Toward a Public Relations Approach to Nation Building

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This article advances a public relations approach to nation building. A public relations approach to nation building focuses on cooperative relationships and offers a communication-centered, participatory approach for improving ethnic relations in multicultural states. This research evaluated the Neighborliness Campaign in Malaysia and found it was effective in building cooperation between people of different ethnic groups. However, the Neighborliness Campaign also suffered from the unintended consequences of other government nation-building efforts. To improve future communication campaigns for nation building, a public relations approach, based on relational communication, is offered.

Daily news reports are filled with stories of ethnic tensions throughout many parts of the world. Ethnic tensions, ranging from blatant discrimination by one group against another to attempts of ethnic cleansing, show that serious efforts must be made to improve ethnic relations. Who should be in the vanguard of these efforts? Very often, it is national governments that attempt to diffuse ethnic tensions through nation-building campaigns, programs, and policies. However, considering the outcome of the Rwanda tragedy and the genocide in the former Yugoslavia, what can governments do to build relationships among people of different ethnic groups to stop ethnic violence before it begins?

One answer to this complex question may lie in understanding the various uses and processes of public relations. Public relations research and practice focus on relationship-building processes (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997). Although some view public relations as a business function, public relations may be viewed better as a tool to negotiate relationships between previously unrelated social systems or
as a tool to modify existing relationships between organizations and publics (Botan, 1992). Because improved interethnic relationships are needed in many multiethnic states, a public relations approach may be the key to stopping ethnic violence before it begins.

**PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The purpose of this article is to provide an outline for the role of public relations in the nation-building process. A public relations approach to nation building begins with an understanding of how governments have used communication to achieve national goals. A review of public relations, communication campaigns, and development communication literature shows that national governments see communication as a valuable resource in nation building. In the first section, this article extends the discussion of communication and nation building and provides an overview of information and development campaigns. In the second section, it provides a discussion of political theorists who have addressed the relationship between communication and nation building. In the third section, it lays out the background, methodology, and results of a case study—the Neighborliness Campaign in Malaysia. The Neighborliness Campaign is an ongoing, nation-building effort designed to foster interethnic relationships in Malaysia. This campaign provides a useful framework to evaluate public relations efforts as they contribute to the nation-building process. In the final section, this article examines the accomplishments and limitations of the Neighborliness Campaign and discusses implications for a public relations approach to nation building. Relational communication may offer a framework to build a public relations approach to nation building because it can describe relationship building at both the interpersonal and organization–public level.

Public relations focuses on the use of communication to achieve specific goals such as relationships; thus, this article will approach nation building from a relational perspective. Public relations functions already play important roles in the nation-building process of many developing nations (Taylor & Botan, 1997). Public communication campaigns are one resource for nation building, and other public relations functions have been used to attract investment and international aid to developing nations (Taylor & Kent, 1999). However, it is the use of public relations campaigns to help build national unity that is the focus of this study. It is the frequency of public relations campaigns in developing nations and the absence of its discussion from scholarly writing that make this study a significant contribution to public relations scholarship. The following section looks at how public relations efforts, as public information and development communication campaigns, have already contributed to the nation-building process.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The major framework that has guided U.S. public relations scholarship over the last decade has focused on symmetrical communication between organizations and publics (J. E. Grunig, 1989, 1992; J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 1992; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). In 1984, J. E. Grunig and Hunt proposed four models of public relations: (a) press agentry, (b) public information, (c) two-way asymmetrical, and (d) two-way symmetrical. Initially, J. E. Grunig and Hunt posited that the public information model—a one-way model that featured practitioners as journalists in residence who disseminated truthful information—would be the model most widely practiced (J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 1989). However, later research showed that the public information model was the most popular model practiced by U.S. government organizations (Turk, 1985). In the international context, the public information model is often the norm because public relations contributes to both development communication and nation-building campaigns (Van Leuven & Pratt, 1996).

Communication Campaigns

According to Rogers and Storey (1987), communication campaigns are strategic efforts that seek specific effects on a large group of people in a predefined timeframe. Government-sponsored mass communication campaigns relate information about such social issues as seatbelt use, heart disease, unsafe driving, forest fires, sexually transmitted diseases, drugs, smoking and tobacco use, environmental issues, literacy, and pollution (cf. Culbertson & Chen, 1996; Rice & Atkin, 1989; Rogers, 1976, 1983, 1995; Salmon, 1989). Public information campaigns, like all strategic communication efforts, have specific goals outlined by campaign planners. These specific goals are usually defined as campaign intent. Because many campaigns use persuasion theory, campaign intent often ranges from cognitive outcomes such as awareness, message recall, and knowledge about an issue to outcomes such as behavior or lifestyle changes (McGuire, 1989). In the communication campaigns literature, awareness and knowledge about a specified issue are considered short-range goals, attitude change about the issue is considered a midrange goal, and behavior change is considered a long-term goal (Mendelsohn, 1973). Although the progression from awareness to attitude change to behavior change may seem straightforward and logical, Hornik (1988) argued that “the central theoretical problem in the field of purposeful communication is explaining the gap between knowledge and behavior” (p. 113). Indeed, it is the “knowledge gap,” formulated by Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1971), that has both fascinated and frustrated communication campaign planners and scholars around the world.
Public information campaigns are not unique to the United States; nations in all stages of development have used the theories and methods of communication campaigns to educate target publics. Reports show that agriculture, business development, and literacy campaigns in Asia, India, and Africa have been successful (Rice & Atkin, 1989; Rogers, 1976, 1983, 1995; Salmon, 1989). However, “historically, many advocated a significant role for communication programs in bringing about rapid development” (Hornik, 1988, p. 115). Although the term development is most often viewed as “economic development,” this article takes a more participatory approach and views development as a social process that creates the conditions for people to negotiate and solve their own problems autonomously (cf. White, Nair, & Ascroft, 1994).

**Development Communication**

Development communication is one aspect of nation building. For many, development communication began when Wilbur Schramm (1964) examined the relationship between modernization and communication. Schramm outlined how communication campaigns could help “modernize some part[s] of a society” (p. 145) through a combination of mass media channels and face-to-face communication. Lerner and Schramm (1967) further examined the use of communication in economic and social development in a variety of cultural and social contexts. An initial assumption guiding development campaigns was that people in the developing world lack both the knowledge and skills that would allow them to achieve the status of a developed nation (Marsden, 1990). Much of the impetus for these campaigns was top-down communication from government and international organizations to publics. Schramm and Lerner’s (1976) follow-up research showed that although campaigns in the developing world continue to address such issues as health, family planning, agricultural improvements, and the environment, many of the assumptions about development and communication are changing. By the late 1970s, scholars had reconsidered top-down, government-sponsored campaigns in favor of more participatory, bottom-up approaches (Marsden, 1990). Recent treatments of communication campaigns for development have reflected this participatory approach (White et al., 1994), including Hornik’s (1988) examination of how communication affects the health and agricultural sectors of developing nations, the tracing of the paradigm shifts in development communication theory (Melkote, 1991), and an analysis of how economic organizations such as multinationals contribute to development (Moemeka, 1994).

The wide use of communication campaigns to solve social and development problems cannot be disputed. However, questions about the relationship between the intent of campaign planners and the rights of the individuals targeted by campaigns have been raised (Rakow, 1989; Salmon, 1989). Salmon noted that “any ef-
Fort to engineer change in a society is a value-laden activity, one in which not all persons agree on the ends pursued and the means employed to achieve these ends” (pp. 19–20). Rakow further argued that public communication campaigns needed to reassess the traditional view that the public was something to be “moved to action” (p. 164). It is because serious social and political questions about the development process continue to be raised that public relations has been identified as a more participatory approach to development. Public relations, with its focus on two-way communication, can make the development process more participative.

