

**GOVERNMENTAL PR AND INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS:
A STUDY OF THAI GOVERNMENTAL PR IN
MANAGING THE HISTORICAL “PREAH VIHEAR”
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INTRODUCTION

Although “Public Relations” or “PR” is among a popular area of studies and a field of practices, lots of people tend to be confused when being asked on the roles of public relations professionals in society. Mainly, PR education has reflected its position as a field of study in applied social science, which was initiated from the US after the WWII. The PR discipline positions itself in the functional paradigm, which was grown from the integrated fields of social psychology, behavioral sciences, and management.

L’Etang (2009) pointed out that PR literature has a corporate and technocratic bias, with a less concern on the political aspects of organizations. In addition, she criticizes that PR seems somewhat like a US-based scientific discipline that focus on organization reputation and communication management of stakeholders, including the media.

A number of scholars have also challenged the field of PR, by proposing the expansion of the field beyond the organization perspective. By applying the relational approach into PR discipline, Falkhrimer (2006) proposed that we can interpret PR as “a communicative structuration force”. PR’s roles, according to Falkhrimer (2006), are constructed both in organizations, and between organizations and the exciting society. It implies that PR has its power in either what Falkhrimer (2006) called as the process of reproducing or the transforming social structures.

Therefore, PR practitioners, according to the relational perspective, act as “cultural intermediaries”, or “power brokers”. They play a particular role in linking an organization with stakeholders in their socio-cultural context, and take part in balancing the power of their organization and other stakeholders.

The concept of “Power”, therefore, has significantly become a topic of interests, especially after a number of scholars looked at the PR discipline from the normative and relational approach. According to L’Etang (2009), PR is related to power and power management, both in the visible and invisible states ranging from the political, economic, cultural, or even religious contexts and the elites. In addition, L’Etang (2009) believed that the core concept of “PR power” is perhaps related to the extent to which one can access to the media, own the media or manage the relationship with the media and other stakeholders in the society.

Richards (2004) also identified two groups of Power-related PR; The Power-based PR and The Value-based PR. The Power-based PR, according to Richards (2004), focuses on using all capacities to strengthen their own organization. The Value-based PR, on the other hands, concerned with its reputation that link with the value and standard of the society. In terms of communication and power, Graham (1995; cited in L’Etang, 2009) introduced the terms of power-with and power-over. Power-with implies that all stakeholders have power to interactively influence one another. Power-over, on the other hand, implies a one way influence

from a stakeholder to others, which may lead to misinterpretation of the influencing message as “propagandas”, instead of persuasive messages.

THE DIGITAL MEDIA: THE CHALLENGE OF PR IN MANAGING “POWER”

The fast growth of digital media has challenged the field of PR and PR education. From the functionalist perspective, the arrival of digital media provides opportunities for digital users to enjoy the bigger “spaces” of advocating, debating, or participating in a dialogue among various stakeholders.

From the relational perspective, it is interesting to learn if changes in digital technology will challenge those who are in power, in applying public relations tools to make a peaceful power management. Perhaps, it may reduce or even erase the old style of communicating power, which is the power being enjoyed/controlled by those who are in political power, especially the government and the politicians or those who can access/afford the cost of PR tools using traditional mass media.

In the case of a crisis, it is particularly challenging for the PR professionals to manage all kinds of media to engineer consent among stakeholders. By looking at the pre-digital era-framework, a number of studies applied PR concepts to understand the issue and crisis. For example, Health (2006) believed that the PR role is about managing and presenting information with the aim of clarifying issues of fact, value, and policy. Coombs (2006) applied Benson’s Situational Crisis Communication theory or SCC as a strategy of PR in crisis. According to Coombs, three central elements of crisis communication include a list of crisis response strategies, a framework for categorizing crisis situations, and a method to match a crisis response strategy to a specific situation. At the corporate level, Coombs (2006) found out that (1) a rumor can cause more damage than the truth, (2) a company must be ready and able to take corrective actions, (3) the response to an organizational level crisis must be quick, consistent and open, (4) The full disclosure is vital for an organization that is facing a continuing danger and is becoming a victim of the crisis, (5) the failure to disclose or respond could financially cripple an organization.

