skillset.

Brian Tyson, Chairman, Australia, Head of APAC Region, Global Deputy CEO of SEC Newgate.

This edition takes a thoughtful and unique cross-cultural approach, exploring how public relations professionals and organisations accommodate contextual cultural differences in managing communication campaigns, building stakeholder trust, and delivering outputs and messaging for clients and corporations. It addresses the impacts of shifting digital technologies, international trade, and prevailing issues such as sustainability, equality, inclusivity, and diversity. In our globalized world, the book emphasizes the vital importance of acquiring and operationalizing cross-cultural competencies for effective communication management across borders.

Dr. Bertha Du-Babcock, Distinguished Professor of Business & Professional Communication, Wenzao Ursuline University

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PUBLIC RELATIONS IN ASIA PACIFIC: COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY ACROSS CULTURES

SECOND EDITION

BY

MARY DEVEREUX

AND

ANNE PEIRSON-SMITH



United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street,
Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2026

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83753-725-9 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83753-722-8 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83753-724-2 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Jacqui Devereux and Martin Devereux – my two most important stakeholders – with love and thanks for all your support. (M.D.)

*To my parents, Mary and Kevin, who taught me that truth is non-negotiable – and that how you tell it makes all the difference.
And to my children, Ben, Milly, and Isabella, who gave me daily opportunities to master message framing, audience engagement, and crisis management – also known as parenting. (A. P-S.)*

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INTRODUCTION: PR COMMUNICATES WITHIN AND ACROSS CULTURES

The Asian Century has begun. Asia is the world's largest regional economy and, as its economies integrate further, it has the potential to fuel and shape the next phase of globalisation. (Tonby et al., 2019)

Asia will be the furnace in which a new era is forged – and may experience heightened versions of global challenges. (Seong et al., 2023)

As the Asian adage goes: “If you want to prepare a fresh omelette for breakfast, go out and buy a hen.” Well, then you must break some eggs in the preparation and cooking procedure. But in the practice of public relations (PR), the core subject of this book, broken eggs, rather than representing collateral damage, can become a valuable opportunity that can be redesigned for other practical purposes, which can ultimately benefit others.

Maybe in the 21st century, this traditional saying needs an update, given the technologized age in which we live. So: “If you want to make the perfect omelette, go find and watch the perfect recipe delivered by a food influencer on Tik Tok or Instagram, Douyin or YouTube.” Originally, in 2009, we could not find a book focusing on the realities of PR practice in Asia Pacific, so we

decided to write one (Devereux & Peirson-Smith, 2009). And now is the time to update this original content.

To think of Asia as a singular piece bears no resemblance to the reality of Asia Pacific. The region includes countries and territories in Australasia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia, and is characterized by large populations, robust economic growth, a complex map of cultures and languages, a rich diversity of both socio-economic and natural environments, an abundance of natural resources, developing and developed economies, local and multinational organizations, intraregional trade, and intraregional interdependence.

With several Asia Pacific countries among the fastest-growing in the world, the requirements for PR and communication management are also growing in terms of both demand and professionalism.

Yet, these countries and this region can be seen collectively because they constitute an interlinked ecosystem based on reciprocal trade interests, and culturally, there are some common cultural tendencies and shared or complementary belief systems (Gupta & Bartlett, 2007).

Many believe PR has its origins in ancient civilizations where persuasive communication was used by orators to influence public opinion. From the 20th century, it came into its own to generate content for mainstream media. Throughout its development across two centuries, the PR profession has honed its skills and usefulness through compelling storytelling to developing corporate and stakeholder relationships, forge public perception, manage reputations. As the current digital age has transformed how we communicate globally in terms of speed, content, scale and channel, PR has further evolved and adapted to the democratized demands of instant social media messaging where content and its sharing are at the command of all. Today, PR in Asia takes a blended traditional and digital approach, building and amplifying direct, mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its stakeholders, activating the PR playbook – media and influencer relations, content marketing, search engine optimization, e-marketing, and social media content management using compelling touchpoints.

Consequently, the need for PR and communication management has never been greater in Asia Pacific, aligned with rapidly expanding economies enabled by sizeable technological investment and related commercial and business needs in the region (Macnamara et al., 2018). Here, PR's value as a source of strategic intelligence

(McKie & Heath, 2016) for a diverse array of corporations and stakeholders operating in a hyper-developing set of markets involved in navigating challenging geo-political and socio-cultural changes (Domm, 2016).