It is time for a paradigm shift in the treatment of communication in nation building, and public relations is an appropriate place to turn. This article is not the first one to link public relations and development communication. Pratt (1985) described how public relations functions in the nation-building efforts in Africa. Van Leuven (1996) traced the development of public relations in Asia from communication for nation building to the more recent trend of business development with other nations in the region. Newsom, Carrell, and Kruckeberg (1993) also explored how the strategies of public relations could inform development communication, and they argued that if development programs “were thought of and handled as a professional public relations campaign should be, development communication programs might be much more successful” (p. 1). Public relations focuses on how communication is used to establish, maintain, or change relationships between organizations and publics. Therefore, its conceptual tools may well provide new and useful insights into the complex phenomenon of nation building.

The term relationships is a central concept to a public relations approach to nation building. Broom et al. (1997) explored the concept of relationships in public relations and found that although “many scholars and practitioners say that public relations is all about building and maintaining an organization’s relationships with its publics,” (p. 83) there are very few useful definitions of the concept of “relationships” in the public relations literature. In this article, the term relationship describes two levels of relationships: those between previously unrelated people of different ethnic groups and relationships between government and its publics. Two of Broom et al.’s conclusions that best capture the tensions of relationship building will be explored in this article. Their first conclusion—that relationships consist of patterns of linkages through which parties in relationships pursue and service their interdependent needs—reflects the positive aspects of communication-fostered relationship building. The second conclusion—that relationships may lead to increased dependency, loss of autonomy, and structured interdependence as routine and institutionalized behavior—points to possible negative consequences of relationship-building efforts. That is, relationships can both empower and constrain individuals.

A public relations approach to nation building focuses on relationships between governments and publics as well as the creation of new relationships between pre-
viously unrelated publics. To evaluate the successes and limitations of communication campaigns that seek to build these relations, I conducted a study of the Neighborliness Campaign in Malaysia. The following section outlines the research questions guiding this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Communication campaigns have been successful in a variety of social and political contexts; however, no systematic evaluation of a government communication campaign for building interethnic relationships exists. Given the need for a descriptive framework to understand how communication campaigns build relationships in the nation-building process, the following research question seeks evidence for a public relations approach to nation building:

RQ: How do public relations campaigns foster relationships that build national unity in a developing nation?

Answering this primary research question will illustrate how a government-sponsored public relations campaign builds relationships among various ethnic publics. The description of an actual campaign is only the first step to fully understanding public relations campaigns for nation building. There is also a need for an evaluative framework to understand how communication campaigns succeed or fail to build relationships. As McGuire (1989) noted, campaign effectiveness can be operationalized as the extent to which campaign outcome matches campaign intent. Two secondary questions guide the evaluation of the effectiveness of a specific nation-building campaign. The first question seeks evidence about the intent of the campaign planners:

RQ1: How do the officials at the Department of National Unity (DNU) of the Malaysian government see themselves contributing to national unity through communication campaigns?

The second question measures the outcome of the campaign:

RQ2: How is the public response to national unity campaigns consistent with campaign planners’ intent?

The primary and secondary research questions focus on the role of a communication campaign in the nation-building process of Malaysia. Because campaign effectiveness is understood as the degree to which campaign outcome matches campaign intent, the two secondary research questions are used to answer the primary research question.
Communication is an important tool in nation building, yet discussion of it has been most thoroughly addressed in the political science literature. To provide a background on nation building and communication, the following section examines the theoretical traditions dominant in political science that have addressed this topic.

COMMUNICATION AND NATION BUILDING

Nation building is the process by which “diverse societies, regions, and groups within a country are linked into a national–state system” (Morrison, 1989, p. 18). The process of nation building or group formation works “according to the choice, will, and power of its builders … a nation can be built according to different plans, from various materials, rapidly or gradually, by different sequences of steps, and in partial independence of its environment” (Deutsch, 1963, p. 3).

In the political science literature, the term nation building is associated with building political institutions in a newly formed state (Huntington, 1969). These political institutions help newly formed nations meet the political and social demands of citizens. Nation building in this approach is really institution building. Although the creation of political institutions such as political parties, nonpartisan professional organizations, and organizations supportive of the current government are an important part of the nation-building process, other conditions also are necessary. Communicative relationships are one such condition. Two approaches best describe the ways in which communicative relationships have been examined in the nation-building literature: (a) The primordialist approach has argued that increased communication between people of different ethnic groups will inhibit relationship building, and (b) the integrationist approach has argued that mediated communication builds interpersonal and national relationships. Each will be discussed next.

Primordialist Approach: Communication Increases Tension

One approach, known as the primordialist approach, is most often associated with Clifford Geertz. Geertz (1973) described primordialist sentiments as competing loyalties between groups based on long-standing stereotypes, beliefs, and traditions. Taken to extreme attitudes and actions, these primordialist sentiments can undermine the political and social balance within a culturally pluralistic nation. Primordialist sentiments inhibit national unity because they create “bases for the demarcation of autonomous political units” (Geertz, p. 110). When ethnic or racial lines become the pattern of political and social organizing then disagreements over particular issues become racially charged. National unity suffers when people identify only with their ethnic group rather than with the national identity.

Primordialists have argued that increased channels of communication in developing nations ended historical isolation of ethnic groups so that when previously
unrelated people communicated with one another, they realized their differences. One response to this heightened communication and awareness of difference would be the desire of ethnic groups to minimize contact with others. Primordialist theorists believed that communication may have negative repercussions for the multicultural state because increased communication could lead to ethnic secessionist movements and civil wars.

Walker Connor (1972, 1990) has advocated this approach for over 20 years. Connor viewed communication in the nation-building process as an instrument that would increase ethnic identifications and lead to the ascendancy of ethnic issues in political debates. Moreover, proponents of the primordial approach argued that communication among ethnic groups might contribute to “political assertiveness and military separatism” and strain fledgling political systems during social mobilization (Heraclides, 1991, p. 8). In the primordialist approach, increased communication among ethnic groups would foster separation and conflict—not the intended goal of nation building.

Political theorists were not alone in their belief that communication increased conflict among ethnic groups. Amir (1969) tested the contact hypothesis in interpersonal relationships and questioned whether “intergroup contact tends to produce better intergroup attitudes and relations” (p. 319). Amir found that it was the conditions under which contact took place that most influenced attitude change in interethnic contacts. His study identified several favorable conditions that reduced prejudice between intergroup members: equality of status, social climate, pleasant and intimate contact rather than casual contact, and the belief by both groups that they were functioning to achieve important goals. Alternatively, Amir discovered that conditions such as forced interaction, low prestige of one group in relation to the other, group frustration that leads to scapegoating, and situations that create ethical objections tend to strengthen prejudice.

The primordialist approach shares similar assumptions with Amir’s (1969) contact hypothesis. However, these political theorists extended the unit of analysis from the interpersonal level to the nation–state level. Although the primordialist approach acknowledges the importance of communication, it does not explain why and how ethnic conflicts in the developing world have been minimized in some situations. That is, some nations that encompass ethnically diverse populations have not experienced ethnic conflict. Perhaps one reason to explain this ethnic tranquillity can be found in a second approach to nation building, which is prominent in political science literature. This approach, known as integrationist, argues that national integration can be achieved through the various uses and functions of mediated communication.

