Police- Community Relationship in Kuwait:
Public Relation Approach

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Abstract
Police force is an important element of society which has been vigorously investigated by scholars and thoroughly examined by social researchers. This paper intends to explore the Kuwaiti police in relation to its community from a public relations perspective. The co-creational approach, a major public relations theoretical concept, assumes that both the police and the Kuwaiti community are co-creators of meaning. Therefore, identifying these co-creators' perspectives is essential in order to understand the phenomenon at hand. This paper utilizes the qualitative paradigm that acknowledges the importance of the participants' frame of reference. Twenty-two participants, of community members and police officers, are interviewed and their answers coded and transcribed. These semi-structured interviews have been the basis of the data collection process, which is structured around formally existing concepts (relational elements of trust, satisfaction, control mutuality and commitment). The qualitative sampling techniques of quota and purposive sampling are also used. In the analysis, the two themes of Faith and Communitarianism emerge, representing a key context for the public relations theorist. They contribute to our understanding of public relations in the context of Kuwaiti police-community relations. The findings highlight important issues that form obstacles to a better police-community relationship. The most salient of which is the organization's communication style. This paper has extended the body of knowledge on public relations in the specific context of police public relations in Kuwait. Furthermore, this thesis demonstrates how environmental/contextual factors (Kuwaiti history, culture and economic conditions) could influence organization-public relations.

Keywords: police, public relations, community, power

Introduction

This paper explores current police-community relationships in Kuwait. No previous research on this particular topic is known; therefore, I am breaking new ground. As a result, I have formulated the research question and its qualitative, thematic methodology to cover all possible aspects. Specifically, the question is: *What is the current relationship status between the Kuwaiti community and its police?*

The reason for the general nature of this question is important because it allows the research to be flexible enough to cover all possible aspects of this unknown phenomenon. In answering this question, the research is driven by a public relations focus equipped to address the police-community relationships as seen in the rest of this paper.

Kuwaiti police

Kuwaiti society existed, survived, and progressed for more than two hundred years without organized police. Policing was the responsibility of these localized communities, the structure of which was organized through other institutions, and motivated by social responsibility (Crystal, 2005). This function and mentality of the Kuwaiti police is related to its purpose for existence and evolution. The Kuwaiti police did not emerge "to handle regime- threatening internal dissent" (Crystal, 2005, p. 180), but were instead established to keep peace and order within the state, to protect people's property, and to enforce the law (Ministry of Interior, 2013).

At this point of history, the obligations and accountability of the police towards the Kuwaiti community is clear, which means that the police organisation is legitimized in the community eyes, since it represents the community's values and needs. However, the police organisation has been through a "complex process… [that] occurred in conjunction with the development of Kuwait as a modern nation state" (Al-Fahed, 1989, p.1). During the 1950s and 1960s, this mirrored that of a crude oil revolution that realized a sudden rise in wealth for the country and its citizens.

The police organisation began "as a small domestic police service… and emerged into a small national armed force in the mid-1950s" (Al-Fahed, 1989, p. 89). The police department has grown in complexity along with the government: its powers expanding and its role more explicit (Al-Refaei, 1990). However, the police become an "an instrument of the State" (Al-Fahed, 1989, p. 89). Control now falls under the Ministry of the Interior, which itself is governed by the Emir. This is in accordance with the constitution of Kuwait, which states that "the Emir of the State is considered to be the chief of the police" and the Ministry of Interior is the immediate superior of the police (Constitution of Kuwait, 1962).

By better understanding the context of the force's creation and purpose, one is also better able to understand the relationship between the police and community. Therefore, the philosophy of policing practiced by the police institution and manifested through its communication approach is an essential element in co-creating this meaning with the community.

Kuwaiti community

Kuwaiti community is collectivistic high-context culture, and so there is an emphasis on the group rather than on the individual. In this sense, the members of Kuwaiti culture are primarily concerned with the needs of the group and thus tend to view 'self' as entrenched in group relationships (Al-Husaini, 2004). This feeling strengthens the rule of 'obligations' over 'rights'. For example, those decisions essential to one's life, such as marriage and career, are influenced by group decisions and may be more group- oriented than in a low-context community (Al-Krenawi and Graham, 2005).

