Introduction

Increasing internationalisation has resulted in firms taking advantage of global opportunities where and when they occur, and reaping the advantages of economies of scale in production and experience and learning curve effects. In the words of Levitt (1983), "the world is becoming a common market place in which people - no matter where they live - desire the same product and lifestyles". Behind this trend towards globalisation, lie the concerns, outlooks and attitudes of increasingly educated, well informed citizens and customers, influenced by increasingly sophisticated pressure groups and deluged with information by a media whose international scale and speed of coverage is almost breathtaking.

From the management point of view, the changing concerns of citizens around the world are the most fundamental changes of all. They are certainly the most crucial for corporate relations. Technology makes things possible but, in open societies, consumers and voters decide what it is used. Even the largest companies compete to understand and respond to consumers' needs and aspirations. This task is even more complex in view of the decline in the power of advertising in terms of influencing consumer purchasing behaviour. The increasing costs of media space and air time, the increased fragmentation of media audiences and the intensification of competition for the attention of audiences, have all contributed to an increasing realisation that advertising alone can no longer be relied upon to deliver the results that appeared possible during the 1960s and 1970s.

Many firms are now forced to re-examine the basis of many of their marketing strategies and, in particular, their traditional reliance on mass media advertising. This has led to a move towards more narrowly targeted and focused marketing strategies employing other promotional tools like direct marketing, public relations, publicity and sales promotion to a far greater degree than might have been the case in the past.

Despite the wealth of literature devoted to marketing communications, publicity is one of those elements of the communications mix that has yet to be accorded sufficient recognition in terms of its role and importance. Evidence of this is in the scanty coverage of publicity in most marketing and international marketing textbooks. A comprehensive coverage of publicity has remained elusive. This article will focus on one such emerging area of international marketing communications, i.e. international publicity.

The nature of publicity

Publicity is a major tool of “proactive public relations”. In other words, it is offensively-rather than defensively-oriented and opportunity seeking rather than problem solving. Like advertising and personal selling, the fundamental purposes of marketing-oriented publicity are to create brand awareness, enhance attitudes towards a company and its brands, and possibly influence purchase behaviour.

Companies obtain publicity using various forms of news releases, press conferences and other information dissemination. News releases concerning new products, modifications in old products, and other newsworthy topics are delivered to editors of newspapers, magazines and other media. Press conferences announce major news events of interest to the public. Photographs, tapes and films are useful for illustrating product improvements, new products and advanced production techniques. Understandably, all forms of publicity are subject to the control and whims of the media, but by disseminating a large volume of publicity materials and by preparing materials that fit the media's needs, a company increases its chances of obtaining beneficial publicity.

Constraints on international publicity

The role of publicity in international marketing can be a complex one since the firm is operating in a variety of environmental conditions and with constraints on strategy choices. Hence, the supply of factual, interesting and newsworthy information becomes dependent largely on the following factors:
• Cultural differences in various markets.
• Language barriers.
• Media availability.
• Different laws governing promotion.

These factors present a set of unique problems for international publicity. As noted by Black (1993), “even drawing up a simple news release may require a knowledge of local culture, religion and traditional values if it is to ring true and not offend local susceptibilities”.

If it is against this background that corporate relations are to be conducted, how can firms respond to it and exercise influence effectively? Fortunately, the basics of corporate communications, public relations and publicity still apply. The task is to apply well known principles in a new, more complex, environment.

Cultural constraints
Knowledge of culture is essential to conducting international publicity. It enables the firm to communicate with its targeted audience through the use of language either commonly known to both parties or learned. Most importantly, it helps the firm anticipate how consumers in various markets are likely to respond to their actions. According to El Kahal (1994), “ignorance of cultural difference is not just unfortunate, it is bad business”. Hence, sensitivity to cultural difference is crucial to successful international publicity.

Ignorance to cultural differences can create problems for a firm. For example, Euro Disney’s corporate image suffered initially due to the insensitivity of its executives towards the French people. The Disney personnel were considered to be brash and overbearing. According to Gumbel and Turner (1994), the answer to any doubts or suggestions invariably was, “Do as we say, because we know best.” For a proud and touchy people such as the French, this attitude by the American company fuelled resentment that led to planning and operational difficulties for the company.

Language barriers
The diversity of languages in world markets is one major constraint facing international publicity. Although some languages are used in more than one country, there are many more languages than countries. There are approximately 3,000 different languages and 10,000 different dialects in the world with less than 300 nations (El Kahal, 1994). A firm, however, does not have to know all the languages of all markets but must take steps to ensure that it communicates in the relevant languages. Even in the few cases where the product and its publicity are universal, the language will not be.