**Integrationist Approach: Communication Decreases Tension**

The integrationist school was led by Karl W. Deutsch (1966a, 1966b). Deutsch’s work spanned more than 40 years, and his ideas have influenced some of the
leading political and economic theorists of nation building. Deutsch conceived of the nation–state as a communicatively constructed entity. He examined nation building as social mobilization, and throughout his long and influential career he examined how people form a collective consciousness. Deutsch believed that a collective consciousness emerged when individuals were joined through various mediums of communication. In Deutsch’s work (1963), the proliferation of communication channels would create a collective consciousness that would lead to national integration. National integration created a level of cooperation that would then enable nation–states to accomplish such goals as trade, territory protection, and international affairs. Integrationists argue that a collective consciousness is important for all state-building but especially important for culturally pluralistic ones. Deutsch’s (1966a) theory of integration for culturally diverse states was a major influence in the nation-building scholarship during the 1960s and 1970s. It was during this time that many nations were emerging from colonialism and were consciously working to develop independent nation–states from what had once been clusters of peoples and lands often thrown together to meet the needs of colonial powers.

When Deutsch addressed ethnic relations, one theme permeated his theory: Relationships create social integration. For Deutsch, social integration of individuals, groups, associations, and institutions was directly related to communication channels. It was communication channels that transferred information from one group or network to others and built the relations necessary for attaining national goals. More specifically, Deutsch (1966a) saw the role of communications as something that “transfers a patterned relationship between events” (p. 93). That is, Deutsch argued that a nation was created and held together “from within” by the communicative competency of both the government and its citizens. Integration through various communication channels, then, was the means by which nations were created. More specifically, for this study integration is an important goal in ethnically diverse states in which ethnic conflict may threaten national unity.

Deutsch (1963) argued that individuals and small groups become unified when various mediums allow people to share common social communication habits. He further argued that it was communication as a medium that created the potential for members of a nation to transmit information to each other, form efficient patterns for teamwork, and create new patterns of teamwork for new purposes. Such new patterns of teamwork or political and social institutions are a major part of the nation-building process because they create and facilitate cooperative relationships.

A key term in Deutsch’s understanding of communication is the concept of patterns for teamwork or integration. Implicit in this understanding of integration is the assumption of mediated relations. However, the creation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships is an important part of understanding how and when nations are created. For Deutsch (1963), communication as a social phenomenon,
in general, and as a medium of control, in particular, is what creates a national identity that allows people to think together, see together, and act together. It is a central part of nation building because communication channels or networks act as a glue that brings a nation together and then helps to keep it cohesive.

The theories presented about this point argued that communication as a strategic effort has an appropriate and necessary role in nation building. An illustration is needed to further develop an understanding of communication in nation building. The nation of Malaysia offers an opportunity to examine a communication campaign that attempts to build interethnic relationships. The Malaysian government consciously uses communication campaigns for a variety of nation-building goals, and improved ethnic relations is one of its priorities. The following case study illustrates the dynamics of government-fostered, interethnic relationship building. It is important to note that communicative relationships do not take place in a social vacuum. Before one can understand the benefits and limitations of newly facilitated communication relationships, it is necessary to understand the existing social, political, and economic system in which they are formed. Thus, an understanding of Malaysia’s history of ethnic relations is a necessary prerequisite to examine the complex roles and functions of the Neighborliness Campaign. The following section examines the dynamics of the social, political, and economic relationships in that nation.

**DIVERGENT ETHNIC RELATIONS IN MALAYSIA**

Although only three decades old, the nation of Malaysia seeks to be accepted by the world as a developed, modern state. Behind this international image lies a complex program of nation-building communication campaigns of which one component is ethnic relations. Nation-building efforts in Malaysia seek to improve the social, political, and economic spheres. However, ethnic relations is viewed as the basis for achieving other national goals.

The Malays, known as bumiputera, comprise 55% of the population. Ethnic Malays claim to be the indigenous “sons of the soil” (Horowitz, 1985, p. 218) with a right to rule the nation. The term sons of the soil is the literal translation of bumiputera. Malays believe that their legitimacy in ruling Malaysia comes not from their economic power but because of their history of living in the region before the Chinese and the Indians. Although Malays comprise the largest ethnic group in population, they fall behind the Chinese in education and economic development.

Ethnic Chinese comprise the second-largest ethnic group (34%) within Malaysia. At the height of Chinese immigration in the early 1900s, there was a sizable Lauken community in Malaysia that attempted to maintain the language, culture, and values of the Chinese ethnicity. Indeed, one of the major obstacles to Malay–Chinese relations revolves around the Chinese community’s attempt to hold
on to its traditional values. The Chinese have dominated the business community and have also been very successful in education. As a group, however, they have not yet developed political power.

A third ethnic group, Indians, also live and work in Malaysia. Under British colonization, unskilled workers from rural India were encouraged to immigrate to Malaysia. The British imported these foreign workers for the labor intensive mining and rubber plantations and because they wanted the indigenous Malays to remain in the agricultural sector of the economy. The Indian minority represents 10% of the population and has not been involved in the conflicts between Malays and Chinese. Therefore, the Indian community is rarely mentioned in discussions of ethnic conflict in Malaysia.

Ethnic Tensions

Although there are several obstacles to improved race relations in Malaysia, the coincidence of ethnicity, class, language, and religion is one that both Deutsch (1963, 1966a) and Connor (1972) warned about. The situation, known as coincidental cleavages, occurs when people continually divide along ethnic lines on social, political, and economic issues. Coincidental cleavages are not unique to Malaysia; rather, it is a common condition in former colonies where disparate groups were forced together under colonial boundaries (Horowitz, 1985). In the Malaysian situation, primordialists see communication as continually dividing people of different ethnic backgrounds and accentuating ethnic cleavages. Integrationists, however, view communication as a way to overcome these divisions and create a national or collective consciousness.

The Malaysian government attempted to follow an integrationist path to nation building (Ongkili, 1984). Like many other ethnically mixed nations that emerged from colonialism, the government publicly attempted to integrate all people through nationally sponsored programs, economic development projects, and nationalist (rather than ethnic) rhetoric. Despite government efforts to integrate the population, racial tension between Malays and Chinese intensified in May of 1969 when an ethnic Chinese political party, the Democratic Action Party, upset the Malays’ ruling alliance and won a large number of political seats in the Parliament (Koon, 1988). Riots occurred in the capital of Kuala Lumpur as the Democratic Action Party held what was perceived by Malays as “victory processions … considered to be provocative, arrogant, and abusive” (Ongkili, 1985, p. 203). Malays who feared that the Chinese would take over the nation reacted violently to the election celebration. As primordialists warned, ethnic issues quickly became associated with political issues.

According to James Ongkili (1985), one of the first officials at the DNU and a Malay historian, the procession of Chinese political supporters chanted anti-Malay
slogans. Official government reports claim that the slogans included, “Death to the Malays, Aborigines go back to the jungle,” “Malays have lost power,” “We are now in Control,” “Better go and die,” “This country does not belong to the Malays, we will chase out all Malays,” and “What can the police do—we are King” (pp. 203–204). Little is known about the Chinese version of the riots. Koon (1988) argued that the Chinese version was never discussed in the government-controlled media.

The riots of 1969 killed hundreds of people and damaged the national and international image of Malaysia as a model for a harmonious interracial society. The riots prompted the Malaysian government to implement a series of nation-building programs, under the DNU, to improve ethnic relations. The nation-building programs that responded to the riots of 1969 sought to ease some of the frustrations of both ethnic communities, foster cooperation, and integrate the races into a national identity. The Neighborliness Campaign was one of these communication efforts.

