Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly
2014, Vol. 91(3) 508–529
© 2014 AEJMC
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1077699014538831
jmcq.sagepub.com
SAGE

A Global Perspective on Public Relations Professionalism: Mapping the Structure of Public Relations Associations' International Networks

Aimei Yang[1] and Maureen Taylor[2]

Abstract

Associations play a powerful role in socializing practitioners. The presence of public relations associations across the world is one more step toward professionalization for the entire profession. This study examines the structure of global public relations professionalization manifested through the networks among international and national public relations professional associations. The findings of a cross-national, multilevel network analysis suggest that despite the overall dominance of international public relations associations, at the regional level, local centers have also emerged. In addition, European public relations associations have developed more relationships with other national, regional, and international associations than American-based professional associations.

Keywords

public relations professionalization, globalization, multilevel network analyses

Public relations is undergoing a professionalization process in many countries.[1] Professionalization occurs when there is a specialized knowledge in an area that identifies who is qualified to provide a service. The professionalization of medicine, law,

[1]University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA
[2]University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, USA

Corresponding Author:
Aimei Yang, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, University of Southern California, 3502 Watt Way, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0281, USA.
Email: aimei.yang@usc.edu

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

Downloaded from SHAREOK. Persistent Handle URL: https://hdl.handle.net/11244/25319

counseling, and journalism has helped solidify their role as valued societal functions because members are expected to provide a consistent, predictable quality of service.[2] Although professionalization in some fields creates restriction on the supply of practitioners or the reduction of productivity and competition,[3] in general, professionalization is a desirable goal for most occupations.

Professional associations, often invisible to the public, play crucial roles in the professionalization process. Associations create normative values, standardize practices, and present a unified identity to both practitioners and organizations that use their services. Consider how the American Bar Association (ABA) works across the world to strengthen the rule of law by disseminating American legal values. In public relations, associations such as the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) and the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) represent some of the largest professional associations. Partnerships among organizations may influence the development of public relations.

This study explores the trend of global public relations professionalization. We understand this trend as one aspect of a larger social, economic, and political transformation often referred to as globalization.[4] The increasingly closer connections of public relations practitioners, agencies, and associations among different countries form systems or networks that cross national boundaries. Such networks may shape how public relations is defined, practiced, and theorized.

This cross-national study provides a macro understanding of professionalization that can contextualize existing individual country studies.[5] Public relations is influenced by competing internal and external influences. National social, economic, and political contexts influence practices, and external public relations values imported by international public relations associations, firms, agencies, and multinational companies also have influence. However, few studies have explored how national associations are connected with international associations or associations in other countries. Transnational connections among associations may disseminate public relations values and affect the development of national practices. This external force may impact the development of national practices in many nations that extend beyond just those who are association members.

This article applies World Polity Theory (WPT) to public relations professionalization. WPT suggests that worldwide models are formed based on widely accepted values and that these models emanate from developed nations. Interactions among national and international public relations associations exemplify a worldwide model that may create common structural, institutional, and cultural features of the profession across nations. When different regional, national, or international associations partner and build relationships, a global network emerges, and it is the structure of this network that prompts our study.

World Polity Theory

Globalization has brought considerable changes to our era. Across countries, many professions, norms, and even people's entertainment forms are similar despite

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

differences in their history, social, and economic environments and available resources.[6] These similarities suggest a trend of structural, institutional, and cultural isomorphism at the global level.

Mixed Models

WPT adopts a systematic theoretical perspective and emphasizes the power of institutionalization through global-level symbolic processes.[7] Worldwide models are formed based on widely accepted values (e.g., human rights, socioeconomic development, equality, and justice) and development models (e.g., the Excellence Theory developed in the United States). The concept of worldwide models explains the strikingly similar structural, institutional, and cultural features of practices across nations. Consider that certain professions in different countries are similar to each other because they follow similar professional models (e.g., journalism values objectivity, timeliness, and social responsibility).[8]

The existence of worldwide models does not deny the complexity and difference among national contexts. Location still matters; however, the promotion of worldwide models causes disarticulation between the ideal and the actual reality faced by members of a local culture as they attempt to follow models that were created elsewhere. In public relations, practitioners may be told to operate one way, but their job might demand different actions. For instance, Gupta surveyed Indian practitioners and found that deception of the public remains a common practice.[9]

Worldwide models are constantly negotiated among actors in different contexts. Academic conferences, professional conferences, and presentations by international experts can influence the development of practices in a nation. Participation varies widely as associations may engage in interactions at different levels, on different activities, and during different times. WPT provides a way to study competing models and actors that influence professionalism in a nation and across the world.

Multiple Actors Form Polity Networks

Non-state actors such as professional associations are the creators of common values and normative practices because they embody worldwide models.[10] They exert impact through shaping the language of contracts and codes of ethics, monitoring the accountability of states and business, mobilizing resources for problem-solving, and framing public discourse in a manner that encourages social movements and change.[11]

WPT maintains that the connections among non-state actors form an international network of influence, also known as the polity network. The polity network is a highly interconnected network in which actors from different nations are densely interconnected through international actors. Some international actors emerge as well connected, central, and influential in this network, and such positions facilitate the dissemination of worldwide models. The polity network emerges as an alternative power that balances the influence of nations' networks and commercial networks and forms an important dimension of the emerging global networked society. Furthermore,

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

the efficiency of the adoption of a worldwide model depends on an actor's position in the polity network.

Striving Toward Professionalization in Public Relations

Many have observed a trend of professionalization across the world.[12] The professionalization of a field allows certain occupational practices to be acknowledged by society, and it also allows for maintaining autonomy in the practice.[13] One step toward greater societal respect and recognition is the creation of strong professional associations.

Professionalization of Public Relations through Professional Associations

Professional associations revolve around occupational control and socialization. They "define professional work, establish boundaries and demarcate fields, standardize work methods, and form professional loyalties."[14] Powell and DiMaggio noted that professional associations create "normative rules about organizational and professional behavior" that reward those who follow the rules and punish those who do not.[15]

Scholars have examined the role and influence of professional associations and how they contribute to change, innovation, and technology diffusion.[16] Studies have found that professional associations, although located outside agencies and organizations, profoundly influence how members think and act. Associations often connect organizations by establishing and promoting standards and new ideas.

