COMMUNICATING IN CHINA

The Media and PR Perspectives

Communicating in China explores the art of how messages get delivered to Chinese audiences, examining the topic from the media and public relations perspectives. It combines both theoretical and practical elements, aimed at helping to understand how processes work in China, and how to effectively communicate with mass audiences from within that framework. Taught by current and former professionals with real world experience working in China, the course looks at many of the issues that people from these disciplines face in doing their jobs, from how to stay in line with the government’s agendas to working with China’s massive bureaucracy to steer clear of thorny topics. It combines broader discussion of the market, with teaching of some of the real-world skills needed to work in the Chinese media sector. The course may include trips to offices of local media, companies and PR events to see real world examples of some of the issues discussed. Grades will be determined by a final project for each of the course’s two legs, as well as attendance and participation.

Instructors:

Doug Young, Fudan University
Heather Ritchie, Vice President of Communications, Alcatel-Lucent

Reading:

The Party Line: How the Media Dictates Public Opinion in Modern China, by Doug Young
Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China, by Anne Marie Brady
Changing Media, Changing China, Edited by Susan Shirk (optional)
Blocked On Weibo, By Jason Ng (optional)
Making News: A Straight Shooting Guide to Media Relations, by David Henderson
Public Relations in Asia Pacific: Communicating Effectively Across Cultures, by Mary Devereux and Anne Pierson-Smith

Part I: THE MEDIA PERSPECTIVE:

Week 1: Overview: Fitting in with the government agenda.
This week will look at factors on the Chinese government’s agenda over the years, and how those factors fit in with what gets reported in the media. Discussion will focus on what elements of the government’s agenda have changed over the years and which have remained more constant, as well as how journalists go about selecting what topics to write about.

Readings: “Party Line”, Chapters 1, 5 and 6, and “Marketing Dictatorship”, Chapter 3.

Week 2: Framing the Debate: Selective Voices and the role of Xinhua
This week will examine who are the “opinion leaders” that dictate the bigger messages that get sent out for all media to mimic. Central media including the Xinhua news agency, CCTV and the People’s Daily have always been at the top of the list as opinion leaders, though new challenges are emerging to this structure in the new media age.

Readings: “Party Line” Chapter 2. “Marketing Dictatorship” Chapter 4

Week 3: Underlying language: Taboo subjects and making things work.
This week will examine the kinds of subjects that get censored in the Chinese media and why, and look more closely at how the censorship system works. Discussion will include a detailed look at specific personal experiences by the instructor involving censorship in the Chinese media.

Readings: “Party Line” Chapters 8 and 9, “Marketing Dictatorship”, Chapter 5. Also see “Blocked On Weibo”.

Initial proposals for final projects due.

Week 4: Guanxi: The importance of relationships.
This week will examine the massive machinery that oversees what makes it into the Chinese media, including the mechanisms used to control news flow. Discussion will include broader perspective, as well as practical information such as the relationships that reporters and editors need to build in order to do their jobs.


Week 5: Changing landscape: The roles of traditional vs new media
This week will look at the rise of new media, how it is shaking up traditional patterns in the Chinese media landscape, and what Beijing is doing to keep its influence in check. Whereas all traditional media were state-owned and directly controlled by local governments, new media is privately owned and highly decentralized, including a growing volume of user-generated content on social networking sites.


Week 6: Under fire: Chinese views of the west and western media
This week will look at how China’s media have looked at the west and western media over the years, and the forces that have shaped its approach. The west has gone from being an evil opponent for the first 20 years under Communist Party rule, to a more nuanced force that is sometimes positive and sometimes overbearing and bullying in the present. Readings: “Party Line”, Chapters 7 and 10. “Marketing Dictatorship”, Chapter 7.

**Week 7: Field trip to visit a major Chinese publication.**
This class will involve a trip to a local media office, where part of the visit will include a presentation by a local reporter or editor on the challenges of working in Chinese language media. Discussion will include how Chinese reporters choose what stories they will write, how the editorial process works, and how reporters are compensated. 
**Readings:** “Party Line”, Chapter 4, “Marketing Dictatorship”, Chapter 8.
**Final project due**

**Part II: THE PR PERSPECTIVE:**

**Week 8: Overview: East meets west: Understanding the differences in the way we communicate**
Chinese and American communication styles differ when it comes to constructing stories, influencing others and collaborating. These differences affect the performance of multinational public relations teams. And they will become increasingly relevant as China extends its global influence. In this class, we will explore the differences and why they matter.
**Readings:** Geography of Thought, Chapters 1 - 2.

**Week 9: PR Strategy: Creating Good PR Programs**
This class covers five similarities and differences in eastern and western PR programs, including the role of government, importance of reputation, journalistic styles and approach to social media. It also covers how to develop a PR strategy, plan and story that resonates. During this session, you will cover the foundation of a good program, discuss good and bad examples, and receive planning templates.
**Readings:** Public Relations in Asia Pacific, Chapters 1 and 2 and 14.

**Week 10: Rules of media engagement: Working with journalists, bloggers and stakeholders**
Journalists have more information coming at them than ever before. How do you capture their attention? This class covers ten ways to engage media. You’ll see examples of great stunts, videos, and pre-packaged stories. The goal is to make public relations professionals think creatively about their programs. The course will highlight best practices from North America and China.
**Readings:** Public Relations in Asia Pacific, Chapters 3, 4, 6 and 12
**Week 11: Basic Media Training Workshop: Working in the line of fire**
In this class, you will learn what the media want, how to prepare for an interview, the techniques for good story telling, how to handle tough questions, and how body language can help tell your story. We will also discuss how these differ in Eastern and Western environments. You will do a video interview and have a chance to watch yourself and receive coaching.

**Readings:** Geography of Thought, Chapters 4 - 6.

**Week 12: Maintaining an image: Crisis and reputation management**
At some time or another, most organizations face a crisis. Organizations that handle them well have the potential to come out stronger. Organizations that handle them poorly can damage their reputation for years – if not forever.
This class teaches ten keys to managing issues from the planning to the recovery stage. You will review case studies and respond to a crisis that may hit while you are sitting in class. You will leave with a method, checklist, and industry best practices.

**Readings:** Public Relations in Asia Pacific, Chapters 5 and 8.

**Week 13: Pitching a story**
This class will feature a panel of PR experts, both from Alcatel-Lucent and other local companies. Students will pitch PR plans to the panel based on materials and strategies they have studied and learned from during the semester.

**Final project due.**