As practitioners and educators in PR for over 30 years, most of these located in the Asia Pacific region (including Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, China, South Korea, and Australia), we have witnessed these changes and recognized the need to collate our experience and provide an insider's viewpoint on this dynamic industry. To that end, we intend this book to be useful for several audiences: for students of the subject, as they prepare for a career in PR; for practitioners in the region, who will find this a valuable resource to assist in their professional development; and for executives who want to learn more about the industry, given its growing global importance in corporate practice.

This book provides key insights into the rapid expansion of PR in and across the Asia Pacific region, based on selected theory and practice needed to communicate effectively with stakeholders across different cultures and geographies. In the past three decades, PR has taken on a new importance. As the world has globalized, so have domestic Asia Pacific organizations, in both the public and private sectors, having entered wider markets or received foreign investment. This requires that organizations and their employees need to deal with a wide variety of audiences, including consumers, netizens, influencers, suppliers, investors, government officials, pressure groups, competitors, editors, and media professionals.

More than ever, economic downturns have highlighted the need to communicate positive organizational messages to these audiences and to their influencers, to gain acknowledgment for their achievements and to ensure competitive survival in an increasingly uncertain geo-political landscape.

Each chapter of this book covers the essential concepts and skills of PR across the core practices of the profession. These include, in order of presentation, channel management; building and defending corporate reputation; public affairs, issues and crisis management; employee engagement; financial communications; healthcare communications; consumer marketing, research and measurement; and future trends in PR.

The application and impact of digital and rapidly emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, in addition to social media usage and management, serve as common unifying themes throughout the book, to mirror topical developments in the PR profession across Asia Pacific.

Case scenarios and examples from around the Asia Pacific region can be found in each chapter, bringing the strategic and tactical practices of PR into sharp focus and grounding them in the diverse cultural realities of the Asia Pacific region. In addition, we have sought the expert insights of a range of experienced communication professionals working around the region to validate and personalize the themes addressed in each chapter.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the many PR professionals who have contributed to the collective knowledge upon which this book is based and Isabella Peirson-Smith for conducting background research on the case studies. In addition, we thank everyone at Emerald Publishing, in particular Christopher Newson of Triopo Media Limited and Nick Wallwork Senior Commissioning Editor of Emerald Publishing, who helped breathe life into this book project update, in addition to Lydia Cutmore, Sashikala Balasubramanian, and the efficient editing team, who expertly shepherded the book into publication.

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LOCATING PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC CONTEXT

Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some hire public relations officers. (Daniel J. Boorstin, cited in Nieberg, 2025)

A lot of people complain about yesterday. We have no power to change yesterday. But this very day 30 years later is what we can control and decide. Change yourself and stay determined for 10 years. Jack Ma, final speech as CEO of Alibaba. (cited in Wee, 2013)

- An IT company is rebranding following a takeover deal, and launching its new corporate logo in Singapore.
- A new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a multinational oil company based in Malaysia is giving an inaugural speech to the local chamber of commerce, including senior government officials.
- A soft drinks manufacturer is relaunching an existing product with a new flavor for the Taiwanese market and is using micro-influencers to boost the campaign, SEO, and increase click-through rates.

- A charity for abandoned children in India is trying to raise funds using a crowdfunding site to build a series of new children's homes across several cities.
- A government department in Jakarta is responsible for a public healthcare campaign to educate young people about the dangers of taking drugs.
- A power company in Japan announces plans to fund a series of wind farms as an alternative to traditional sources of energy.
- A magnate in Macau donates billions of dollars to build a new private university.
- A soy sauce manufacturer based in China is recalling its product from all supermarket shelves across Asia as government food and safety departments have found toxic deposits in bottles produced at its plant in Tianjin.
- Compromising images of a music celebrity from Australia start to circulate on TikTok, while the tabloid media publish an exclusive story with a modified version of one of the photographs.
- An anti-race demonstration in New Zealand gets out of hand with injuries both to protestors and police receiving global media coverage and public criticism of the authorities.
- Architects in Hong Kong are lobbying the relevant government departments and developers to protect more green urban spaces in the center of the city and plan to run a citizen campaign in response.
- An international fashion brand culturally appropriates an Asian dress style carrying a slogan celebrating an iconic political leader in their new collection and Instagram campaign, causing a storm of protest and threats of boycotting the brands by thousands of angry local netizens, resulting in a product recall in the country of origin.