In public relations, professionalization is partly fostered by professional associations. There are professional associations in over sixty nations, with several countries having more than one association. Associations provide training, accreditation, and mentoring opportunities, and interface with academics, sponsor research, and socialize entrants to the field. By defining professional norms and standards, the influence of professional associations goes far beyond association members.

Identifying the Global Network of Public Relations Associations

Globalization is often illustrated through denser and closer interconnected networks among countries.[17] These rich connections bring people with different ethnicities, religions, cultures, and other backgrounds into a global system. Such a system may reflect multiple types of relationships and factors that influence the structure of the global public relations association network. One goal of this study is to illustrate the global networks of professional association relationships.

It is likely that public relations associations are connected through at least three types of predictive relationships. *Membership* means one organization is another organization's member. *Partnership* means two organizations collaborate with each other on certain projects. *Acknowledgment* relationships mean one organization is aware of the existence of another organization and acknowledges the other organization in certain ways (e.g., mention the organization on its website or articles).

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

Predictors of the Structural Features of a Global Public Relations Associational Network

Linkages among public relations associations can show the structure of international influence on professionalization. Studies suggest that professionalization may also be conditioned by national economic, cultural, and political factors.[18] These factors may further affect the structure of professional networks.[19] A second goal of this study examines if national factors provide additional predictive insight into the structure of professional networks.

Economic divide. Studies have found that the larger the economic gap among nations, the less likely for them to collaborate on an equal basis.[20] In other words, although actors with different economic backgrounds may still build relationships, such relationships may not be reciprocal and equal.

Cultural blocks. Culture can be understood as a set of values, beliefs, norms, and practices that inform, guide, and motivate people's behavior and shape people's worldview.[21] Cultural factors also play an important role in influencing the structure of international networks.[22]

Different political systems. Whether a country has established a democratic political system will influence an association's ability to participate in international collaboration. Democracy encourages diverse opinions and vibrant civil participation, such as people participating in professional associations or other types of organizations. Authoritarianism or semi-authoritarianism countries regulate citizens' civil participation and the activities of civil associations. People may be discouraged from participating in groups.

In sum, the literature suggests that both international forces and national conditions influence public relations practices in different nations. This article maps the structural features of public relations professional associations' international networks and the factors that influence the network structure. Two research questions guide this inquiry.

RQ1: What is the global structure (e.g., network centralization, density, centrality measures, subgroups, and goodness of fit with a core–periphery model) of international public relations associations' network?
RQ2: What are the determinants of the structure of international associations' network?

Method

Sample

To identify public relations international professional associations (a form of international non-governmental and non-profit organization), the researchers consulted *The*

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

Yearbook of International Organizations, a comprehensive source on INGOs (International Nonprofit and Nongovernmental Organizations).[23]

To identify national professional associations, the researchers consulted four sources: *World Report* from International Communications Consultancy Organization (ICCO), *PR Links* from International Public Relations Association, *The Global Public Relations Handbook*, and *PR Week*. Since 2004, ICCO has generated an annual resource that includes data collected from twenty-four national public relations professional associations. The other sources provided information about national public relations associations, conferences, and news about the field.

Data Collection

Archival records and data-mining technology constructed the public relations associations' transnational network. Archival records are voluminous and important sources of social network data and are less affected by human memory or perception.[24] Hyperlink analysis identifies which associations have consciously linked to others. Hyperlink analysis creates a record of perceived organizational relationships. In other words, associations do not link to each other unless they see a reason.[25] To obtain the hyperlink data, a web crawler, LexiURL Searcher, mined hyperlinks among websites. The obtained data were further processed and transformed into a directional network data matrix.

Economic context. WPT suggests that more developed economies influence less developed ones. The level of economic development of individual countries is measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in 2012. Data were extracted from the World Development Indicators.[26] Following Lee et al., data were further categorized into three groups. Nations ranked in the upper third of economic wealth were coded with a score of 3 (rich). Nations ranked in the middle third received a score of 2 (medium), and the lowest third were assigned a score of 1 (poor).[27]

Cultural context. In this study, cultural context is measured with dummy coded variables: African, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Japanese, Latin American, Orthodox, Sinic (Chinese), and Western culture. The cultural types were adopted from Huntington. Huntington provided a map that groups countries according to their civilization types.[28] This study follows the classification list that Henderson and Tucker have elaborated from the map.[29]

Political context. Countries' democracy levels are used to measure political context. Countries' overall democracy scores from Marshall and Jaggers' Polity IV data were used in this study. Polity IV is a composite index of democracy with a scale from −10 to 10.[30]

Data Analysis

Social network analysis. This project recognizes that public relations associations could engage in three types of networks: membership, partnership, and acknowledgment

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

relationship networks. For the membership network, two organizations are considered as having a relationship if one is a member of another organization. This is a directional network. If A is a member of B, then there is a relationship tie sent from A to B. The partnership network is defined similarly but without the direction of relationships. If A and B are partners on activities/projects, such a relationship is mutual. Finally, the acknowledgment relationship network is developed based on hyperlink data. Two organizations share a relationship if there is a hyperlink between the two organizations' websites. A hyperlink is conceptualized as an indicator of acknowledgment.[31] This is a directional network, and organizations may either initiate or receive hyperlinks. The three networks are constructed separately, and the relationships are not mutually exclusive (e.g., two organizations may have a membership relationship and a partnership relationship). The three relationship networks were analyzed with a network analysis software program: UCINET 6.[32] UCINET 6 was used to compute the centrality measures, fit discrete core–periphery models, and test network regression models.[33]

Results

Sample Descriptives

The analysis identified seventy-two national and international/regional public relations associations. There are thirteen international/regional public relations associations, four African associations, ten American associations, sixteen Asian associations, twenty-five European associations, and four Middle Eastern associations (see Table 1 for details). In terms of social contexts, most countries that have developed national public relations associations have an established democratic system (68.6% countries with polity IV ≥ 8, polity IV ranges from -10 to 10). Most countries with national associations are relatively rich (60.3%) with GDP per capita ranked among the upper third in the world; 25.9% countries have middle-level GDP per capita and only 13.8% countries with low GDP per capita (ranked among the lower third in the world). In terms of cultural context, the majority (43.1%) of countries have a Western context. Other large cultural groups represented in this sample are Islamic culture (15.5%) and Latin American culture (13.8%). Figure 1 shows that public relations is truly an international industry that involves the efforts of practitioners from around the world.