A major difficulty confronting an international firm is the translation of a concept (e.g. product, promotional theme) from one language to another, even from one dialect to another. For example, United Airlines, on acquiring Pan Am's Pacific routes in 1985, used the Australian film star Paul Hogan on the cover of its in-flight magazine with the caption “camping it up”. The backdrop was the Australian outback. United was quickly informed by Hogan’s lawyers that, in Australia, the caption implied acting in an effeminate fashion. This illustrates that even within major languages like English, the meaning of words and expressions varies from country to country. Such differences need to be considered when developing publicity materials and when communications occur between a company and its foreign publics.

Within a country, different classes of people (such as manual workers, white collar workers, managers) use different vocabularies, dialects and accents. These differences also need to be taken into account when developing print and audio promotional messages especially when these messages are for a particular segment of the market.

When a company enters a foreign market, it can use properly translated product news releases, feature articles and other published information or it can develop new, market-specific materials. Promotional materials for high-tech products are often directly transferable to another market with the use of standard technical language in industry journals. Hence, manufacturers of computers and other high-tech products may find it easier to use materials developed for their domestic markets than would their counterpart dealing in consumer goods. It is much more difficult to translate the shortened (often slang) expressions used in promoting consumer goods and services.

Media availability
Much, if not all, of the communication with target audiences is indirect through the media. The great majority of newspapers and television stations are national organisations addressing a predominantly national audience. However, an International Herald Tribune or a Financial Times will have significant international readership, while broadcasting corporations like CNN and the BBC World Service cater for an international audience. Currently, dealing with the media internationally is largely a question of dealing with a range of national publications and
broadcasting stations in many national markets.
What is even more challenging for the firm is the fact that the communication infrastructure varies from one country to another. Television set ownership ranges from one set per two persons in countries such as the USA and Japan, to 1 to 20 in Indonesia, 1 to 50 in India, 1 to 300 in Bangladesh, and 1 to 600 in Burma (Terpstra and Sarathy, 1994). Newspaper availability is marginally more consistent, with 1 daily paper per 2 persons in Japan and 1 per 4 persons in the USA; to 10 per 20 in Latin America, and in extreme cases, 1 per 200 persons in some African countries.

Managing media relations in a foreign country also requires special skills. The fact that the media has its own agenda and decides what it will print or broadcast according to its own values, makes it more important than ever to develop a longer-term media strategy (McIver, 1964). An international media strategy will feature a set of consistent messages, directed towards particular channels, underpinned by long-term media relationships and focused on the international issues which most concern the company.

Government regulations
Local promotion regulations and industry codes directly influence the selection of media and content of all promotional materials. Government restrictions can take many forms. The following are some examples:
• Some countries have restrictions on the types of products that can be promoted. Tobacco, alcohol and drugs are especially targeted. The promotion of tobacco products like cigarettes are banned in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Portugal and Switzerland.
• In some countries, certain media are not available or are very limited. In Austria, the TV cannot be used for the promotion of tobacco. In many African countries where ownership of a TV set is very limited, promoting a product solely on television would not be adequate to reach all the required target market. The firm will need to combine television promotion with other media such as magazines, radio and newspapers.
• Some governments are very particular about the language used and the use of comparative promotion. This often necessitates pre-clearance of some promotional materials. South Korea bans plagiarising of foreign-inspired messages. Many countries regulate the use of words such as gratis, free, low calorie, etc.

Given the above restrictions, it is not surprising that government regulatory agencies are a common target for publicity campaigns. If they have a positive view of the company it may be easier for the company to conduct business. For instance, Japanese companies like Toyota and Sony have been very concerned that the huge US trade deficit will result in tariffs and other protectionist policies. They initiated publicity campaigns, including press releases, in order to convince the media, regulators and the public that protectionist policies are not the best solution to the trade imbalances.

International publicity is made easier if a firm maintains a good and healthy relationship with its host government, as evidenced by the Japanese companies in the USA. This requires good communications and investment in contacts and relationships. Such relationships are forged and developed by:
• Making the government aware of your contribution to output, investment and employment.
• Convincing them of your standards of behaviour.
• Being willing to be helpful, and supportive of the needs of the community.
• Treating their nationals well and ensuring that they have real prospects of developing themselves.