Arab society, both traditional and contemporary, considers the family as the basic unit of social organisation (Barakat, 1993). The Kuwaiti family is heterogeneous due to the fact that Kuwaiti people are descended from different cultures and civilizations, e.g. from Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq (Hadi and Al-Fayez, 2002). Kuwaiti society is family-oriented, where the family is generally very closed and private (Al-Thakeb, 1985). It consists of a closely-knit, yet extended family circle, with some members only distantly related. Thus, the family is a cohesive institution, with individuals helping out with the many different tasks within the family, supporting each other, rallying around in times of difficulty, and often pooling resources for business ventures or to overcome hardship (Al-Mekaimi, 2003).

In high context cultures, as Kuwait, the emphasis is on non-verbal communication and subtlety, rather than frankness. Thus, ambiguity and obscurity characterize conversations in a high-context culture (Zaharna, 1995). Furthermore, High context communication is identified by Hall as involving "more of the information in the physical context or internalized in the person" (Hall, 1976, p. 79). In other words, greater confidence is placed on the non-verbal aspects of communication than on the verbal aspects.

The origin of Kuwaiti ideology is to be found in the Islamic religion as well as tradition and culture (Alsuwailan, 2006). Arabs are heavily influenced by their religion, to the degree that most Arabs use the words Muslim and Arab interchangeably, which causes confusion as to what is religion and what is culture (Bledsoe, 2005). Religion is often practised as if it were part of Arab culture and old culture is adopted by some who think it is Islamic (Hill, Loch, Straub and El-Sheshai, 1998). Kuwaiti culture itself is derived from Arab tribal tradition –the original *Utub* were tribal Arabs (Bedouin) from the interior of Arabia, who changed to a settled way of life on the coast. Bedouin tradition has been reinforced over the centuries by the constant migration of tribes through Kuwaiti territory (Ghabra, 1997).

Public Relations in Kuwait

Arabs have utilized public relations for thousands of years (Alanazi, 1996). A famous example is the press release, first used by the Babylonian government in the year 2000 B.C., for the purpose of teaching Babylonian farmers ways of increasing crop yields (Sriramesh, 2009, p. 997).

An interesting fact is that the word 'public' (i.e., a group of people) does not exist in Arabic public relations textbooks (Al-Enad, 1990). Public relations literally translated,

the Arabic term means 'general relations'. Al-Enad (1990) provides two possible explanations for this: it could be a result of the political sensitivity to the word, shunned in order to distinguish it from the similar idea of 'public opinion', or it could be the result of unintentional mistranslation in the past that no one has attempted to change (p. 24).

The fact that such concepts and words are lacking in Arabic texts hints at vagueness in the field. Al-Enad (1990) describes this by noting the differences in developing countries, where modern public relations is imported from Western societies based on a democratic atmosphere, technological development, middle class growth, large scale business, etc. (Al-Enad, 1990). Most developing countries lack such infrastructure; thus, applying similar ideas to such a different culture creates the vagueness with which it is taught. In addition, there exist many Arab-centric conditions that are unique, some of which are noted by Kirat (2005), including the relatively short history life of modern public relations practice, the perception of public relations as a governmental tool, and the collective nature of the Arab culture and its effect on the idea and practice of individual freedom and opinion.

In practice, most Arab public relations practices function to disseminate public information (Al-Enad, 1990, Kirat, 2005). Kirat (2005) goes so far as to say that most public relations practitioners' duties are "secondary PR jobs such as assisting customers, guests, fulfilling hospitality functions at the expense of professional public relations, strategic planning, research and providing top management with sound advice" (p. 324). Although Kuwait has a fair atmosphere for public relations, including considerable advances in advertising, a relatively free media and political structure, as well as a strong economy, it is still in its relative infancy when it comes to public relations (Musallam, 2004).

Public relations in public sector

According to Al-Enad (1990), public relations in the Middle East, especially in the public sector, is different in terms of its purpose and mission from that of developed countries. He believes that one of the reasons behind such differences consists of "environmental factors", such as the authoritarian theory of the press. He also believes that public relations in governmental agencies in the Middle East work as information offices to achieve one or two goals: a) to educate the public on subjects related to the clients' fields of work, increasing their knowledge of pertinent issues, and persuading them to behave or act differently (e.g. to go to school, immunize, obey traffic rules, etc.), and, b) to publicize the achievements of clients and/or society as a whole in order to encourage public satisfaction (Al-Enad, 1990).

Police public relations departments are not much different from others in the public sector in terms of purpose and shortcomings. It began in the Ministry of Interior in 1955 as the press sector, charged with entertaining police force members and conducting awareness campaigns (Al-Refaei, 1990). Furthermore, as a whole, the police public relations department has virtually no role in the decision-making process of the police structure or organisation. Its mission is solely to distribute the organization's message and interpret the media and public's response. The role fits Al-Enad's (1990) general description of governmental public relations in Middle East, marked by a "purpose [which] is unbalanced, and the tools are the mass media which

not only publish and transmit whatever comes from government public relations but have no power to edit or change any part in most cases" (p. 25).