How about a crisis beyond organizational level? Especially if it is a crisis in any nation, how can the previous theories of PR and crisis communication management at the organizational level apply to the bigger, like a nation or between two nations?

This paper aims to use the case of historical “Preah Vihear”, as an issue to understand the Thai government’s PR role to generate national and transnational peace. By applying the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCC) and the concept of ‘Power’ in Public Relations, we are hoping to share the empirical evidence to prove the academic understanding of governmental public relations in the digital age.

RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent has the Thai government applied Power-based PR as a tool to manage communication during the political crisis of “Preah Vihear”, in the country and with its neighboring country?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted during peak and non-peak periods of trans-border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia in 2013-2014. We have applied mixed qualitative techniques, including on-site-visit observations, in-depth interviews and group interviews with 30 key stakeholders. We interviewed top PR authorities from the governmental and military sides, and top journalists responsible in reporting the issue. We also went to the border areas before and after the peak of the crisis, from the Northeast to the Eastern part of Thailand. We interviewed local stakeholders, including governors of three provinces, the military team, local journalists, local traders, and local authorities. We went across the border to Cambodia and flew to Phnom Penh to meet with Cambodian political leaders, a Cambodian Religious leader and the Thai Ambassador to Cambodia.

THE RESULT:

1) The Background: Thailand-Cambodia:

Thailand and Cambodia are two neighboring countries located in Southeast Asia. They share a border stretching approximately 800 kilometers. Historically, the relationship between the citizens of the two countries could be described as a “love-hate relationship” (Kasetsiri, Sothirak, & Chachavalpongpun, 2013)

The two countries share similarities when it comes to customs, traditions and way of life. Furthermore, the majority of their populace are Buddhist, and there is a lot of cross-border contact, particularly as many completed their studies at Thai monastic institutions.

Many Theravada monks can speak good Thai, and in their chanting they recite the same pali language prayers as Thai monks. This reflects their closeness and similarities. Their relations are not controlled by authorities but by their visiting each other and studying dharma together. This is supported financially by the government agency responsible for Buddhism in Thailand and Thai Buddhists.

(Interview, Cambodian Monk leader, April, 2015)

When examining the relations between different government agencies at the national and local level, they appear to be relatively stable, particularly with military leaders, the Ministry of the Interior and in education. They are constantly visiting each other, scholarships are being awarded and informal, or unofficial activities, are being organized such as sport events.

At the local level, relationships are built around trade and health care. Thai products are very popular among the local Cambodian populace. They often cross the border to purchase rice and other food at Thai stores and markets. Some Cambodians are also employed as labor in Thailand, and many of these border residents speak very good Thai. This became clearly evident during interviews conducted, where they pass back and forth across the border.

The Thais and Cambodians living along the border have very close relations. The border is really just an imaginary line, while in real life, we just come and go as we want. We don't have any problems.

Interview, local Thai trader, May, 2015

- **The Route to a Hate Relationship**

“Preah Vihear” issue is an example where the idea that a border serves to promote conflict and disunity.

In the past, the people of Southeast Asia gave importance to cities and their authority. Then, through a combination of Brahmin and Buddhist beliefs, the ruler of the principal, or most powerful city, became known as the King of Kings, and the rulers of the smaller communities were considered vassals and had to pay tributes to this King.

During these times, wars were fought for one of two reasons. First, one of these city states would be located far from the central power and as it grew in strength, their ruler would decide to stop paying tribute, as it no longer recognized the authority of the reigning city. Second, the king of another city would feel that he deserved to be a King of Kings and independent, if not the new reigning monarch of the former power. This would then lead to war with the losers becoming prisoners of war who would be required to help build the new ruling city, and with them they would bring customs and traditions, art and culture that the new kingdom would adopt.

Thus, during these times, the rulers and those living in their cities did not really have an idea how far their authority went. In the past, as one moved farther from the seat of power, the number of inhabitants lessened and it became more and more difficult to communicate with them. Because of this, court officials who travelled to these parts had to ask where the borders lay. While the answers they would receive at first sounded quite simple, the reality was quite different as they would be told, “Go ask the villagers who are living there.”