Strategic implications of international constraints
The preceding discussion on different environments faced by an international firm and some of the consequences for failure to recognise these differences, highlight the importance of pursuing a communication strategy that is flexible enough to accommodate such variations in the foreign environment. This raises the issue as to whether the success of an international publicity programme is dependent on having an “adaptation” strategy or “standardisation” strategy, or a combination of both (i.e. contingency strategy).

Before considering which one of these strategies is appropriate for international publicity, it will be worthwhile summarising the main characteristics of each strategy.

Proponents of the standardisation school of thought contend that differences between countries are more a matter of degree than direction and therefore, firms must focus on the similarities of consumers around the world (Fatt, 1967; Levitt, 1983). Benefits resulting from such a strategy are cost reductions in planning and control, the building of an international brand and company image.
The adaptation school of thought, on the other hand, argue that country differences such as culture, media availability, legal restrictions, etc. must be taken into consideration (Black, 1993; Britt, 1974; Efkins, 1992; Neilson, 1964). They cite many international promotion blunders attesting to the dangers of not basing their strategies on the “foreign” culture concerned (Hartley, 1995; Ricks et al., 1974).

The third school of thought takes a moderate approach by recognising the benefits to be obtained from both approaches and rejecting complete standardisation or adaptation. It is their view that a more effective strategy can be developed after careful evaluation of the possible factors that can affect the effectiveness of the strategy in the countries involved. In other words, the most effective communication strategy would vary depending on the situation (Kotler, 1986; Walters, 1986).

In the context of international publicity, success hinges on how well the various publics are understood and how well they are communicated (Hennessey, 1992; Nally, 1991). This does not, however, preclude the relevance of the three schools of thought to international publicity. These concepts will now be examined against the background of planning and controlling an international publicity campaign.

Typically, a multinational firm would comprise of subsidiaries and a Headquarters (HQ) located in the home country. The HQ designs the Corporate Plan which specifies the overall philosophy, strategy and objectives of the firm. These aspects apply to the subsidiaries operating in different countries. However, the planning and operation of a localised programme such as publicity, would necessitate adaptation, especially if it is a “reactive” programme (i.e. responding to a local incident). In this respect, firms can “think globally” but would have to “act locally”.

This viewpoint is supported by McDonald (1989, p. 84) when he notes that in a diversified multinational conglomerate, detailed marketing objectives and strategies for a foreign country cannot be set by someone in a remote location – a balance has to be reached between the flexibility of local units to react to changes in local market conditions and centralised control which can harness company strengths on a world-wide basis and ensure that they are consonant with the overall goals of the company. He concludes that:

any standardisation that may be possible will become clear only if the company can successfully develop a system for identifying the needs of each market in which it operates ... Such a system has to take account both of the similarities and differences between countries and operate, so that the key determinants of international success are controlled centrally, allowing for local deviations where necessary.

As mentioned earlier, the fundamental purposes of publicity are to create brand awareness, enhance attitudes towards a company and its brands, and possibly influence purchase behaviour. The achievement of these objectives would depend on how well the company assesses the sensitivity of the market and their development of an appropriate response. This requires adaptation at the operational level whilst at the same time ensuring that their operations are in tandem with the company’s overall goals and corporate image. In this context, a “contingency” approach as opposed to complete standardisation or adaptation appears to be more appropriate to international publicity planning (see Figure 1). This outcome seems to be consistent with the current state of the debate on standardisation versus adaptation, the balance of which is tilted on the adaptation/contingency approach.

The results of a number of cross-cultural and cross-national comparative studies conducted by Onkvisit and Shaw (1987) rarely showed similarities among consumers. Differences with respect to market characteristics, industry conditions and other environmental variables have invariably been found in these empirical studies. This leads to the conclusion that some degree of adaptation is necessary for foreign markets. It is against this background that the process of planning an international publicity campaign will be examined.

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**Figure 1**

International publicity planning: structure and strategies

![Diagram of international publicity planning](image-url)

1. **HQ (Corporate Plan)** (Standardised)
2. Adaptation &
   Standardisation
3. (Localised Plans)
4. Subsidiary A
5. Subsidiary B
6. Subsidiary C
7. Subsidiary D

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Planning and controlling international publicity

By its nature, publicity entails careful planning, be it at the domestic or international level. The development and implementation of any publicity plan is dependent on answers to the following questions (Gregory, 1996):

- What are the objectives of the publicity campaign?
- Who are the target audience?
- How should they be motivated?
- How can the audience be reached?
- What procedures should be used for testing and evaluating publicity?