Theoretical frame

In order to accurately illustrate the current relationship, this research utilizes two major theoretical concepts: the co-creational approach (relational approach and community theory) which focuses on organisation-public relationships.

The Co-creational Approach
The co-creational perspective is the newest. It has shifted public relations from a functionalistic approach, where the goal of public relations is a means of achieving organisational goals (Botan and Taylor, 2004), to an analysis of meaning from the perspective of the public. In essence, the public and the organisation act as co-creators of meaning. Within this perspective there exist several theories and approaches, the most salient of which are the relational approach, co-orientation theory, accommodation theory, and dialogue theory. This paper has selected the relational approach and community theory which "explicitly share [the co-creational] values" (Botan and Taylor, 2004, p. 652).

The relational perspective

Ferguson (1984) was credited with this new regard for public relations–she proposed a paradigm shift in the public relations field, from focusing on effective communication towards an analysis of organisational-public relationships (OPRs); she used the relational approach, but only as a unit of analysis for public relations research. Ehling (1992) described this change as "an important change in the primary mission of public relations" (p. 622). In contemporary public relations theory, the new concept of 'relationship' (as a unit for analysis) has been both accepted and pushed further toward a comprehensive paradigm.

The emphasis on value-recognition is the motivating factor behind the relational perspective, where 'value' is defined as an approach's ability to deliver a message while simultaneously reducing costs. The theory states that this is best accomplished by building long-lasting, strategic relationships with the public.

Furthermore, the relational approach, as a co-creational theory, is applicable and valuable in this research context. The police-community relationship case is approached from the public relations perspective; that is, from the co-creational angle, focused on building and maintaining a healthy relationship with the community. Since there is no available data describing the current relationship, the first step in this direction is to assess the current relationship status of the police- community relationship.

Therefore, the relational dimensions of trust, satisfaction, commitment and control mutuality have been implemented. Although the relational perspective has identified more than twenty dimensions, these four are the most often utilised and validated in organisation-public relations studies (Cortese, 2008). Furthermore, the focus of the relational approach on the relationship as a unit of analysis helps this research reveal the current status of the police-community relationship.

Community theory

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) are credited with having been the first to support community relations in public relations studies (Hallahan, 2004). The authors believe that the mission of public relations should be the restoration and maintenance of the sense of community, where "the greatest stakeholder—the ultimate environmental consistency—is society itself, to which such corporations are ultimately and irrefutably answerable" (p. 59). By embracing such a view, an organisation should be able to accommodate community differences, thus reducing conflict. Ledingham (2001) explains that "in this perspective, public relations techniques and processes act to resolve differences within the social system comprised of organizations and the publics with which they interact" (pp. 286-87). Other public relations scholars (i.e. Wilson, Culbertson, and Chen) also understand the importance of community and have called for a greater focus on the community in public relations (Hallahan, 2005). For example, Wilson (1996) believes that "public relations must begin to think of our publics and our organizations in the sense of community" (p. 74).

In short, this co-creational perspective is useful in this research for two primary reasons: 1) this approach has the unique "potential to identify an appropriate framework or methodology to effectively evaluate the relationship between an organization and its public" (Jahansoozi, 2006, p.78), and 2) applying such a framework could help the police better serve the their public by improving the public relations as more than just "protocol tasks, publicity functions and secondary roles" (Kirat, 2005, p.326).

Methodology

The methodological qualitative approach is design to tackle the issue using the co-creational approach. The interview was the main qualitative method used in this research. The rationale behind employing interviews as a data collection method is to obtain first-hand information about the police-community relationship. However, it is worth mentioning that the interviews were structured around existing concepts (relational elements of trust, satisfaction, commitment and control mutuality) rather than having a more open approach. However, the interviewees were also asked questions relating to their understanding of the role of the police force, their experiences of the police force, and their opinion of the purpose of the police force in Kuwaiti society. In this research, two groups were included in the population sample: 1) community and police members, and 2) the community and the police elite.

This study uses a combination of two sampling techniques; specifically, that of quota and purposive sampling, where quota sampling is used to identify members of the Kuwaiti community. Purposive sampling is used to identify special participants with unique contributions. The implication of quota and purposive sampling techniques on this research sample produced four categories of participants including community members, police members (quota sampling), community elites, and police elites (purposive sampling).