RQ1: The Global Structure of Public Relations Associations' Networks

RQ1 directs attention to the global structure (including measures of network centrality, subgroups, and overall structural tendencies) of public relations associations' networks. The analysis examined three networks: membership (one association holds membership of another association), partnership (associations claim to be strategic partners or have collaborated on projects, events, seminars, or conferences), and acknowledgment (associations share hyperlinks). This analysis explores network centralization, subgroups in each network, and the tendency for each network to fit with a core–periphery model.

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

Table 1. Names of International Associations and Countries-of-Origin of National Associations.

	National public relations associations				
International public relations associations	Africa	Americas	Asia	Europe	Middle East
African Public Relations Association, Council of Public Relations Firms, European Public Relations Education and Research Association, Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication, International Association of Business Communicators, International Communication Consultancy Organization, International Public Relations Association, International Public Relations Association Gulf Chapter, Institute for Public Relations, Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa, Public Relations Organization International, Public Relations Society Arab, The Middle East Public Relations Association	Kenya Nigeria South Africa Uganda	Argentina Barbados Brazil Canada Chile Jamaica Mexico Puerto Rico Uruguay United States	Australia Bangladesh China India Indonesia Israel Japan Kazakhstan Malaysia New Zealand Pakistan Philippines Singapore South Korea Syria Thailand	Austria Belgium Croatia Czech Republic Denmark Estonia Finland France Germany Ghana Greece Hungary Ireland Italy Luxembourg Netherlands Norway Poland Portugal Romania Russia Spain Switzerland Turkey Ukraine United Kingdom	Bahrain Qatar Saudi Arabia UAE

Membership network. The membership network reveals the most formal relationship between different associations. Network centralization scores were calculated to examine the extent to which the network was integrated around one or a set of organizations. Network density reflects the proportion of all possible ties that are actually present. For the membership network, the overall density is 0.0067 (2.182% outgoing ties, 16.465% incoming ties), which is the lowest among the three networks. Given the size of this network, this finding suggests that very few national public relations associations become members of other associations. Furthermore, the direction of relationships suggests that only a handful of public relations associations (e.g., IPRA, ICCO, etc.) have high indegree centrality (calculated based on ties that a focal actor receives from others. High indegree centrality indicates that the focal actor is highly respected

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

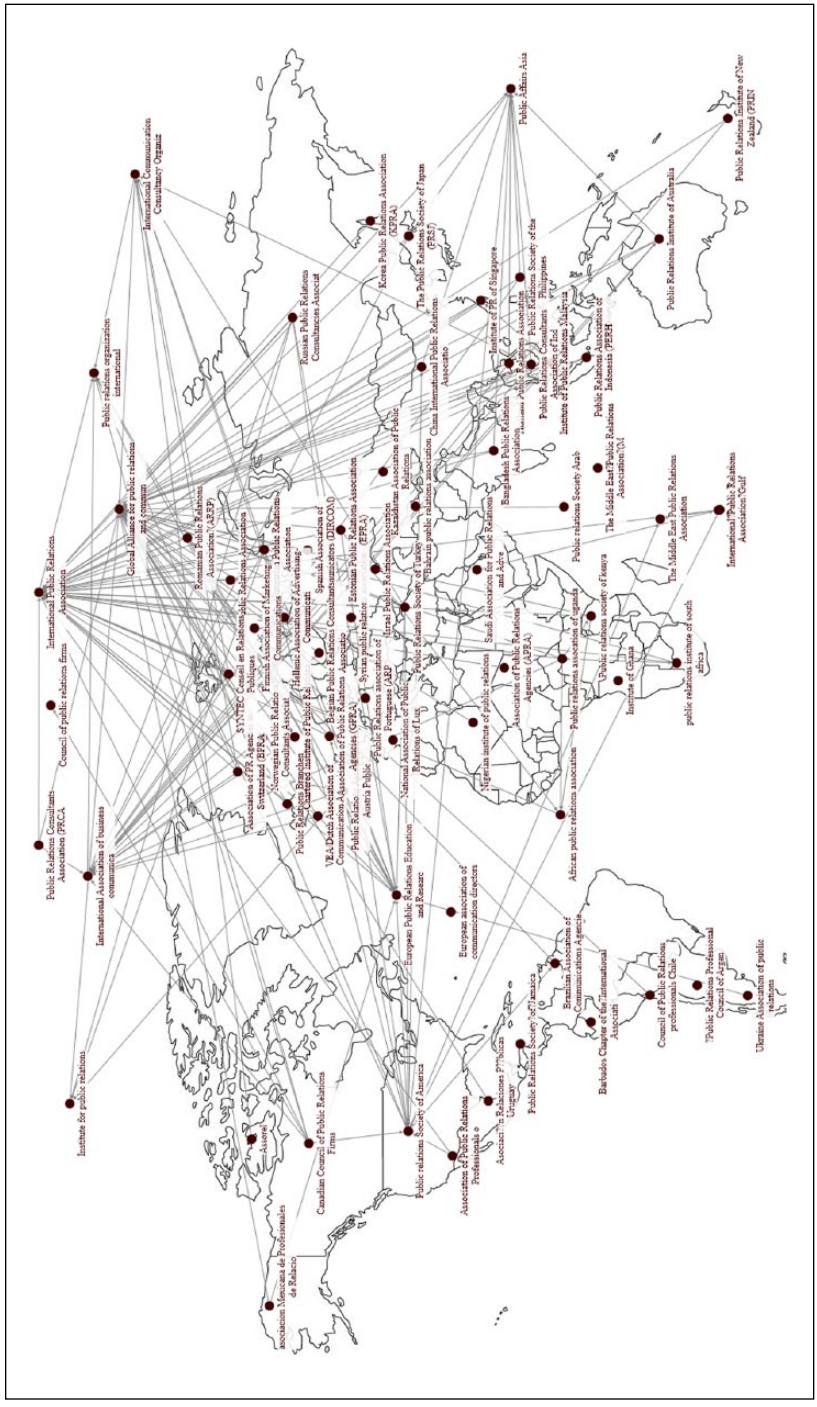


Figure 1. Partnership network.