THE NEIGHBORLINESS CAMPAIGN

The DNU formulated the Neighborliness Campaign (1986–present) to cultivate a spirit of neighborhood, cooperation, and friendliness that would create “harmony among community members” (Adnan, 1986, p. 42). Mohd Hamdam Adnan, Honorary Secretary of the Institute for Public Relations in Malaysia, outlined how public relations campaigns served the nation-building process. He highlighted public relations practices and government sponsored communication efforts using two-way communication to “create permanent mutual understanding and harmony among individuals and organizations” (Adnan, 1986, p. 42). Public relations activities, under the nation-building imperative, attempted to “build a good image” (Adnan, 1986, p. 42) and create unity for all members of the Malaysian society.

The Neighborliness Campaign responded to the rapid urbanization of Malaysia. National development efforts created employment opportunities for many Malaysians, especially rural Malays who were previously involved in agricultural or subsistence activities. As a result, cities in Malaysia, most notably the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, experienced a massive influx of rural dwellers. The government needed to create low-cost housing to handle the growing pool of laborers and built a series of large but impersonal housing blocks. These housing units were a sharp contrast to the small and friendly rural communities these workers were used to. Consequently, city life did not foster the same feelings of community and sharing as small villages had (Adnan, 1986, p. 43).

It was in these large housing projects that Malaysians of all ethnic groups began to live together in close proximity for the first time. The government, fearing a repeat of the ethnic riots of 1969, implemented a plan to integrate people who lived
in these housing blocks in the hopes of recreating the lost sense of community. The Neighborliness Campaign recreated community on two levels. First, it treated each housing unit as a community and organized activities to bring the different ethnic groups together in service to the unit. This campaign attempted to bring Malaysians and Chinese together to serve community goals. Second, the campaign cultivated a spirit of neighborhood by bringing people of the same ethnic groups together for cultural activities. In other words, the campaign sponsored events specific to each ethnic group as well as activities bringing both ethnic groups together (Adnan, 1986, p. 42). The Neighborliness Campaign created relationships among people and has contributed to understanding and cooperation. Furthermore, as integrationists would suggest, the government attempted to create new cross-cutting cleavages within the community to offset the coincidental cleavages that have divided the Malaysian people along ethnic, religious, economic, and political lines.

The Neighborliness Campaign focused originally on safety, and neighborhood members were encouraged to organize patrols to walk around the neighborhood and report on suspicious activity. However, the DNU decided to shift the focus of the campaign from safety objectives to social objectives (Guide to Neighborliness, n.d.). Toward this end, the DNU created neighborhood associations known in the Bahasa language as Rukun Tentaggas (RTs). Through the RTs, the Neighborliness Campaign sought to build better ethnic relationships in a country where people of Malay, Chinese, and Indian ancestry have long held ethnic, rather than national, identifications. The DNU encourages RT formation in housing areas with potential ethnic tensions and also allows some neighborhoods to form their own RTs. How effective is the Neighborliness Campaign in building national unity? The next section outlines the methodology used to investigate the research questions.

METHOD

To answer the research questions, quantitative and qualitative data were collected. According to Chu (1990), data collected in the developing nations of Asia should include both qualitative and quantitative measures. For qualitative support, archival data and in-depth interviews with 10 officials at the DNU and grass roots organizers of the campaign provided the campaign intent. Interviews, conducted in English, followed a moderately scheduled format. Responses were recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis. For quantitative support, citizen surveys, which included both open- and closed-ended questions, measured the attitudes of Malaysians and provided the outcome of the campaign.

To isolate the effects of the Neighborliness Campaign, this study followed a posttest-only control group design, which is a common methodology for communication program analysis (Selnow & Crano, 1987). Public relations researchers such
as Broom and Dozier (1990) have also supported this type of comparison method, arguing that it may “provide the only viable evaluation strategies for many public relations programs” (p. 11). This research method allowed for an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Neighborliness Campaign by looking for statistical differences in responses between the two test groups. Citizen surveys, which included both open- and closed-ended questions, measured the attitudes of Malaysians to form the outcome of the campaign. Generalizability was attained by random sampling of households in both the Neighborliness and control group areas.

To ensure the effectiveness of the survey instrument, pilot tests were conducted both in the United States and onsite in Malaysia, and the instrument was refined accordingly. Moreover, the researcher followed Brislin’s (1970) recommendations, for translation and back translation, for survey construction and analysis of responses. Trained survey researchers were hired to survey ethnic Malay and Chinese Malaysians who lived in areas with the Neighborliness Campaign and those who lived in neighborhoods without the campaign. Malaysians in neighborhoods with the campaign were identified as the treatment group and neighborhoods not exposed to the campaign were identified as the control group to serve as a baseline. The target publics are part of a strong ethnic community, and survey interviews by a member of their own ethnic community was the only practical way to find out how closely public responses to the Neighborliness Campaign corresponded with the original intentions of the planners.

In many developing nations, census data are not available to describe the population (Chu, 1990). This sample targeted individuals between the ages of 18 and 60 to include those who remember the ethnic tensions after independence, as well as those who grew up with nation-building campaigns. The sample \(N = 88\) was divided between the Neighborliness Group and control group.

**CAMPAIGN EVALUATION**

An assessment of both planners’ and public responses provides a well-rounded picture of the design, implementation, and acceptance or rejection of this public communication campaign. Specifically, this study reveals whether this campaign helps to build national unity by looking for similarities between the intent of government public relations practitioners as they formulate the campaign and the perceptions of the citizens who participate in it. If communication campaigns contribute to the government’s goal of nation building, there should be some correspondence between campaign intent and recipients’ knowledge, attitudes, and actions in interethnic relationships.

As mentioned in the communication campaign section of this article, campaign outcome can be evaluated by both cognitive and behavioral measures. Cognitive outcome measures in this research design include evaluation of atti-
tudes toward cooperation, attitudes about the social characteristics of members of the other ethnic group, and national identity. It would be difficult to attribute citizen responses to questions about nation building solely to the Neighborliness Campaign because there are a variety of nation-building efforts underway in Malaysian schools, professional organizations, newspaper articles, and editorials. However, the pervasiveness of these other communication efforts is likely to affect the Neighborliness group and the control group equally. People in the Neighborliness group receive additional messages and participate in specific Neighborliness activities designed to improve ethnic relations. Thus, people in the Neighborliness areas should be more willing to cooperate with members of other ethnic groups, have more positive attitudes about members of different ethnic groups, and have a higher degree of national identity than their control group counterparts. A comparison of the two populations should indicate if a relationship exists between people involved in the Neighborliness Campaign and the outcome variables. The following section reports the intent of the Neighborliness Campaign.

CAMPAIGN INTENT: QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE

RQ1 inquired about the intentions of the campaign planners. Open-ended questions were asked about goals of the campaign, themes and key messages, past successes and failures, and lessons learned. The four themes that emerged from the interviews with officials at the DNU and associated citizens constitute campaign intent. Each of these themes will be discussed next.

Theme 1: Campaigns Offer Information and Education

Officials at the DNU believed that the different races needed to understand each other’s culture and religion for nation building to occur. The first theme identified from the interviews with members of the DNU is that communication campaigns, like the Neighborliness Campaign, are a way to foster national unity by creating a better understanding of the different cultures. Communication campaigns offer information and education about the three major cultures and DNU officials believed that this information leads to increased cultural tolerance and cooperation.