When it comes to discussion of maps of the countries and their borders of the region, “Preah Vihear” (Preah Vihere) has continually become an explosive issue. There are maps date back centuries, but they were based on trade, spiritual texts, the writing of travelers and foreign traders, their experiences and imaginings of the kingdoms and countries. None of these maps were produced through topographical surveys.

The importance of a map demarcating the countries and borders of Southeast Asia became evident as Western imperialism spread across the region, when the Thai kingdom was known as Siam and Western topographical survey teams were engaged to map the country and issue property deeds for the first time.

The very first topographical map of the Kingdom of Siam was published in 1895. After that a census was conducted to determine the number of people living in the different districts that were designated in the map.

Approximately 50 years after the publication of the first map, conflicts arose over the demarcation when Cambodia became an independent and free kingdom in 1953. King Norodom Sihanouk brought a case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to decide whether “Preah Vihear”, or “Prasart Phra Viharn”- in Thai, that was built on the peak of a mountain, belonged to Cambodia or Thailand.

On June 15, 1962, the ICJ found that the temple is situated in territory under the sovereignty of Cambodia and that Thailand is under an obligation to withdraw any military or police forces, or other guards or keepers, stationed at the temple or in its vicinity on Cambodian territory.

The Royal Thai Navy Academy recently noted in 2016 that the map used for this decision was a single map produced by the French and then presented to the Thai kingdom of Siam. No other entity had examined the map to determine its correctness, or legitimacy. It went on to tell how in 1929 H.R.H. Prince Damrong, the former minister of the Interior, traveled to Preah Vihear. There, he also met with a representative of the French government and they photographed the site and signed their names to the photographs. These photographs were also used by the lawyers in the suit, which the Thais eventually lost.

2) The History of Early Public Relation Activities and Their Continuing Effects

• Patriotism: A Key Message with Unintended Effect

One factor that has promoted from former times up to the present is patriotism. The Thai government adopted patriotism as a communication theme to be launched from time to time through multiple communication channels. This was very clearly evident when Thais transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy and introduced a democratic government in 1932.

Thailand's neighbors were all colonized by Western powers and did not gain their independence until the late 1940s and early 1950s, at which time they also turned to promoting patriotism. The technique that most of these countries, including Thailand, employed was to promote national unity and to communicate they key message that;

“The place we stand is our country. We must protect our country from enemies outside”.

For example, the Cambodian government tried to introduce to its citizens that Thailand was still called “Siam”, the former name of the country, which caused the former Khmer empire to collapse, and later “Siam-Reap” was established as a Cambodian city to signify the place where Siam people lost the transnational war.

The Thai government, on the other hand, worked to impose the key message to the public thinking that Burma was Thailand’s ancestral enemy, which had vanquished the former Thai capital of Sri Ayutthaya.

For Preah Vihear issue, during 1950-1960 the Thai government used all kinds of media to promote the concept of patriotism. During that time, the leaders of both countries sent warnings to each other by closing the border crossings. The two countries would promote conflicting messages. Cambodia would say that Thailand had infringed upon its sovereignty as Preah Vihear belonged to Cambodia. Meanwhile, the Thai message was that “Prasart Phra Viharn” belonged to Thailand and no others could claim it or infringe upon Thai sovereignty.

In addition, different printed materials were produced in the 50-60s concerning communication campaign activities through cooperative efforts of the government and private citizens, which were organized as different types of campaigns, so that the Thai public would join in saying that “Prasart Phra Viharn” belonged to Thailand.

Some of these communication campaign activities including fund-raising. The communication campaign was launched to engage the public to donate 1 baht each. The aim of the communication campaign was to raise this fund to pay for Thai lawyers to bring this case to the ICJ. The other communication campaign was to organize marches saying that Preah Vihear first belonged to Thailand before the French colonial government produced a map that claimed the temple was part of Indochina.