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

among its contacts). In other words, only a few associations have other national associations as members. Close examination suggests that most of those associations are international associations with members from around the world. Regional (including several countries) associations do not have national associations as members. Given that the membership network represents the most formal relationship, our findings suggest that relationships among international and national associations are more formal than connections among regional and national associations.

To further examine centrality and prominent actors, eigenvector centrality for each association was calculated (assessing actors' centrality based on their overall importance in a network). A high score indicates an actor is central to the main pattern of connections among actors, whereas a low value suggests that the actor is peripheral in the network). The eigenvector analysis reveals that the membership network is highly centralized. The first five factors explained 93.7% of the pattern of distance among actors. The most central nodes (central by being well connected, and at the same time, connected with other central actors; see Table 2 for details), in a descending sequence, are the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication (GAPRC), the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD), the EUPRERA, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), the Public Relations Association of Austria, the Spanish Association of Communicators, the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA), and the International Communication Consultancy Organization. As suggested in Table 2, the majority of these organizations have a European background (see Table 2 for additional background information). The analysis revealed a pattern of European centralization when it comes to the membership network. European associations enact greater memberships with other national and international public relations associations.

To further understand the subgroups in the membership network, an *N*-Cliques analysis was performed. *N*-Cliques analysis assumes that an actor is the member of a clique if they are connected to every other member of the clique at a distance of *N* (in this analysis, $N = 2$). For this network, eleven 2-Cliques were found, and most of those cliques were formed by European associations (see Table 3 for additional information). This confirmed earlier findings. European associations are most likely to join and become members of international public relations associations. This tendency may offer those European players disproportional presence and influence over the operation of international associations. Furthermore, the analysis fitted core–periphery models to the membership networks. UCINET produced blocked adjacency matrices by fitting the correlation between the observed data matrix and an idealized core–periphery structure matrix. The matrix shows network members that belong to the core (leaders) and the periphery (associations on the outside). The membership network structure fit poorly for a core–periphery structure matrix (model fitness = 0.019), suggesting the nodes in the membership network are disconnected, and therefore cannot form an overall structural pattern.

To sum up, in comparison with public relations associations from other parts of the world, European associations are participating in international collaborations as members. The active status of European associations may allow them to influence

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

Table 2. Normalized Bonacich Eigenvector Centrality Scores and Backgrounds Information of Top Five Most Influential Public Relations Associations in Each Network.

Organizations	Centralities[a]	Backgrounds and missions[b]
Membership network		
GAPRC	77.35	A confederation of global PR associations and institutions, representing 160,000 practitioners and academics, aiming at unifying the PR profession, raising professional standards, sharing knowledge, and being the global voice for PR
EACD	57.38	A network for communication professionals in Europe, aiming at establishing common quality standards and advancing professional qualification
EUPRERA	27.56	An organization with a European focus and global character, aiming at stimulating and promoting innovative knowledge and practices of PR education and research
CIPR	35.39	A representation body for U.K. PR practitioners, aiming at enhancing the reputation of PR and the professionalism of members
PRIA	35.39	A representation body for PR professionals in Australia, aiming at promoting high ethical standards in the PR industry in Australia through accredited membership and recognition
Partnership network		
GAPRC	60.36	See above[c]
IPRA	56.08	Founded in 1950, a network of global PR practitioners and institutions, with 700 members from eighty countries. IPRA aims at providing intellectual leadership in the practice of international PR and helping members meet their professional responsibilities
IABC	33.18	Founded in 1970, a network of about 16,000 business communication professionals in over eighty countries. IABC aims at enhancing member professional standards and skills
EUPRERA	32.99	See above[c]
PRSA	27.73	Founded in 1947, PRSA is the world's largest organization of PR professionals. PRSA provides professional development, sets standards of excellence and ethics for its members. PRSA also advocates for social understanding of PR services
Acknowledgment network		
IPRA	70.25	See above[c]
GAPRC	37.54	See above[c]
PRISA	35.13	Founded in 1957, PRISA represents PR professionals throughout the southern African region. PRISA plays a leading role in uniting professionals and driving transformation
MEPRA	35.04	Based in the UAE, MEPRA aims at promoting PR in the Middle East region, raising professional standards, and providing a structure for professional development and a unified voice
ICCO	33.06	The ICCO membership comprises national trade associations in twenty-eight countries. ICCO provides a forum for PR consultancies to meet and address issues of mutual interest and concern

Note. GAPRC = Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication; PR = public relations; EACD = The European Association of Communication Directors; EUPRERA = The European Public Relations Education and Research Association; CIPR = The Chartered Institute of Public Relations; PRIA = Public Relations Institute of Australia; IPRA = International Public Relations Association; IABC = International Association of Business Communicators; PRSA = Public Relations Society of America; PRISA = Public Relations Institute of South Africa; MEPRA = The Middle East Public Relations Association; ICCO = International Communication Consultancy Organization.

[a]Normalized Bonacich eigenvector centralities.

[b]Information provided is based on each organization's website.

[c]Organizational background information has been previously introduced.

international practices. Furthermore, international associations are more likely to have national associations than regional associations as members.

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

Table 3. Eleven 2-Cliques Found in the Membership Network.