Findings

The resulting interview data was reviewed using thematic analysis, which is a process that searches for patterns and meaningful themes within the interview data. In conducting this analysis, Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide to a six-phase analysis was used. The data also were analyzed using deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach is represented by the use of relational factors developed prior to the data collection. Through this process, the fruit of which consists of two identifiable themes: *police role* and *police-community relationship*.

Police Role

Police role is an overall theme discovered while coding the data, based on the inductive thematic approach. Within this overall theme, it appeared that multiple themes help determine an individual person's conception regarding the intended purpose and actual role of the police in Kuwaiti society, each falling under one of two worldviews, i.e. *Faith*, whose proponents presume that the police must exist because society needs a police force, and its members, are sacred, at times even idealized; and *Communitarianism*, whose proponents assume that the police force is yet another one of many necessary government institutions that exist to service the community.

Faith

With the *Faith* worldview, interviewees expressed their unconditional support of the police and their ability to keep social order. This worldview premise regards social order as paramount and the police as the pre-requisite for this social order, even for society. Therefore, a society without police is a society headed for demise. In terms of characteristics, this view idealizes the police by describing their presence and power with the Arabic term "*Kudwah*" which is an Arabic reference to political power, or "swagger".

The emotional attachment of the *Faith* worldview influences the participants' perspectives on police ineffectiveness and abuses because they hold social order (and the police force's ability to provide order) as more important than occasional police abuses. In effect, the *Faith* view influences the participants' perspective of the police, where they project positive attributes onto the police beyond what the police actually deserve. This is done because of the feeling that the police are not only necessary, but are also comforting when one believes that their police force is fair and effective.

Communitarianism

This term, *communitarianism,* is a philosophical theory of social obligations and relationships which emphasises the social-community role in terms of the way a country ought to function. Such an idea of the importance of community was articulated by the participants in this research. However, that was through the police-community relationship, where some interviewees acknowledged the community's importance in the relationship, as opposed to those with the *Faith* worldview.

In other words, the community believes that it should have the power and, furthermore, the responsibility, to determine the role of police. With the

Communitarian worldview, police exist to serve the community, where their performance is based on how well they do so in serving the community's needs.

In comparison with the *Faith* worldview, the *Communitarian* worldview is less emotionally committed/ loyal. It is more practical, where citizens constantly evaluate police behavior in order to decide whether it supports their stated role. Regardless of community composition, however, the *Communitarian* view ascribes no sanctity to the role of the police officer beyond that which the community grants him; rather, the worth of a police officer is measured by his contribution to the community as the centre of this relationship. In this view, community members have the right to monitor police performance through the country's civil society institutions.

Police-Community Relationship

The study applied four relational elements in discussing the police- community relations; however, the trust was the most discussed element and had significant influence according to the interviewees. The other three elements had mild effect in relations the police- community relationships. Therefore, trust exclusively presented in this research findings.

Trust

Regardless of the participants' perspectives, in terms of the influence of the worldviews, every interviewee acknowledged the existence of such trust issues. However, the interviewees held diverse perspectives. For instance, the *Faith* worldview is one that is completely in favor of trusting the police implicitly, often ignoring or justifying police mistakes. On the other hand, the *Communitarian* worldview is critical of police performance.

Actually, Goldsmith (2005) acknowledged that such trust might exist in relation to the community's trust in the police because the police have power and control in society which places them (p. 445). Therefore, the *Faith* worldview encourages trust in the police regardless of their performance.

The *Communitarian* worldview emphasises the idea that the police are merely a function to protect and keep order within the community. With this view, community members monitor police performance. Their view is more critical of police performance, since there is no need to revere police in order to feel safe; thus, there is less obligation to trust the police beyond police performance.

Police behavior and communication style were the most visibly discussed issues in relation to trust. In this context, the behavior of the Kuwaiti police force was the most discussed sub-theme during the interviews, perhaps because police behavior is the most visible aspect of police duties. The interviewees discussed all sort of police misbehavior ranging from rudeness, lack of sympathy, impoliteness, carelessness, incompetence, to the criminal behavior of police brutality and torture.

The *Communitarian* view seems to have the most vocal of critics in regard to this point, insisting that the police do not correctly understand their role as community servants. In other words, the behavior of the police force towards the community

indicates that the police lack understanding of their position in the power dynamic between themselves and the community they serve. The *Communitarian* camp tends to look at the flaws in police conduct so that the force can become better at protecting and serving the community in future.