Not only did the Thai government support these communication campaign activities to promote patriotic fervor, they also launched a number of communication activities, including speeches, writings, songs and dramas that would stimulate love of country. They would also subtly promote patriotic feelings through the history texts being taught in school, which were aimed at creating a sense of pride in Thailand because of its superiority over its neighbors, for example exploiting the fact that Thailand was never colonized by a Western nation like Thailand’s neighbors, including Cambodia.

The issue of situation got very intense after the ICJ decided in Cambodia’s favor by a vote of 9 to 3. The Thai government then made public announcement that it would not accept the court’s ruling, but that it would remove its troops as it was a member of the United Nations. Still, it would not lower the Thai national flag that flew over the temple. At the same time, Thai composers and a singer composed a song and disseminated this song nationwide. Meanwhile, filmmakers made a film to communicate that “Thailand was cheated of its sovereignty” in the case of Preah Vihear.

- **The Historic Preah Vihear PR Effect: In Heart and Mind among Thais.**

These aforementioned campaigns, focusing on Preah Vihear, in the 50s and 60s continued the psychological effect up to 2010. In the 2010, many of Thai people were influenced by patriotic messages of the previous government to believe that “the case of Preah Vihear is a bitter moment in the history of Thailand.”

Thais were made to believe that “Thailand lost territory.” The consequence of this then was that most Thais did not want to speak of this loss or the pain they felt or listen to any more stories about Preah Vihear.

They were not interested in what happened in the past, but the way the people look down upon Cambodian and their country stemmed from what they learned in school, which included being told that the Khmer and Cambodia are not one and the same. Furthermore, they learned that the “Kingdom of Siam defeated the Khmer Kingdom (Angkor Wat).”

The information in school textbooks is incorrect. For example, the Khmer and Cambodia kingdoms are not the same. I believe this is a sad story in history that Thais have neglected and ignored the truth. It seems they won't accept the truth about Cambodian (Khmer) history.

(Interview, Thai Journalist, November, 2014)

The abovementioned picture is then considered one that must/should be re-promoted about Prasart Phra Viharn, or Preah Vihear, during the next 50 years.

3) The Conflicting “Preah Vihear” Story in The Digital Age

- **Opening Scene: The Crisis-Facing Communication**

In addition to the deep faith in the communication campaign’s effects concerning Preah Vihear, Thailand and Cambodia have faced another major event in their histories. This was during modern times when Cambodia faced internal political turmoil and Thailand provided sanctuary to Cambodian refugees. Then, when Cambodia started to regain stability, many Thai business people invested in the country, contributing to its redevelopment.

Taksin was a member of this first group of business persons that helped in the redevelopment of Cambodia following the war. He set up a TV station and helped to supervise public relations for the country.

(Interview, Thai military leader, June 2014)

However, once more, in 2003, relations between Thailand and Cambodia again soured when Cambodia was getting ready to hold an election. One of the candidates announced that a Thai star had stated incorrectly that Angkor Wat was once Thai. The rumor then spread and grew, ending up in national as well as local newspapers. This led to a protest demonstration in front of the Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital, that culminated in its burning.

Not long after this crisis, Thailand was faced with its own political crises with major protests, elections and a coup d'état, with a number of government administration changes. Among the political groups fighting for power, there were claims that one, while in power, received special benefits from the Cambodian leadership.

During this time of political turmoil in Thailand, Cambodia applied to UNESCO for their Preah Vihear temple ruins be registered as a World Heritage Site, along with the surrounding territory. This caused an increase in political protests with calls that the foreign minister along with the current Thai government had “sold the country”. The crisis continued to escalate until troops from both countries engaged in fighting. At the same time, members of the public turned to new media to get their stories and opinions out about this conflict.

If we look at this from a communication perspective, it can be said that the Thai “government lacked in its ability to communicate”, “manage information dissemination” and hold the trust of the public”. The different spokespersons who had the authority to give interviews only provided information about the specific areas they were responsible for. The government failed to create a unified image and there appeared no one in the government who could be trusted.

Public criticism was harsh. The people wanted information, but there appeared to be no one in authority who provide it.

(Interview, Thai Diplomat Leader, 2014)

Thus, the crisis continued to grow, especially when the Minister of Foreign Affairs gave an interview in which he discussed the World Court of Justice case concerning Prasart Phra Viharn, or Preah Vihear and said, “As fast as communication, Thailand has no claim.”