2-Cliques	Member organizations
Clique 1	Public Relations Professional Council of Argentina, Public Relations Institute of Australia, Public Relations Association of Austria, Public Relations Verband Austria; Estonian Public Relations Association, Public Relations Institute of New Zealand, Public Relations Institute of South Africa, Spanish Association of Communicators, The Middle East Public Relations Association, Chartered Institute of Public Relations, Public Relations Society of America, Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa, Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication, European Public Relations Education and Research Association
Clique 2	Public Relations Institute of Australia, Public Relations Association of Austria, Public Relations Verband Austria, Association of Public Relations Agencies, Russian Public Relations Consultancies Association, Chartered Institute of Public Relations
Clique 3	Public Relations Association of Austria, Public Relations Verband Austria, Belgian Public Relations Consultants Association, Public Relations Branchen, SYNTEC Conseil en Public Relations, Association of Public Relations Agencies, Hellenic Association of Advertising-Communications Agencies, Public Relations Association of Portuguese, Russian Public Relations Consultancies Association, Association of PR Agencies in Switzerland, Public Relations Society of Turkey, Chartered Institute of Public Relations, European Association of Communication Directors
Clique 4	Public Relations Association of Austria, Public Relations Verband Austria, Chartered Institute of Public Relations, Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication, European Association of Communication Directors
Clique 5	Barbados Chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators, Brazilian Association of Communications Agencies, International Association of Business Communicators
Clique 6	Public Relations Institute of Australia, Brazilian Association of Communications Agencies, Association of Public Relations Agencies, Public Relations Association of Indonesia, Public Relations Consultants Association, Russian Public Relations Consultancies Association, International Communication Consultancy Organization
Clique 7	Brazilian Association of Communications Agencies, International Association of Business Communicators, International Communication Consultancy Organization
Clique 8	International Public Relations Association Gulf Chapter—Qatar, International Public Relations Association, International Public Relations Association Gulf Chapter
Clique 9	Public Relations Institute of Australia, Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication, International Communication Consultancy Organization
Clique 10	Association of Public Relations Agencies, Russian Public Relations Consultancies Association, International Communication Consultancy Organization, European Association of Communication Directors
Clique 11	Global Alliance For Public Relations and Communication, International Communication Consultancy Organization, European Association of Communication Directors

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

Partnership network. The partnership network reveals additional information about how associations interact in the international arena. These are less formal relationships than the membership network. For the partnership network, the overall density is 0.0309 (network centralization = 51.59%, *M* degree = 4.389, *SD* = 6.800). Because this is a symmetrical network (symmetrical meaning that relationships are completely mutual), only the mean degree and standard deviation were examined. The findings suggest that around the world, far more public relations associations are engaged in partnership building than membership building. Furthermore, relationship distribution in this network is unequal. Some organizations are much more likely to develop international partnerships than others. To test if densities are indeed different between the partnership network and membership network, the researchers used a standard network inferential and bootstrap approach to test statistical significance.[34] The difference between means is 0.0243. The standard error of the difference by the standard method is 0.0027 and the estimate by bootstrap is 0.0117. The two-tailed probability is .0362, suggesting that partnership relationship is significantly more likely to exist among associations. Furthermore, a matrix correlation analysis suggests that when two associations engage in one type of relationship, there is a marginally significant chance they would also engage in another type of relationship ($p = .576$). In other words, when associations engage in either partnerships or memberships, they are more likely to also engage in another type of relationship, and therefore broaden the scope of their collaborations.

Eigenvector analysis revealed that the partnership network is a less centralized network in comparison with the membership network. The first four factors (the only three factors with explanatory percentage larger than 10%) explained 55.5% of the pattern of distance among actors. Although still prominent, the European actors are no longer dominant in this network. As Figure 1 shows, overall, the most central actors in the partnership network are international associations. Table 2 provides details about these organizations' names, history, and missions. In each continent, there are regional centers. The African Public Relations Association connected with national associations from several African countries. In Asia, the regional association, Public Affairs Asia, is the most central actor. In Europe, the regional association, EUPRERA, is most prominent. In the Middle East, the International Public Relations Association Gulf Chapter is very central. In North America, although the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is a national association, it is exceptionally active at the regional and international level. For the partnership network (model fitness = 0.007), the network structure fit poorly for a core–periphery structure matrix, suggesting relationships involve a much broader range of associations.

Overall, the analysis reveals that the partnership network is a much more engaging network with more actors participating in relationship building. Several regional associations emerged as important actors suggesting that they may carry regional values to other public relations associations.

Acknowledgment network. The acknowledgment network has the highest overall density: 0.0312 (37.889% outdegree, 20.037% indegree), suggesting more associations

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

used hyperlinks to acknowledge other national or international associations. Interestingly, outdegree is higher than indegree, suggesting more associations are eager to send out hyperlinks linking to other organizations. Associations show web visitors that they are linked to other associations.

The eigenvector centrality analysis revealed that the first factor only explained 11.7% of the pattern of distance among actors. This analysis suggests few actors are overwhelmingly dominant. As suggested by Table 2, both regional associations and international associations can achieve central positions. Interestingly, the GAPRC achieved high centrality across three networks. Of note, several international public relations associations (International Public Relations Association, International Communication Consultancy Organization, Public Relations Association International, and GAPRC) and regional associations (The Middle East Public Relations Association [MEPRA], African Public Relations Association, and EUPRERA) emerged with high scores on eigenvectors. Because higher scores indicate that actors are more central to the main pattern of distance among all of the actors, both international and regional associations appeared to be central in this acknowledgment network as well. Overall, partnerships and acknowledgments are much more common in terms of international relationship building, perhaps because it is easy to link to partners' websites acknowledging them as important.

However, the acknowledgment network (model fitness = 0.451) is much closer to a core–periphery structure.[35] There are ten organizations in the core suggesting that when it comes to acknowledgment, there is a hierarchical structure among associations. A few international associations are more likely to be acknowledged than the majority.