Theme 2: Campaigns Build Relationships

The second theme identified from the interviews with members of the DNU is the idea that communication campaigns, especially the Neighborliness Campaign, fos-
ter relationships among Malaysians of different ethnic groups. Moreover, these new relationships eventually create national unity among the various races. One of the main goals of the Neighborliness Campaign is building interpersonal relationships among neighbors. Interviewees at the DNU repeatedly stated that the Neighborliness Campaign contributed to nation building by offering citizens opportunities to interact with neighbors of different ethnic groups. The vehicle for this goal was the RT system. Under the Neighborliness Campaign, RTs sponsor activities that create opportunities for Malaysians of all ethnic groups to interact during religious and cultural holidays and learn more about each other’s culture.

Theme 3: Campaigns Lead to National Development

DNU officials believed that there is a relationship between national unity and economic growth. The theme of national development may be prevalent in the responses of the DNU officials because nation building and national development are inextricably linked by the Malaysian government in official documents and the media. The DNU interviewees identified two ways in which communication campaigns like the Neighborliness Campaign contribute to national development—fostering national values and creating economic opportunity.

Theme 4: Campaigns Build On Tradition

The success of a communication campaign like the Neighborliness Campaign often rests in its coordination with other facets of the society. That is, for a campaign to be successful it must complement, not contradict, traditional practices or beliefs. The Neighborliness Campaign fits well into Malaysian social practices because the principles on which it is based have been valued in traditional Malaysian society.

Interviewees mentioned that the spirit of neighborliness embodied by the Neighborliness Campaign is nothing new in Malaysia. They claimed the campaign has been based on a traditional practice that has always existed in Malaysian communities. This claim is supported by archival research. Historically, Malaysia has been a rural society in which local meetings have encouraged neighbors to cooperate with each other to solve local problems. However, members of the DNU noted that today the only difference between the traditional community organization and the current RT system is that the spirit of neighborliness has been institutionalized and fostered by a government office.

Interview and archival evidence suggests that the Neighborliness Campaign improves cooperation at both the interpersonal and national levels of Malaysian society. The campaign seeks to contribute to interpersonal relationships by encouraging people living in multiethnic neighborhoods to learn about each other’s
culture and customs. The DNU’s assumption is that intercultural cooperation will help neighbors work together as one unified national community. According to the archives and the respondents at the DNU, the Neighborliness Campaign also contributes to nation building on the national level or macrolevel because Neighborliness communities share common values, and this creates the basis for national unity (Why National Unity Is Important in Malaysia, n.d.).

The first part of this case study—archival evidence and interviews with campaign planners—outlined campaign intent. Once this was ascertained, the second part of this study sought evidence about campaign outcome. The following section provides quantitative data that describe how Malaysian citizens respond to the goals of this effort.

CAMPAIGN OUTCOME: QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE

Interview data suggest that national unity means that people have to agree to cooperate in Malaysia. DNU documents and interviews showed that one of the most important goals of communication campaigns like the Neighborliness Campaign is to encourage people to cooperate with each other regardless of race. To assess campaign effectiveness, participants in both test groups were asked a series of questions intended to measure the extent to which these goals have been achieved.

Question measures included questions about cooperation, attitudes toward members of the other ethnic group, and national identity. The measures are described in detail next.

Agreement to Cooperate

Horowitz (1985) suggested that one way to reduce interethnic conflict is to “create incentives for interethnic cooperation” (p. 598). Communication campaigns offer incentives for cooperation by providing information to dispel cultural stereotypes. Chinese and Malay respondents in both the Neighborliness group and the control group were asked to indicate on Likert scales their willingness to cooperate with members of the other ethnic group in their neighborhood, in the workplace, and for national unity. It was expected that both Chinese and Malays in the Neighborliness areas would have more positive attitudes about cooperation than those living in the control group areas. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) on agreement to cooperate, race of the respondent, and neighborhood location was computed from the citizen questionnaire. Table 1 reports the results. Quantitative results supported the qualitative data with participants from neighborhoods with the campaign ($M = 5.35$) significantly more likely, $F(1, 77) = 7.092$, $p = .009$, than participants from noncampaign neighborhoods ($M = 4.50$) to agree to cooperate with the other races at work, in the community, and in pursuit of national unity.
It is interesting that race did not have a significant main effect on agreement to cooperate with others. Moreover, neighborhood and race did not interact with respect to agreement to work with others, suggesting that the main effect detected for the presence of the Neighborliness Campaign. Possible reasons for this finding are discussed next.

**Transcending stereotypes.** A plausible reason to explain why individuals who participated in the campaign have higher cooperative attitudes than non-Neighborliness residents may be in their ability to transcend traditional stereotypes. Breaking through cultural stereotypes may make campaign participants more willing to cooperate with members of other races.

**Facilitating interactions.** Another reason for the statistically significant difference between the two groups may be that individuals in the Neighborliness group benefit from facilitated interactions with members of different ethnic groups. Amir (1969) argued that intercultural interactions best facilitate understanding when they follow certain guidelines. These guidelines include the ability of group members to select their own leaders, equal status of group members, and cooperation in working toward clearly defined group goals. The Neighborliness Campaign may create these conditions.

If people involved in the Neighborliness Campaign are more inclined to cooperate with others regardless of race, what does this mean for attitudes about the other ethnic group? The following section explores this issue.

**Interethnic Attitudes**

The officials at the DNU believed that one of the outcomes of communication campaigns for nation building would be improved interethnic attitudes in Malaysia. The communication campaigns literature argues that attitude change is necessary for behavior change (McGuire, 1989; Mendelsohn, 1973; Rogers & Storey, 1987). Archival and interview evidence suggested that participation in the Neighborliness Campaign should lead to increased levels of understanding, tolerance, and more
positive attitudes about Malaysians from different ethnic groups. Likert scale questions about social characteristics included evaluations about the trustworthiness, sincerity, tolerance, work ethic, and friendliness of the other ethnic group. These measures, created from the archival evidence and in-depth interviews with DNU officials, are identified as the stereotypes that impede national unity in Malaysia. Chinese respondents were asked to evaluate Malays on these measures, and Malay respondents were asked to evaluate the Chinese on the same measures.

**Malay attitudes toward the Chinese.** A composite variable was computed from the social characteristics described previously. This new variable—named \textit{attmalay}—reported Malay attitudes toward the Chinese on Likert scale questions about the social characteristics identified previously. Results of this one-way ANOVA are reported in Table 2 and show that there is no statistically significant difference in interethnic attitudes between Malay respondents in the Neighborliness Campaign and Malays in the control group. This suggests the campaign had no effect on the attitudes of Malays in the Neighborliness group toward their Chinese neighbors.

**Chinese attitudes toward Malays.** A second composite variable—called \textit{attchinese}—was computed to understand Chinese attitudes toward Malays on the same social characteristics described previously. The results of the one-way ANOVA, reported in Table 2, show that Chinese respondents differ significantly, $F(1, 35) = 17.15, p = .027$, with those in the neighborhoods with the campaign ($M = 12.96$), reporting less favorable attitude scores toward Malays than those in the control group. This result, the opposite of what the DNU and the campaign planners sought, is one of the most significant of this study. At the least, it suggests that the Neighborliness Campaign does not succeed in overcoming any preexisting anti-Malay attitudes in the Chinese residents who participated in the campaign. More likely, however, this result may suggest that the Neighborliness Campaign has some counterproductive outcomes.