- **The “Preah Vihear” PR Challenge: Thai Government Information Management in the Digital Age**

The deteriorating situation became an increasing concern with clashes among different political groups, and between political groups and local stakeholders who live along the Thai-Cambodian border. The local public called for peace between Thais and Cambodians since local Thais-Cambodian were business partners.

To calm the situation, the government had to be responsible for both the security and the proper communication vehicles. However, their communications seemed weak, especially when it came to the government spokesman, who must be believed when providing information.

Those who were responsible for the Prasart Phra Viharn case appeared weak with their handling of the case, and there was no team responsible for the release of information. There were civil servants who work in communications, but they had no supervising spokesperson.

(Interview, Military Leader, July, 2014)

Of course, the government had a spokesperson, but with the current social conditions, the public did not trust politicians and were suspicious about benefits to be gained through relations with their neighbor, Cambodia. Therefore, the government press agency had to avoid having a government representative release the news.

Instead of having a politician-acting as Government Speaker, Thais Communication Team turned to select a team of Public Speakers. This team included a representative of the Army, and an official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to serve as the head of spokespersons.

- **“Trust the Team” (since we perform the best): The New Communicative Theme**

Trust is a vital factor for the success of a communication message. The results of our textual analysis found that Thai Government Team had focused their communication strategies on 2 hi-light periods: The Court Hearing period was between 15-19 April 2013—it is the timing, when the court heard the arguments of the two countries. The Court Ruling period was when court announced its ruling on 11 November 2013. At these times, relationships were relatively calm between the two countries.

An important part of the new PR campaign in the digital age of 2013 was not on the key informative message, but on constructing the Character of the Thai team. Therefore, the spokesperson tried to present the Thai Team as “a character of the gentleman” who delivered the facts. They expected that these characters could eliminate any contempt and avoid any insult to the opposition, as is explained in the following excerpt from one of the interviews:

The principle is to kill nor scorn. If there is a fact that can be presented to win the case, present it, but do no insult the Cambodians. We must present our case as a gentleman would.

(Interview, Chief of Communication Officer, May 2014)

During the Court Hearing period, trust had to be built among the top target—the active public who were capable in using the digital media. The communication strategy was to make them act as “the followers” by providing the factual knowledge on the history and background of the issues, and the actions each party would follow. They applied clear and simple message strategies to explain general information. They also distributed this information through a variety of channels, two weeks before the hearing days. They made a live broadcast the court proceedings on government television channels.

- **Avoiding of the “Winning or Losing” Topic**

Another strategy employed during these promotional endeavors was to avoid speaking about “winning or losing” as was talked about during the promotion of the Preah Vihear case 50 years previously. Instead, they focused on trust in the team, which is committed to the cause, which all active citizens could witness with their own eyes.

- **Focus on the Information, Its Flow, Feed-Forward and Feedback**

Information is at the root of promotion. It can be classified as basic information that provides a simple, easy to understand, explanation for the case, the workings of the ICJ, the preparation of the case, the makeup of the legal team, which has no political affiliations, their readiness and finally, the different ways the court could rule.

When presenting this information, the key message was, “This is an invitation for all persons to join together in this historical event by following the proceedings broadcast live from across the globe.”

Our concept, or thinking, was to show all Thai people that we were fully prepared. We would show no weakness to the Cambodia side, no exchange of benefits offered through the exchange of property as was rumored...and the Thais would see this as they watch their representatives pursue the case.

Whether the Thai team won or lost the case, the Thai team could still win the hearts of their Thai compatriots.

Interview, Government PR officer, 2014)

Flow is considered the key of PR content as it provides the “information flow”. In order to make the right information flow, “trust” is the big issue. According to the interview, the team accepted that the Government PR team, thus, had to trust in the communication process. It includes sources of information, the way to deliver the message, the clarity of message, and the team’s decisions on how to release these messages.