RQ2: Determinants of the Global Structure of Public Relations Associations' Networks

RQ2 asks about the determinants of the structure of public relations associations' network. What kind of societal factors (political systems, levels of economic development, and dimensions of societal culture) influence public relations practice? A set of network regression analyses tested the relationship between these contexts, network centrality, and network structural features. Network regression follows statistical inference procedures based on network data.[36] For all tests, international and regional associations are only included in a control variable called organizational type. Only models that are significant are reported.

Membership network. In this network, regression analyses show that political context, economic development, and cultural backgrounds are significant predictors of actors' eigenvector centrality ($R^2 = .409$, adjusted $R^2 = .374$, $F = 15.667$, $p < .05$). Specifically, the standardized coefficient for political context =.639 ($p < .05$) suggests that a higher democracy level is associated with more chance for a country's association to be central. For economic context, the standardized coefficient = .189 ($p < .01$), suggesting that national associations from richer countries are more likely to be prominent (see

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

Table 4. Regression Models of the Effects of Political, Economic, and Cultural Factors on Eigenvector Centrality.

	Membership network	Partnership network	Acknowledgment network
Organization type (control variable)	.023	.005	.358**
Political factor	.437*[a]	.198*	.304*
Economic factor	.189*	.607**	.490**
Cultural factor			
Western	—[b]	—	—
Latin American	−.016*	−.203	.001
African	.023	−.009	.017
Islamic	−.013	.102	.000
Sinic	.000	.000	.000
Hindu	.000	.000	.000
Orthodox	−.014	.002	.000
Buddhist	.000	.000	.000
Japanese	.000	.000	.000
R^2	.409	.917	.612
Adjusted R^2	.374	.912	.601
F value	15.667*	39.740**	32.835**

[a]Standardized coefficients are reported.
[b]Western culture serves as the reference category.
*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed). **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

Table 4 for details). Finally, in terms of the cultural context, an association with a Western cultural background is more likely to be central. However, those factors do not affect how associations become members of subgroups in the membership network.

Partnership network. In this network, political context, economic development, and cultural backgrounds are significant predictors for both eigenvector centrality and subgroup structure. In terms of the effects on eigenvector centrality ($R^2 = .917$, adjusted $R^2 = .912$, $F = 39.740$, $p < .001$), the model is significant. Economic development is the most powerful predictor (standardized coefficient = .107, $p < .001$), followed by culture (Western culture is again associated with higher eigenvector centrality) and political context (standardized coefficient = .198, $p < .001$; see Table 4). For subgroup structure, the model is also significant ($R^2 = .557$, adjusted $R^2 = .531$, $F = 28.509$, $p < .05$). Economic development is the most important predictor (standardized coefficient = .206, $p < .05$), and political context (un-standardized coefficient = .038, $p < .05$) is also significant. These findings suggest that associations with similar political and economic backgrounds (homophily) are more likely to join together and become members in the same clique.

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

Acknowledgment network. In the acknowledgment network, the overall model is significant on eigenvector centrality ($R^2 = .612$, adjusted $R^2 = .602$, $F = 32.835$, $p < .01$). Organization type is a prominent predictor in this model (standardized coefficient = .358, $p < .01$), suggesting that whether an association is an international or national one would significantly influence its chance to be central in this network. Economic level is also a significant predictor for network eigenvector centrality (standardized coefficient = .490, $p < .001$). Political context is also a relatively influential predictor (standardized coefficient = .304, $p < .05$; see Table 4). Because this network features a core–periphery structure, a set of regressions was then performed on the structure of this network. The model is significant ($R^2 = .540$, adjusted $R^2 = .506$, $F = 21.113$, $p < .05$). Only the variable "organizational type" achieves significance as a predictor (standardized coefficient = .071, $p < .05$), suggesting that international organizations are more likely to hold a position in the core group.

Discussion

The findings provide general and specific evidence about the development of global public relations networks. First, there is evidence of worldwide professional networks that may create common structural, institutional, and cultural features of the public relations profession across nations. Second, European influences and regional and global centers have emerged, and these relationships will influence future practices. Finally, economic, political, and other social factors are influencing the creation of homophilous networks of associations. These findings, and the implications of each for the development of local and global practices, are discussed below.

WPT and Public Relations Associations' International Networks

The analysis reveals evidence of a worldwide model that may create common structural, institutional, and cultural features of the public relations profession across nations. Figure 1 depicts a globalized international public relations network. This network suggests the participation of a broad spectrum of associations with different backgrounds. It is likely that public relations associations across the world have recognized the value of international cooperation and are making efforts to expand their networks. Such an effort may continue to promote more international cooperation and the exchange of ideas, models of practices, norms, and values. As these ideas, models, practices, and values become normative, they may eventually be adapted by even those practitioners who are not members of the associations.

Consistent with WPT's prediction, Figure 1 demonstrated that many countries are linked through their connections with international associations. Similar to Beckfield's findings with intergovernmental organizations, this study also reveals inequality—some associations appear as more prominent in different networks, whereas others remain peripheral.[37] Associations from economically developed democracies are active participants of international professional networks. They engage in either partnerships or memberships. Because one relationship is likely to lead to the

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

development of another, associations from the global North may continue to broaden the scope of their collaborations and deepen their influence.

This finding suggests the potential existence of hierarchy and explains the lack of broad participations in the membership network. Becoming a member of another organization suggests high levels of identification and commitment. Perhaps actors from many countries around the world still lack identification with the models and values promoted by international associations because their own culture and heritage are not adequately represented in international models. Future studies should explore how this hierarchical structure influences the public relations practice in different countries. It is likely that such structure simultaneously helps to professionalize public relations practice in a country while at the same time constraining the localization of public relations or limiting who the newly emerged public relations industries serve. Hierarchy may limit the long-term development of indigenous models of public relations in many countries (e.g., in some African countries, public relations agencies mainly serve multinational corporations rather than local business).

The Co-existence of European Influences and Regional Centers

A highly centralized membership network features the dominance of European public relations associations and a few international associations. WPT argues that more connected actors are likely to influence the norms and ideologies international associations enact. European associations frequently participate in international collaborations with other international and regional associations. The European associations are playing a leadership role in the global network and may influence many nations' practices.