There could be many possible reasons for such a counterproductive outcome. There is the possibility that the campaign is seen in the Chinese community as a

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<td>Malay attitudes toward Chinese</td>
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<td>Chinese attitudes toward Malays</td>
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*p* < .05.
Malay tactic to advance the interest of Malays. This attribution may arouse suspicions—possibly even the anger—of the Chinese who participate, whereas not so antagonizing those who do not participate in the campaign. Other possible reasons are discussed next.

**Neighborliness area selection.** Not all housing areas are involved in the Neighborliness Campaign. The DNU targeted particular neighborhoods to start the campaign. The DNU officials stated that the neighborhoods that received the campaign were selected because they had conflict among members of the different ethnic groups. That is, the neighborhoods in this study have existing strained ethnic relations; thus causing the DNU, or a group of concerned citizens, to set up an RT in an attempt to minimize the tension. If this is the case, then negative attitudes, especially those of the Chinese population, may already have been very strong before the implementation of the campaign. Thus, the campaign may have not yet had enough time to change negative opinions, but as the primary outcome measure of cooperation shows, it may have begun to encourage people to recognize the value of cooperation.

**Chinese dissatisfaction.** Another reason may be found in the unique historical experiences of the Chinese community. The Chinese in Malaysia are angry about what they perceive to be unfair treatment due to national policies that favor Malays. Qualitative evidence from the citizen surveys shows that the Chinese believe that one of the best ways to build national unity is to have fair and equal treatment for all Malaysian citizens. Perhaps the Chinese are dissatisfied with the pro-Malay policies and are projecting their dissatisfaction with the national government on to their Malay neighbors. Although this appears to be an unintended consequence of the pro-Malay policies, the primary indicator in this study of agreement to cooperate shows the Chinese are willing to work with Malays at work, in the community, and in the pursuit of national unity, despite this negative group attitude. The final measure in this study reports on the relationship between campaign involvement and sense of national identity.

**National Identity**

People in multiethnic countries often identify themselves by their ethnic or religious group (Horowitz, 1985). My 2½ months of field research showed that Malaysia is no exception. Kim (1984) found that ethnic identity was “the most powerful but negative determinant of unity” (p. 27). One of the goals of the DNU is for Malaysian citizens to identify themselves using the national identifier of Malaysian, rather than the ethnic identifier of Chinese or Malay. It was expected that people living in the Neighborliness areas would identify themselves as Malaysian more often than members of the control group.
For the purposes of this survey, national identity was measured by how citizens label themselves. Citizens were asked to describe themselves, and a chi-square was used to compare the frequency of people describing themselves with the national identifier Malaysian, rather than the ethnic identifier of Chinese or Malay.

The chi-square test \((N = 88, p = .094)\) showed there is no statistical difference between the groups and that the residents in the control group actually responded with Malaysian to the identity question more frequently than the residents in the Neighborliness group. However, it is important to note that Chinese in the Neighborliness group identified themselves as Chinese almost three times more frequently than their ethnic, control group counterparts. This finding suggests that the campaign may build national identity within the Malay sector of the population; however, it is not building national identity in the Chinese population. This finding may reflect the same counterproductivity discussed in Chinese attitudes toward Malays.

There appears to be no positive relationship between involvement in the Neighborliness Campaign and increased levels of national identity. A large number of individuals in both the Neighborliness Campaign and the control group are beginning to identify themselves as Malaysian, but further study is needed before any conclusions can be drawn. National identity is a very specialized and long term measure of nation building, and it may be one of the most difficult to achieve or measure. Malays seem to be more likely than Chinese to see themselves as Malaysian, but the Neighborliness Campaign does not appear to be a determining factor in this choice. The lack of statistically significant difference between the people in the Neighborliness Group and the control group on the national identity measure can be partially explained by the following four reasons.

**Low levels of national identity for all Malaysians.** Kim (1984) conducted a survey of 873 Malaysians in the three largest states in Malaysia and reported that “both Malays and Chinese have a significantly low sense of national unity” (p. 27). Although the Neighborliness Campaign was created after this study, the results suggest that national identity continues to influence national unity.

**National identity is a process.** Another plausible explanation for the lack of statistical difference between the two groups may be related to the complex nature of national identity. In Malaysia, national identity is linked to ethnicity. Attempts to change this and create a national, rather than ethnic identification, will no doubt take a long time. During colonial rule, Malays, Chinese, and Indians were discouraged from interacting with each other, and it has only been in the last 30 years that the Malaysian government has been actively trying to create a Malaysian national identity.

**Ethnic labels continue to influence government decisions.** Although the government attempts to create a Malaysian national identity, it continues to re-
inforce the traditional ethnic classifications. Government policies have been enacted that give preference to Malays in education, employment, and economic loans. Moreover, Chinese are labeled as Chinese in the education and political system, and their numbers are limited for university enrollment. It is contradictory to have the government trying to create a Malaysian national identity but continuing to use ethnic labels to classify and reward certain ethnic groups. Chinese will not identify themselves as Malaysian as long as they feel like they are not being treated equally to Malays. Indeed, the open-ended portion of the questionnaire showed that Chinese believe that the government needs to be more equitable in its treatment of all ethnic groups—perhaps showing an unintended consequence of existing national policies favoring Malays.

**Government influence in Neighborliness areas.** There appears to be a trend in Neighborliness areas toward reliance on government for guidance and benefits. The open-ended portion of the survey shows that Malay Neighborliness respondents overwhelmingly look to the government for help on important issues. However, the Chinese are suspicious of, perhaps even hostile toward, the government. The Chinese may see the majority of the benefits of the government programs, including the Neighborliness Campaign, going to their Malay neighbors and may disapprove.

The secondary research questions evaluated how closely campaign outcome matched campaign intent. The primary indicator for understanding how communication campaigns succeed shows that people living in Neighborliness areas are more likely to agree to cooperate with members of other races in the community, in the workplace, and for national unity. Interviewees at the DNU also believed that the Neighborliness Campaign helps build national unity and identity because it offers citizens of all ethnic groups the opportunity to improve their attitudes toward other races. Evidence from the survey shows no support for this claim. The final sections of this article address the primary research question and offer a relational framework to nation building that may help national governments build relationships between members of different ethnic groups and avoid the unintended consequences of the Neighborliness Campaign.

**DISCUSSION**

The primary research question asked: “How do public relations campaigns foster relationships that build national unity in a developing nation?” The two secondary questions will now be discussed to answer this question. Evidence from the Neighborliness Campaign shows that campaigns can foster relationships. Campaigns are designed to inform and educate people and to encourage cultural tolerance. More important, communication campaigns try to create relationships between governments and citizens and between people of different ethnic groups. However, as
some of the quantitative data show, there can be mixed outcomes—accomplishments and limitations—of this communication campaign for nation building.

Campaign Accomplishments: Fostering Cooperation

Integrationist theory argues that communication would create new patterns of teamwork between previously unrelated people. The integrationists approach also believes that culturally diverse nations could use communication to motivate citizens from different ethnic groups to work together. The assumptions underlying the Neighborliness Campaign fall under an integrationist approach.

Interviews with members of the DNU identified communication campaigns, like the Neighborliness Campaign, as a way to foster national unity through creating better understanding of the different cultures. Horowitz (1985) suggested that creating incentives for interethnic cooperation may build national unity. Communication campaigns offer incentives for cooperation by providing information to dispel cultural stereotypes and increase cultural tolerance, understanding, and national unity. Results from the quantitative portion of the citizen survey support this claim. Malay and Chinese respondents living in neighborhoods with the Neighborliness Campaign reported more favorable attitudes toward cooperation with members of the other races than did control group respondents.