In the digital era, though social media has continued to grow in importance, the team of the Government PR accepted that mass media still retained its central position for communications. When promoting an important issue, many interviewees believed that social media can provide outlets for repeating the message, or providing an even broader reach of target audiences. For example an academic who observed the Preah Vihear Issue commented that:

Online media today is becoming ever more popular. It's a great tool for repeating news that has been covered by different mass media, giving the story much broader reach.

(Interview, an academic, June, 2014)

When managing the communications on the Preah Vihear issue, the Thai PR team employed a variety of channels, including print such as a book on the background history of the case or a Q&A book, documentary television programs and short animated films as well as different activities, like discussion forums, press conferences, press releases and appearances on different programs where they would be interviewed.

For Twitter and Facebook, an external consultant, who was a former news reporter, was engaged to provide advice, as communication objectives had to be set for followers in order give them correct updates quickly before anyone else.

(Interview, Government PR leader, 2014)

In addition, the team of academics agreed that all the information had to be posted on the relevant websites to serve as a central database for interested persons. This way people could search for the information they wanted to know, gain a better understanding or use it as reference when posting on other media channels like television and social media, so that the information was readily available for those who want it.

Feed-forward is another communication management element that the PR team had to be concerned with, particularly the PR team leader, or spokesperson, who is responsible for presenting information, accepted that it was necessary to know in advance on the desires of their audience or the expectations of different target groups. These “feeding” of audience desires and expectations would rather shape the key message released by the PR team. According to the PR officers, they had to know public knowledge and perceptions in advance, so that they could present the right information or could explain the more difficult points by using simple language.

As the case about Preah Vihear was quite complex and had its historical background...the person team need to required people who could explain it to the general public in a way that was easy to understand.

(Interview, Government PR Officer, 2014)

Feedback was a third element that the spokesperson had to be concerned about with the advent of the 3.0 agenda setting age. To achieve their success, they set up a team to listen to feedback coming from every channel, which they could then apply in expanding their results.

For example, at the beginning of the project, the team focused on Facebook to determine how well followers, particularly members of the second group, the media and officials of relevant agencies, understood their message. If the responses showed that they understood what was being communicated, they could then explain to others the same message, and if there was a change in direction, they would still be able to follow the same line of thought.

Furthermore, the feedback from the public was very important, and to give them a voice, the team organized a poll to evaluate the public's level of understanding of the Preah Vihear case.

We organized a poll to survey the level of overall understanding the public had about the Prasart Phra Viharn as well as specific points of the case. This was conducted once a month in order to apply the results to adjusting our strategy.

(Interview discussing stability, 2014)

In addition, the research results showed that the team took very seriously the feedback they received from the different groups, from all traditional forms of communication as well as online. They could then use this information to determine how well their message was being communicated and what adjustments were required to be adjusted before the court announced its decision.

...using an online monitor helped us follow comments and complaints online, to listen to what people thought so we could make adjustments and correct misunderstandings. We employed a keyword search for such words as Phra Viharn and defense of the case.

(Interview, Head of the Military PR, 2014)

By monitoring communication, we could check the direction the news was taking and make a daily summary. During the more important periods, we summarized the news twice a day.

(Interview, Government PR head, 2014)

- **Information Sharing with Stakeholders at Various Levels**

Formal and informal meetings in a small group with key stakeholders became a strategic way to understand public knowledge and perception. According to the governmental PR officer, these key stakeholders were those who work for the nation's security, members of the media and politicians. By listening and exchange information, the PR team could predict on what kind of information was necessary for dissemination and why.

The path that should be followed is to make contact with small groups of no more than four to five persons so it is easy to have an exchange of ideas and talk about things in a receptive manner about points or ideas that are difficult to discuss in a large meeting. For instance, we met with a group of television program producers and provided them with a summary of what was happening.

(Interview, Government PR Officer, 2014)

Reporters would ask a lot of detailed questions including those that the spokesperson could not answer, but if the spokesperson would give an answer based on a policy or specific principle, the reporters will begin to trust and believe them. In some cases, they already knew the answer, but need to ask so they can report the news.