The relationship between the elements is shown in Figure 2. We now go on to look briefly at each of these items in turn.

Defining the objectives of the campaign
A company’s international, national and regional marketing objectives have a strong and decisive influence on the objectives of a publicity campaign. For example, a company’s marketing objectives could be to develop several international brands and to be the dominant competitor in all its markets. On occasion, it may also want to enter a new market or introduce a new or modified product on an international, regional or national basis. Marketing objectives such as these, give direction to the company’s publicity objectives.

Identifying, analysing and motivating the target audience
Publicity, in a way, involves selling and like any good salesperson, a firm must identify its target audience. In publicity or public relations, this audience is referred to as “publics”. Publics are groups of people, internally and externally, with whom an organisation communicates (Jefkins, 1992).

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Figure 2
Planning and controlling international publicity

Planning

Define Objectives

Identify the Target Audience

Select Media to reach Audience

Feedback

A.

Control

Pretest and Evaluate

B.
that medium's interpretation of the audience's interest, otherwise it would be rejected as unsuitable (Wragg, 1993). There are four elements in the situation:
1. The actual need of the audience.
2. The medium's interpretation of the audience's need.
3. The firm's need.
4. The firm's interpretation of the audience's need.

Essentially, effort should be made to align all four, although in reality, there are few cases whereby a firm's concept of a public need would correspond to that of the medium. This, however, is something that a firm should avoid when operating in a foreign market where the need for adaptation is greater.

Pre-testing and evaluating publicity
Pre-testing a publicity material provides vital feedback information which should indicate whether the target audience will receive and understand the message. This is especially necessary in a foreign setting where many potential recipients may not be familiar with the organisation, its service, product or cause. A press release that makes perfect sense to the organisation but fails to take into account the behaviour and culture of its chosen public may result in misperception and hence rejection of the message (Weiner, 1982).

Once the publicity material has been used by the media, effort should be made to evaluate its impact, in order to determine whether it has been a success, partial success or failure. Oxley (1989) observes that the consequences of neglecting evaluation will be "a reduction in the organisation's self-steering capacity – it will have deprived its memory of information needed to guide it into the future".

In publicity, software programs or press clipping services can be used to develop reports that pinpoint the quantity of media exposure, number of mentions of the company's product/service or name, the amount of favourable, unfavourable and mixed coverage, and the number of people the publicity reaches. Yale (1992), observes that some clipping services can even index and store the company's clippings and the publicity materials that generated them on a computer disk.

Counting clippings is not, however, the only way of measuring success. It is also necessary to measure their impact on the public. Telephone or personal surveys are useful ways of conducting opinion research. Most developed countries have opinion research firms who could collect such information. Information from opinion surveys can help a firm decide whether a publicity campaign has achieved its objectives, whether it was efficiently carried out, and whether its overall benefits were worth the campaign's effort. Nevertheless, as with the nature of the publicity, the reaction to it and the research evaluation is also potentially influenced by national differences.

Conclusions
This paper has sought to provide a framework for examining the main concepts and applications of publicity from an international perspective. It has also explored a number of the main constraints facing firms in the international environment and hence emphasised the necessity for planning and controlling international publicity campaigns. Acknowledgement is given to the fact that, depending on the type of publicity campaign (i.e. "proactive" or "reactive" campaign), the strategy would vary. Therefore, however, the likelihood that an "adaptation" or "contingency" strategy would be appropriate for a "reactive" publicity campaign, whilst a "standardisation" strategy could be applied to a "proactive" campaign. In addition to this, the organisational and decision-making structure of an international firm has a bearing on the strategy adopted by the firm abroad.

With the intensification of competition for the attention of foreign audiences whose cultures are remote from those of domestic markets, common sense dictates that a "contingency" or "adaptation" approach would be the most useful as a competitive weapon. It must, however, be stressed that for international publicity to be effective, it has to be carried out within the broader context of public relations.

Given the dearth of literature in publicity, and even more so international publicity, this paper is meant to be the first step in the recognition of its importance. It would, however, be necessary to follow this up with empirical research on international firms and their approach to publicity. As yet, no such work has been done. Perhaps a case-based, empirical theory can be developed from such a study.

It is also acknowledged that the paper has focused, to a large extent, on the practice of publicity as opposed to an approach incorporating both theory and practice. It is the author's observation that theory on publicity is handicapped by its attachment to general marketing communications theory. There is therefore a need to delineate a theory specific to publicity. Thus, the challenge is to
integrate the concepts put forward in this paper and adapt them to a theoretical framework.

References