If, as integrationists argue, nation building is based on cooperative attitudes toward members of other ethnic groups, then public relations campaigns that foster improved cooperation contribute to nation building. Indeed, the qualitative portion of the questionnaire supports this claim because it shows people living in Neighborliness group areas state that the DNU was the catalyst for communication campaigns and activities. Citizens believed it was the DNU’s responsibility to encourage people to cooperate for the benefit of the neighborhood, the workplace, and the nation. Cooperation is one of the first, and perhaps most important, steps to creating national unity.

Campaign Limitations: Unanticipated Consequences

RQ2 looked for consistency between the intent of the Neighborliness Campaign planners and the actual outcome of the public response. The findings are mixed. All strategic communication efforts have consequences—some positive and some negative. Unintended consequences are the “undesirable, indirect” (Rogers, 1995, p. 421) outcomes that often result from interventions such as campaigns or innovations. Although the Neighborliness Campaign may foster cooperation, it may also suffer from some unintended consequences. The secondary measures showed negative consequences for people involved in the Neighborliness Campaign. First,
Chinese members of the Neighborliness areas reported less positive attitudes about their Malay neighbors than Chinese people living in the control group areas. Second, the Chinese involved in the campaign are also less likely to identify themselves with the national identity label of Malaysian.

The primordialists warn that increased communication can lead to ethnic identification in political and social issues, and it appears a campaign such as the Neighborliness effort, although allowing for people to form relationships, may not be able to overcome ethnic identifications and hostile attitudes. Indeed, some campaigns may actually foster negative attitudes and increase ethnic identifications if they are not implemented fairly. Campaigns do not exist in a social vacuum, and communication campaigns for building national unity coincide with other government programs and policies. Sometimes these other government policies have unanticipated, and even negative consequences for the outcome of strategic campaigns. The Malaysian government has implemented aggressive efforts to help the Malay majority catch up to the Chinese in business and education. Qualitative data from the citizen surveys show that many Chinese are unhappy with this policy. In an open-ended question about ways in which the government can build national unity, Chinese respondents noted that “all people must be treated equally,” “do not place importance on Malays only,” and “administer more fairly.” The findings on the attitude measures suggest that Chinese perceive inequalities in the Malay-dominated society, and this perception has caused their rejection of some parts of the Neighborliness Campaign. Many conditions influence interethnic relationships, and although the Neighborliness Campaign may provide some of the conditions for improved ethnic relations, factors such as pro-Malay, pro-Islamic government policies contradict the goals of the campaign.

Creating commonalities through mediated channels is not enough to improve interethnic relationships—it is merely the first step. Campaigns that communicate a key message—national unity is good, everyone is equal and valued, and so forth—but then operate in an environment in which many citizens are not treated in such a way, may foster increased ethnic tensions. Thus, the integrationist and primordialist approaches do not adequately explain the dynamics of communication in the nation-building process, and an approach that focuses on relationship building is needed. The following section of this article takes both the primordialist and integrationist approaches one step further to offer a relational approach to nation building based on communication and public relations theory.

A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO NATION BUILDING

The results of this study show that neither the primordialist nor the integrationist approach appears to fully explain the accomplishments and limitations of the Neighborliness Campaign. Primordialist theory cannot explain why cooperation between people of different ethnic groups has been fostered through the Neighbor-
liness Campaign and why Malaysia continues to be a peaceful nation with minimal ethnic conflict. Likewise, integrationist theory cannot account for the negative Chinese reactions to the campaign and explain why they continue to hold onto their ethnic identity. One reason for the failures of both approaches is that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, literature on nation-building has been consistent with Deutsch’s (1966b) views and focused almost exclusively on the role of mass communication. However, communication does not necessarily need to be mediated to build relationships. Interpersonal communication also helps to build relationships, and it therefore must be considered in any study of nation-building efforts. Indeed, what was missing in Deutsch’s treatment of communication was an understanding of the way that communication as a process shapes both an individual’s and a society’s understanding of relationships and the world-symbolic interactionism. Deutsch, like many scholars of his time, did not foresee the connection between language and constructed social realities. This view emerged only at the end of Deutsch’s career. Because Deutsch viewed communication primarily as telephones, railways, mail services, and mass media, he did not anticipate the important functions of the process of communication, such as its ability to create and maintain interpersonal relationships, persuade, and negotiate perceptions of situations.

Melkote (1991) argued that it is time to look beyond the traditional ways of nation building and focus more on participatory theories and approaches. A consideration of relational communication will extend the integrationist approach, moderate the effects of the primordialist approach, and lay the groundwork for a public relations approach to nation building. Before any discussion of relationship building must come a discussion of the dynamics and components of relationships. When public relations researchers Broom et al. (1997) reviewed the long tradition of interpersonal communication literature, they concluded that “communication offers the richest domain of literature and theory from which to build a theory of organization–public relationships” (p. 95). An exploration of relational communication is the starting point for a public relations approach to nation building.

A relational communication approach believes that “people become aware of themselves only within the context of their social relationships” (Millar & Rogers, 1976, p. 87). Thus, each communication message and action in a relationship affects the development of that relationship. Interpersonal messages are situated in the context of the relationship, but they are also mediated by public communication messages. Special attention needs to be given to both these interpersonal and mass communicated messages and how they complement or contradict each other. A public relations approach can guide both the interpersonal and public communication aspects of communication campaigns for nation building.

The Neighborliness Campaign attempts to build improved ethnic relations and national unity by building interpersonal relationships. Research from Amir (1969) showed that favorable conditions can reduce prejudice between intergroup members and that conditions—such as forced interactions, low prestige of one group in
relation to the other, and group frustration that leads to scapegoating—can strengthen prejudices. Thus, the traditional relational model, such as the one proposed by Millar and Rogers (1976), may be one way to overcome these contextual factors that impede the success of the Neighborliness Campaign.

Broom et al. (1997) summarized that relationships can both empower and constrain interactants. Relational communication posits three transactional dimensions—control, trust, and intimacy—that are inherent in social relationships. Control, considered the most basic dimension, refers to “who has the right to direct, delimit, and define the actions of the interpersonal system” (Millar & Rogers, 1976, p. 91). Trust refers to predictability that one party will behave in a specific and desired way. Intimacy refers to “the degree to which each person uses the other as a source of self-confirmation” (Millar & Rogers, 1976, p. 93). These three dimensions capture the dynamics of relationships. According to Millar and Rogers (1976, 1987), relationships build as increasing levels of two-way communication create trust, satisfaction, and interdependence. This relational approach stands in contrast to Deutsch’s (1966b) view of communication as a means for social control. Integrationists offer a framework for increased mediated communication. However, relational communication shows that many other factors can influence the outcome of relationships.

Cooperative relationships among people in a social system are important for all national development efforts. One area of scholarship that may contextualize a relational approach to nation building is the diffusion literature. Diffusion of innovations, associated with Everett Rogers (1995), studies how ideas are communicated and adapted in populations. Diffusion is “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of social system” (p. 10). The diffusion of ideas has traditionally looked at innovative products and services in developing nations such as agricultural methods and health issues, but improved ethnic relations and national unity could also be considered innovations.