(Interview, Government PR Leader, 2014)

The local people living in the affected border region also acted as the important stakeholder. These local people had good relationship with the Cambodians through family relations, business, trade, or just daily contact. The Government PR team, thus, had to realize that this group had been affected directly by events and become weary of the fighting. Therefore, the local authorities acted ask a PR team and applied a number of the communication techniques and channels, such as searching them out, and talking directly with them. The local PR objectives included to build trust and confidence in the governmental decision with a soft, non-aggressive approach rather than influence them.

We had to go right to the place – so we could create understanding about different points through direct discussion with the local villagers. We also needed to use local communication channels to help raise understanding about the truth, emphasizing that by living together peacefully, we can bury our weapons.

(Interview, Local Governor, 2014)

- **LIVE Broadcast at the Critical Periods:**

Nothing speaks louder than real action is an assumption behind the live broadcasts during the critical Periods. The first LIVE broadcasts from the ICJ in the Hague, Netherlands, took place between 15-19 April 2013, during which time both the Thai and Cambodian representatives presented their cases at ICJ.

Based on the issue and scenario observation, this live broadcast could be considered a “turning point” for creating an increase in the confidence felt in “trust” for the Thai team among Thai stakeholders. The Government television stations presented the oral hearing of the Preah Vihear case in real-time from the International Courtroom in the Hague, to the Thai public nationwide.

The Live broadcast began with the program commentator reviewing the points of the case, as well as the rules of the proceedings and other important information the audience should know using graphic presentations to assist with the explanations. Like “live” sport broadcasts, the PR team also introduced the important players in the case and their roles. After this introduction, the program moved to the courtroom without any comment.

The broadcasts were presented in real-time along with a running translation of the proceedings. There was no review or presentation of opinions during the oral hearings, so the audience could watch undisturbed to how the case played out. So, they could then make their own decision based on what they saw and heard.

One of the key government’s PR then accepted that they decided on live broadcasting, somewhat like what Thai people valued. It was the Thai value reflecting in a Thai old proverb saying that “Sib-Pak-Wa-Mai-Tao-Ta-Hen”, which could be translated in English as a “truthful” Picture is worth a Thousand Words.”

4) The Mediated PR Effect: The Emerging of “The Heroes”

These live broadcasts, which gave the audience a chance to watch the proceedings as they happened, increased overall interest in the case at the time and over the following six months. People became extremely impressed with the head of the Thai legal team and a female lawyer, who was a member of the team. The positive impressions were identified in the social media, and then shared among the social network. Within a couple hours, their names became the headlines among local news reporting.

The team of Thai lawyers attracted such interest that reporters met them at the airport on their return to Thailand and interviewed them, as if they were returning Olympic athletes. Though the female lawyer was not a Thai citizen, Thai netizen and local Thai media framed her somewhat like she was the winner of an international beauty pageant.

Because of this “hero worship”, government public relations received a further boost through Earned Media and Shared Media. In fact, the communication teams of different agencies actually began to compete in their release of information about their background and lifestyles,

not the fact of the court's justice. The female lawyer, especially, was invited to be on many programs where she would be interviewed, as well as a guest at different functions. Her pictures were also released and posted online showing her working and presenting arguments at the court, along with comments.

A FINAL THOUGHT

The establishment of the “digital” media on earth may imply that everyone has an opportunity to directly enjoy the rich information of any event, through their own eyes. The agenda is somewhat difficult to be set by the authority-or those who are in power. However, the arrival of digital media, including the social media can lead to the emergence of co-created public agenda. The case of Preah Vihear may lead to further discussion on how the teams of government PR should act, what kind of information they need to provide to the public and what roles should they serve, who should be on the priority list of target publics, etc.

The case of Preah Vihear pinpointed that the Government can also enjoy playing a new role as a facilitator or a conductor in the digital age. Instead of focusing on setting the Government's own agenda and or propagate it, or controlling the public opinion, the government can provide a variety of tools for the public to access to the event, as a first-hand experience and gain necessary information so that the audience can understand the context and predictive cause-effect by providing necessary information to facilitate the event with “simple but rich & real information” in a united message & through multiple channels.

However, lots of historical events need to be learnt and shared on Government PR in the digital age. We are just at the beginning of these disruptive change of technology.

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