

Public Relations for Peace Building: Case study from Colombia



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Public Relations for Peace Building

- + Purpose of Study: Link public relations with peace building
- + Principals: Colombian govt and FARC-EP – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia Peoples' Army – over 50 years of armed conflict
- + Two streams of literature: Public relations as relationship management and Literature on Peace building
- + Cultivation strategies – communication methods that public relations use to develop relationships and deal with stress from conflict (Grunig)
- + Dual concern strategies: contending, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, distributive, cooperating, unconditionally constructive, and win-win or no deal (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung 2001, 2006)

Public Relations for Peace Building

- + Plowman, et. al. (2001) added two other negotiation tactics: third party mediation and principled strategy based on Huang (1997)
- + Mixed-motives model is also relevant here
- + Peace building literature focuses on conflict transformation theories
- + Research Questions: 1. Comm factors that contributed to and facilitated the peace accord; 2. the specific public relations strategies and techniques that led to the relationship building; the use of relationship building indicators in the negotiations

Methodology

- + Methodology:
- + Analysis of online news media documents reporting on the process of the negotiations
- + 501 articles in three leading Colombian newspapers from Sept 2012 and August 2016 were analyzed using a codebook created for the purpose:
 - + Note: given the secrecy of the negotiations (especially at the outset to build trust), the full picture is not publicly known

Key Findings

- + Communication factors used: Interpersonal confidence building measures; third party mediation; personal influence; compromising
- + Communication mainly through interlocutors at the negotiating table (guarantors and observers) and intermediaries outside the formal talks (facilitators and messengers such as an entrepreneur who knew FARC commander and President Santos' brother Enrique Santos)
- + Confidence building measures used: such as FARC announcing six unilateral ceasefires during the six years; FARC's public apologies; government suspending air bombing; President Santos granting reprieve to 30 guerillas;

Key Findings

- + Formal official negotiation phase gave led to more trust between the parties resulting in paving the way for more informal interpersonal communication between the principals – true dialogue
- + Compromising was a key determinant in building trust and bringing the two sides closer ending in an agreement
 - + FARC leader: *"It is not a matter of giving up ideas and principles, but of appealing to the wisdom of making mutual concessions in order to achieve the most valuable goal, peace"*

Public Relations Strategies and Techniques used

Actors	Public relations techniques
The Government	Third party mediation Principled, Distributive strategy Compromising
FARC-EP	Contending, Compromising

Key Findings

- + Mixed-motives model in play throughout the six years of negotiations (win-win zone fluid during the six years)
- + Personal influence central to the negotiations and deal
- + Although not studied as suggested by Hon and Grunig (1999), the four key relationship indicators were very evident:
- + Trust: President Santos stated: “We have been in the process of trust building for five years”
- + Control Mutuality: As legitimately more powerful, the government ceded some of its power to give FARC a more legitimate voice – News media: *“It is unreasonable to ask a guerrilla to cease hostilities when their only negotiating tool is the use of force...”*

Key Findings

- + Commitment: Key to keeping the six year negotiations going even when both sides broke the ceasefire several times
- + Satisfaction: Least disclosed directly in the media. It was more evident in the fact that the two sides continued to work through difficult times when each came to the brink of walking away.
 - + *"We want to give special thanks to Cuba and Norway, guarantor countries of this process, for their support and for the environment of trust they provide."*
- + Conclusion: The use of third party mediation, interpersonal confidence building measures, interpersonal communication and compromising participated in increasing trust, commitment and control mutuality between the Colombian government and FARC-EP.