Three aspects of the diffusion theory offer context to a relational approach for building interethnic relationships through public communication campaigns. First, diffusion research has shown that whereas media channels are effective in reaching short-range goals of communication campaigns, it is face-to-face communication that is most effective in achieving the long-term goal of behavior change. This research is important considering the limitations of Deutsch’s (1966b) integrationist approach. Mass media channels create awareness, but it is “interpersonal channels that are more effective in persuading an individual to accept an idea” (Rogers, 1995, p. 18). However, interpersonal channels are not always successful. A second aspect of diffusion research asserts that persuasive efforts are most successful when homophilous people, those who are similar in most ways, communicate face to face about an idea. In the Neighborliness Campaign, communication is between people of different ethnic groups. This heterophilous communi-
cation may make the adaptation of ideas such as national unity and national identity more complex. That is, key messages and incentives for both Chinese and Malays come from Malaysian government officials and neighborhood leaders. The pro-Malay and pro-Islamic attitudes of these government officials and neighborhood leaders may strengthen the intended effect of the Neighborliness Campaign for Malay citizens, but they may also make Chinese citizens less likely to accept national unity messages. Third, diffusion theory and relational communication theory argue that the effects of relational communication are enhanced when individuals and groups believe that they have some control over their own development. Conversely, relational communication effects diminish when people believe they have no say in their own development. Many social factors affect the adaptation rate of a campaign, and the most successful campaigns for nation building must incorporate as many favorable conditions as possible.

In a campaign such as Neighborliness, many people, especially the Chinese, believe that their interests have not been respected or even included in many nation-building efforts. The Chinese are not actors in the Malaysian nation-building process, but instead they are acted upon. One reason for this perception of lack of control is that nation-building communication has traditionally followed a top-down approach, and it does not usually allow publics to participate in defining their own development needs. The diffusion research can help us understand some of the limitations of the campaign. However, because the diffusion literature encompasses a top-down communication paradigm, nation-building campaigns that follow this pattern may not be successful in relationship building. As Melkote (1991) noted, diffusion research can be criticized for its emphasis on the mass media, inattention to content of messages, one-way message flow, and prosource bias. Melkote offered an alternative paradigm in which the public and the creator of communication messages are “co-equal” partners who cooperatively use communication “as a tool for diagnosis of a community’s problems” (p. 270). Thus, campaigns that do as Rakow (1989) suggested and put the “public at the center of the activity, directing the actions of institutions” (pp. 178–179) will lead to more ethical and successful communication. Under this model, nation-building campaigns will put control back into the hands of the interactants, foster trust between people that is not negated by government actions or policies, and provide for an intimate environment for people to communicate in.

Millar and Rogers’s (1976, 1987) three dimensions of relational communication offer an important beginning framework for analyzing nation-building communication campaigns for improved interethnic relations. Campaigns should allow participants to control their own development, develop trust, and encourage attachments among people. Yet, the purpose and the direction of many government nation-building campaigns are the opposite of what the relational communication literature argues. If people controlled their own development, constraints created by government policies and programs would disappear and be replaced.
with more equitable solutions. The effects of true relational communication are hindered when social and political structures of a nation constrain individual or group development. Key messages and policies need to be consistent and treat all publics fairly. The need for a two-way communication between government and its publics is exactly why public relations offers a more timely approach to understand and guide nation-building communication.

TOWARD A PUBLIC RELATIONS APPROACH TO NATION BUILDING

A public relations approach to nation building is about using communication to create, change, and maintain relationships. The Neighborliness Campaign has been successful in building cooperation among Malaysians. It could, however, be more effective if it incorporated some of the tenets of relational communication and public relations theory. For instance, currently the campaign is a top-down effort that puts government goals ahead of individual goals. A public relations approach could correct this situation by having each community or housing unit control its own goals and decide how to reach them. Another failing of the Neighborliness Campaign is that it is inconsistent with the rest of Malaysian government policy. The campaign sends one message, whereas government policies send quite a different message. A successful relationship-building campaign is reinforced by public policy, not contradicted by it. The Malaysian government needs to reconcile all of its nation-building efforts. To achieve this reconciliation and regain the trust of Chinese citizens, it may have to change its policies of favoritism for Malays. This action would do more for ethnic relations in Malaysia than any other strategic communication effort. Finally, the effectiveness of the campaign would be enhanced from the fair allocation of resources. Campaigns must serve all community members and the Neighborliness Campaign appears to mostly serve one ethnic public—Malays. The inclusion of Chinese goals and objectives would no doubt improve its acceptance from the Chinese community and strengthen the effects of the campaign.

Corporate public relations research shows that good public relations cannot save the reputation of an organization that acts in unethical ways. It is also true that a well-meaning public communication campaign cannot undo policies and programs of a government that treats people inequitably. The Neighborliness Campaign serves as an evaluative model of a public communication campaign for building interethnic relationships. Although it appears to be building cooperation, many of its functions are actually the opposite of what a true relationship-building campaign should look like. A public relations approach to nation building, with an explicit focus on relationships at both the interpersonal and organization—public level, can extend beyond the primordialists and integrationists schools. Relationship building is not an easily accomplished endeavor, and communicative relation-
ships between individuals of different ethnic groups and between individuals and governments require additional studies and examination. However, several underlying principles about communication, relationships, and campaigns that guide a public relations approach to nation building have emerged from this study:

1. Nation building requires two levels of relationships: those between individuals and those between individuals and governments.
2. Individual relationships can be fostered through communication. Public relations can offer a strategic approach for relationship building. Communication campaigns, a function of public relations, are one vehicle for relationship building.
3. Relationships must be negotiated between individuals and between individuals and governments. Negotiation involves compromise, trust, and respect for the other parties. Communication campaigns need to be flexible and adapt to the needs of the target publics.
4. Relationships are negotiated in a social context. This social context will affect the evolution of the relationships. Communication campaigns that foster relationships must be complemented, not contradicted, by social and political contexts.
5. Campaigns that allow individuals to control their own relationships, foster trust, and provide for intimacy will be beneficial for relationship building and, ultimately, for nation building.

These principles serve as a foundation for a public relations approach to nation building. They call for both interpersonal and organization–public relationships to be the goal of communication efforts. The assumptions also provide a rationale for the locus of control to be placed not with the government, but with the people who will negotiate their own relationships. These principles are only a starting point. Perhaps the most important contribution of this study is that it attempts to reframe the way that researchers examine communication in the nation-building process. Communication in nation building should be examined as that which creates and maintains relationships and not as merely a channel or medium.

This study outlines a framework for a public relations approach to nation building. It studied a public information campaign, created by a government, which encourages people to improve intercultural relationships in their local neighborhoods. The study showed that understanding communication campaigns for nation building requires an understanding of the social, political, and economic context of other nation-building programs and policies. Campaigns, like all other communication efforts, are contextualized and given meaning by other social factors. Many social factors affect the adaptation rate of a campaign, and the most successful campaigns for nation building must incorporate as many favorable conditions as possible. Whereas
this study examined a developing nation, other countries at other stages of development can benefit from this line of research. Many developed nations are in the process of trying to improve ethnic relations. Urban areas in the United States, Canada, and Europe may learn about the ways in which communication campaigns create cooperation among members of different ethnic groups. National unity is never completely achieved but, even in the most cohesive nations, it can always be strengthened.

This article argues that communication campaigns can build relationships between previously unrelated publics as well as between the government and its publics. Implicit in the concept of relationships is the idea of cooperation. In a move toward a public relations approach to nation building, relationships will become the focus of research and a more communication-centered and participative model will emerge. When this happens, it will benefit all parties involved because building relationships, especially cooperative interethnic relationships, strengthens a nation–state and improves the lives of all the people living there. Moreover, a public relations approach that puts control back in the hands of the people will create a more ethical, empowering, and lasting national unity.

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