The European public relations associations' partnering patterns may be influenced by their approaches to public relations. Europeans proceed from a broad sociological approach to public relations that examines "the relationships public relations has with respect to the societies in which it is produced and to the social systems it co-produces."[38] Reflexivity of the role of organizations in society exemplifies European approaches. European reach is extended because of the willingness of European national associations to participate in international and regional associations as members and partners. Forging diverse relationships may be a direct outcome of their social understanding of public relations. Furthermore, it is likely that the centrality of European associations in the global network suggests that they will have a greater influence on the development of public relations in other nations.

Our data also point to the co existence of regional and global networks. Although many scholars have argued that the world is increasingly interconnected,[39] our study suggests that the world is not uniformly connected. Inequality exists at multiple levels. Some actors, such as international associations in all three networks, appear to be centers. Some regions, especially in the membership network, Europe, are more well connected than others.

The partnership network identified several regional centers. National associations behaved differently in membership and partnership networks. In the partnership network, which features much more equal collaboration than the membership network,

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

national associations from around the world (not just European associations) are more likely to participate. Furthermore, associations from the same region are more likely to be connected through regional centers. It is likely that instead of a top-down international public relations professional model being disseminated around the world, each region may develop and create its own model that reflects regional commonality. Such models may enjoy regional popularity and even have certain levels of influence on worldwide models. Future studies should use longitudinal research designs to examine if this trend of multiple centers of the network or the European influence changes over time.

Societal Influences on the Global Network

The literature suggests political, economic, and societal culture influence public relations practice.[40] The findings of **RQ2** suggest that economic development and political context significantly influence how a national or international association is positioned in networks. Homophily theory argued that networks are comprised of like-minded, culturally similar individuals or organizations.[41] Homophilous organizations are more likely to join together and become members in the same clique. Our findings provide evidence that associations sharing similar political and economic backgrounds are more likely to join together and become members in the same clique. Yet, cultural similarity was not a major reason for how organizations develop connections or become members of the same subgroup. This finding may be influenced by the sample of the study: although each culture is represented, some culture groups include only one nation (e.g., Buddhist, Hindu, Japanese, and Sinic culture). Nevertheless, in membership and partnership networks, culture seems to affect organizations' chance to be central in networks. Organizations with a Western cultural background are more likely to be well connected. Given that most Western culture nations in the sample are also wealthy and have democratic systems, it is inconclusive to suggest that culture alone determines the structure of public relations international professional networks.

The data suggest that an association's societal background also affects the level of influence of that association. Associations from wealthier, democratic systems are more likely to be part of the core in international networks. When information, norms, and values are shared and exchanged through networks, it is likely that ideas and norms from those countries may also dominate the globalization process of the public relations profession. They will have disproportional influence over the trajectory of the future of the profession in many countries.

Conclusion

Public relations is an international industry that is rapidly developing across the world. This article examined if and how public relations associations form international networks that are conducive to the spreading of models of professionalization.

This study has several limitations, including the use of secondary, archive data and data-mining that do not allow us to assess the motivations behind communication

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

patterns or observe the decision-making process. Although hyperlink analysis is a common method for ascertaining choices in interorganizational relationships, it is only one measure of acknowledgment relationships.[42] First, future researchers may conduct interviews with organizational leaders to specify factors that shaped their networking choices. Second, the network members constitute a potentially biased sample of economically developed countries (Europe) with well-institutionalized democratic systems. Public relations is more likely to flourish in those countries.[43] Future studies should identify a more diverse sample including national associations from other parts of the world.

This study is a benchmark for tracing trends in global public relations professionalization, and theories and models. Future studies should examine the changes and the evolution of public relations professional networks. In addition, although this study adopted Huntington's culture typology and an assumption that culture and norms are similar among countries within the same cultural group,[44] we acknowledge a refined typology is needed. Finally, this study focused mainly on national and international associations. We recognize the relationship among state/province/local organizations and national ones can vary from case to case (e.g., regional PRSA chapters and the national PRSA), and much more can be learned by further exploring meso- and micro-level dynamics. Research should study multiple levels of networks to capture the rich interactions between international, national, and local associations.

Despite these limitations, this study offers a new perspective for future investigation into the impact of the globalization process in public relations professionalization. The associations that appeared most central may influence practices in other nations because they will identify which practices can count as part of the public relations profession. Through normative values and professional training, they may both consciously and unconsciously regulate other national associations members' behaviors and thus influence how public relations is practiced and theorized.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Seema Gupta, "Professionalism in Indian Public Relations and Corporate Communication: An Empirical Analysis," *Public Relations Review* 33 (2, 2007): 306-12; Eyun-Jung Ki and Soo-Yeon Kim, "Ethics Codes of Public Relations Firms in the United States and South Korea," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 87 (spring 2010): 363-77; Soo-Yeon Kim and Bryan H. Reber, "How Public Relations Professionalism Influences Corporate Social Responsibility: A Survey of Practitioners," *Journalism &Mass*

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

Communication Quarterly 86 (fall 2009): 357-74; Krishnamurthy Sriramesh and Dejan Verčič, *The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2009).