This contrasts with the *Faith* worldview, which recognizes occasional police indiscretions but largely ignores them because there is the belief that the police are necessary for civil stability. This worldview believes that the police officers are the community elite who have been chosen to do an honorary task which is to protect civilians. In this sense, the police are an elite force and the holders of arbitrary power that "know what should be done" (Gaines and Worrall, 2011, p. 36).

Furthermore, the interviewees showed great interest of police communication style. However, as expected, the two worldviews have contradictory perspectives of the obligations of communication. The *Faith* view emphasises the community's cooperation with police as central to the community's stability. However, with the *Communitarian* worldview, the community as the centre of this relationship where the police accountable by informing the community.

With the *Faith* worldview, the police have a central position; a glorious mission that helps to secure community stability. Therefore, the media, along with other institutions, need to cooperate with the police to accomplish such a goal. The media's role in such a scheme is to enforce the positive image of the police. The media's effort should therefore be for the encouragement of the community's trust in the police, since trust is obligatory for the police-community relationship to thrive. The *Communitarian* view, on the other hand, incorporates the belief that the media are not obligated to trust the police. They are however, obliged to report on police performance without positive or negative bias.

In short, *Faith* desires positive reports so as to maintain faith in the institution (i.e. the police) and keep social order. Therefore, the negative coverage of the police is destructive, not only to the police-community relationship, but to the way that people think of police in general. On the other hand, in the *Communitarian* view, the media monitors police behavior, abuses, and performance; it checks the police against its communitarian purpose—to keep order in society without abusing police power.

Interestingly, both *Faith* and *Communitarian* perspectives were critical of police public- relations performance, though for very different reasons. The first blame the department for the negative image of the police by not better controlling the information flow, while the latter blame the police for not being more transparent. The *Faith* view of police public relations is as a gatekeeper, a sentiment that is related to the functionalistic approach and one that "creates and disseminates information that helps the organization to accomplish its goals" (Taylor, 2010, p. 6). In this perspective, the public relations department is expected to maintain a positive police image regardless of actual behavior.

The *Communitarian* view of police public relations functions is at odds with this perspective. According to Taylor (2010), communitarian PR falls under the co-creational approach, which perceives the police and community as co-creators of meaning. According to this approach, public relations "uses communication to help

groups to negotiate meaning and build relationships" (Taylor, 2010, p. 6). However, there is a feeling that the police PR department has fallen short of its community function, instead focusing on protecting the police department and its management from attack. That was clearly articulated by some interviewees and their concerns with police PR incompetence.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results show that the co-creational approach is a suitable alternative for the current practice of a functionalistic approach to police public relations. The approach assumes that both the police and the Kuwaiti community are co-creators of meaning, where community input in decision making is valuable and appreciated. This approach encourages the police organisation to be open to the community and to communicate more transparently. More importantly, this shift in police public relations practice will improve "protocol tasks, publicity functions and secondary roles" (Kirat, 2005, p. 326), where more members of the force are brought into management activities and decision-making. In short, the co-creational approach to public relations will improve the relationship with the public. Moreover, this shift from a functionalistic towards a co-creational approach will improve the efficacy of the public relations department.

Despite the fact that this traditional view has been abandoned by many cultures (Anderson, 2005), the Kuwaiti police still follow traditional ways. Policing scholars also agree that the emergence of community policing is a result of pressured change with regard to traditional policing.

The adoption of the community policing approach will help to improve behavior and communication styles by addressing the root issue. This adjustment will require the police to adjust its goals and mission, aligning it to the goals and mission of its community. The openness of the communicative system will help the policemen to understand the community members' attitudes towards the police. This will consequently improve police effectiveness, as they will be "actively engaged with the environment and creating many boundary-spanning roles linking the organization to its immediate task environment as well as social, cultural, and economic environments" (Greene, 2000, p. 314). Furthermore, community policing will bring about accountability through the acknowledgment of the police's role in the community.

Communication style will, by definition, become more open. It will shift away from a functionalistic approach and transmits its point of view, as opposed to listening to input from the community. Community policing and a co-creational communication approach will help to remedy this issue. This leveraging of the PR department will eliminate some of the need for media voices regarding police affairs. Consequently, the department will acquire a more prominent role in community dialogue.

In summary, this paper has added to public relations theory as it has extended the body of knowledge on public relations in the specific context of police Public Relations in Kuwait. This will help to round-out existing police PR data, especially by adding a Middle Eastern and Arabic perspective to otherwise Western theories (e.g. Relational, Community). Furthermore, this paper demonstrates how environmental

factors (*Faith* and *Communitarian* worldviews) could influence organisation-public relations.

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