2. Randal A. Beam, David H. Weaver, and Bonnie J. Brownlee, "Changes in Professionalism of U.S. Journalists in the Turbulent Twenty-First Century," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86 (autumn 2009): 277-98.
3. James W. Begun, "The Consequences of Professionalization for Health Services Delivery: Evidence from Optometry," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 20 (4, 1979): 376-86.
4. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996).
5. Hugh M. Culbertson and Ni Chen, *International Public Relations: A Comparative Analysis* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996); Gupta, "Professionalism in Indian Public Relations and Corporate Communication"; Sriramesh and Verčič, *The Global Public Relations Handbook*.
6. John Boli and George M. Thomas, "World Culture in the World Polity: A Century of International Non-governmental Organization," *American Sociological Review* 62 (2, 1997): 171-90; John W. Meyer, John Boli, George M. Thomas, and Francisco O. Ramirez, "World Society and the Nation-State," *The American Journal of Society* 103 (1, 1997): 144-81.
7. Jason Beckfield, "Inequality in the World Polity: The Structure of International Organization," *American Sociological Review* 68 (June 2003): 401-24; Jason Beckfield, "The Dual World Polity: Fragmentation and Integration in the Network of Intergovernmental Organizations," *Social Problems* 55 (3, 2008): 419-42.
8. Aimei Yang, "Assessing Global Inequality of Bribery for News Coverage: A Cross-National Study," *Mass Communication and Society* 15 (2, 2012): 201-24.
9. Gupta, "Professionalism in Indian Public Relations and Corporate Communication."
10. Beckfield, "Inequality in the World Polity"; Beckfield, "The Dual World Polity."
11. John M. Shandra, "The World Polity and Deforestation: A Quantitative, Cross-National Analysis," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 48 (1, 2007): 5-27.
12. Magali S. Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Mirko Noordegraaf and Martin Van der Meulen, "Professional Power Play: Organizing Management in Health Care," *Public Administration* 86 (4, 2008): 1055-69.
13. Mirko Noordegraaf, "Remaking Professionals? How Associations and Professional Education Connect Professionalism and Organizations," *Current Sociology* 59 (4, 2011): 465-88.
14. Noordegraaf, "Remaking Professionals," 468.
15. Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 71.
16. Julia Evetts, "The Sociological Analysis of Professionalism: Occupational Change in the Modern World," *International Sociology* 18 (spring 2003): 395-415; Julia Evetts, "Introduction: Trust and Professionalism: Challenges and Occupational Changes," *Current Sociology* 54 (4, 2006): 515-31; Royston Greenwood, Roy Suddaby, and C. R. Hinings, "Theorizing Change: The Role of Professional Associations in the Transformation of Institutionalized Fields," *The Academy of Management Journal* 45 (spring 2002): 58-80; Jacky A. Swan and Sue Newell, "The Role of Professional Associations in Technology Diffusion," *Organization Studies* 16 (5, 1995): 847-74; Patrick Vermeulen, Rutger Buch, and Royston Greenwood, "The Impact of Governmental Policies in Institutional Fields:

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

The Case of Innovation in the Dutch Concrete Industry," *Organization Studies* 28 (4, 2007): 515-40.
17. Peter Monge and Sorin A. Matei, "The Role of the Global Telecommunications Network in Bridging Economic and Political Divides, 1989 to 1999," *Journal of Communication* 54 (3, 2004): 511-31.
18. Sriramesh and Verčič, *The Global Public Relations Handbook*.
19. Monge and Matei, "The Role of the Global Telecommunications Network in Bridging Economic and Political Divides"; Natalia Rodriguez-Salcedo, "Mapping Public Relations in Europe: Writing National Histories against the US Paradigm," *Communication & Society* 25 (2, 2012): 331-74.
20. Glenn Firebaugh, "Empirics of World Income Inequality," *American Journal of Sociology* 104 (May 1999): 1597-630.
21. Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1997).
22. Dominique Brossard, James Shanahan, and Katherine McComas, "Are Issue-Cycles Culturally Constructed? A Comparison of French and American Coverage of Global Climate Change," *Mass Communication and Society* 7 (2, 2004): 359-77.
23. Eric Neumayer, "Do International Human Rights Treaties Improve Respect for Human Rights?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49 (6, 2005): 925-53.
24. Mark E. J. Newman, *Networks: An Introduction* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).
25. Ki D. Hyun, "Americanization of Web-Based Political Communication? A Comparative Analysis of Political Blogospheres in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 89 (3, 2012): 397-413.
26. World Bank, *World Development Indicators, 2012* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012).
27. Seungyoon Lee, Peter Monge, François Bar, and Sorin Adam Matei, "The Emergence of Clusters in the Global Telecommunications Network," *Journal of Communication* 57 (3, 2007): 415-34.
28. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 26-27.
29. Errol A. Henderson and Richard Tucker, "Clear and Present Strangers: The Clash of Civilizations and International Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly* 45 (2, 2001): 317-38, 335.
30. For details, see Data Users Manual for Monty G. Marshall and Keith Jaggers, "Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2008" (November 2009), http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm.
31. Han Woo Park, "Hyperlink Network Analysis: A New Method for the Study of Social Structure on the Web," *Connections* 25 (1, 2003): 49-61.
32. Stephen P. Borgatti, Martin G. Everett, and Linton C. Freeman, *UCINET 6 for Windows: Software for Social Network Analysis* [Computer Program] (Harvard, MA: Analytic Technologies, 2002).
33. Stephen P. Borgatti and Martin G. Everett, "Models of Core/Periphery Structures," *Social Networks* 21 (4, 2000): 375-95.
34. Carsten Wiuf, Markus Brameier, Oskar Hagberg, and Michael P. H. Stumpf, "A Likelihood Approach to Analysis of Network Data," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 103 (20, 2006): 7,566-70.
35. Borgatti and Everett, "Models of Core/Periphery Structures."
36. Skyler Cranmer and Bruce A. Desmarais, "Inferential Network Analysis with Exponential Random Graph Models," *Political Analysis* 19 (spring 2011): 66-86.

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016

37. Beckfield, "The Dual World Polity."
38. Øyvind Ihlen and Betteke van Ruler, "How Public Relations Works: Theoretical Roots and Public Relations Perspectives," *Public Relations Review* 33 (3, 2007): 243-48, 244.
39. Boli and Thomas, "World Culture in the World Polity."
40. Sriramesh and Verčič, *The Global Public Relations Handbook*.
41. Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook, "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (1, 2001): 415-44.
42. Park, "Hyperlink Network Analysis," 53.
43. Aimei Yang and Maureen Taylor, "The Relationship between the Professionalization of Public Relations, Societal Social Capital and Democracy: Evidence from a Cross-National Study," *Public Relations Review* 39 (4, 2013): 257-70.
44. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

Downloaded from jmq.sagepub.com at UNIV OF OKLAHOMA on January 20, 2016