Full Length Article

Towards organisational activism in the UAE: A case study approach.

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

1. Introduction

In recent years, organisations have become aware that committing to social good can only improve their reputations and consequently help them achieve their goals (Sommerfeldt, 2013; Sage, 2012). Organisations have increasingly committed to socially beneficial projects through corporate social responsibility programmes, proving that PR has the power to set agendas and cause behavioural change. For example, PR has gained social relevance and embraced the age of the social collective (Fournier and Avery, 2011). The Internet and social media have enabled an open environment in which both audiences and organisations exert influence and power.

The majority of studies in PR address power as an internal force and a source of contention (Edwards, 2006); this paper looks at power as an external force that is impactful on the community. It attempts to understand the extent to which public relations could be a force in monarchical environments and advocate on behalf of minority groups to support their interests. Drawing on seminal public relations campaigns, this research uses a case study approach to discuss corporate PR activism in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

2. Literature review

Prevalent PR literature covers functions and management within the four models of PR (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Public relations activities bring attention to the brand (Moloney, 2006), contribute to achieving the organisation's goals and sustain its relationships with its audiences (Melbourne, 2012). In the normative view, public relations' general aim is to influence opinion and behavior. The power of public relations is often manifested in its ability to influence publics through persuasive communications. In this way, practitioners

> 'utilize communication to create power. (. . .) When publics accept the practitioner's view of the world, hegemony is created and publics cede power to the organizations. Organizations can use power to dominate publics and much of the critical public relations research seeks to illuminate this hegemonic domination' (Coombs and Holladay, 2012, p. 881).

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Scholars have condemned this functionalist and behaviorist perspective, while adopting different approaches (see Ihlen and Verhoeven, 2015 for a list of approaches). One of the alternatives to this normative model is found in the post-modernist approach to PR, which views it as able to 'engender both power and resistance' (Edwards, 2012, p. 19). This approach raises both an activist role for practitioners who make use of their conscience 'rather than the conscience of the organisation' (Holtzhausen and Voto, 2002, p. 66) as well as ethics for societal wellbeing (Macnamara, 2014). Examining how practitioners can become change agents, Holtzhausen and Voto argue that,

> '[T]he postmodern practitioner also can assist the organization itself to become activist by resisting dominant and harmful power in society in general. Organizations that take on government policies that harm the environment or take a stand on behalf of marginalized social groups will be a typical example of such activism' (2002, p. 63).

Recent studies (Edwards, 2012; L'Etang, Mckie, Snow, & Xifra, 2014; L'Etang, 2009) that have focused on critical thinking about PR and postmodernist approaches to PR have called for PR research outside the mainstream that reconceptualises PR and relocates it in 'a sociological and cultural context' (Macnamara, 2014, p. 72). The work of Edwards and Hodges (2011) is case in point of the cultural approach to PR. Examples of the social approach to PR can be found in Ihlen, Van Ruler, & Fredriksson (2009) as well as Ihlen and Verhoeven's (2015). Holtzhausen (2012, p. 365) speaks in favour of an additional approach, social activism arguing that PR practitioners should focus more on 'conflict and resistance'. Building on previous works, essentially Latin American, that promote empowerment to 'serve genuine concerns of citizens', Hodges and McGrath (2011, p. 91) call for an approach that involves dialogue and participation between and among communities and PR practitioners. They argue that communities enact social transformation when they are involved in the co-creation of the meaning of messages and when they consider truthful the purpose of the communication programmes.

This paper draws on this last approach and takes a postmodernist perspective to discuss the extra-organisational activism of public relations. While intra-organisational activism addresses activism within the organisation and for its interests (Berger, 2005), extra-organisational activism is motivated by societal interests (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002). Extra-organisational activism involves a network of intermediaries (Hodges & McGrath, 2011), including PR practitioners who brush aside their interests and keep low their profiles moving away from the 'mutually-beneficial' core of PR. New media proved effectiveness in connecting this network of intermediaries while strengthening and broadening the relationships with the publics. Men and Tsai (2015) argue that social media are a milieu that enables interpersonal communication with organisations. Social media influence the relationships between organisations and their publics (Men & Tsai, 2016); they are additional ingredients to achieve social power (Ihlen & Verhoeven, 2015).

Building upon the social and cultural perspectives that revisit the fundamentals and epistemology of PR, and through case studies, this research sheds light on some ways when PR practices enable social change. Through the examination of award-winning campaigns in marketing communication festivals and competitions, I argue that PR can enact a conscience to drive social change and improve human relations.

Regrettably, it has become quite common for corporations to take advantage of the weak and fragile situations of employees (Human Rights Watch, 2015). In those cases, state governments have the duty and responsibility to protect those employees as well as all members of their society. However, in many cases, they do not. Failure to protect human rights has previously led to rebellion, protests and revolts. Public activism may lead to the protection of workers' rights, but when this does not or cannot occur, other instances may emerge that speak to those workers' rights and enact civil society through public relations (Taylor, 2010). In these cases, organisations act as social actors that connect people, organisations and networks for better social cohesion. This is particularly true in non-democratic societies where freedom of expression is challenged by regulation and censorship.

This study belongs to a body of research that uses an international perspective of public relations. Situated in a non-Western context, the cases in this text describe an industry that is still developing. As context is an integral part of these cases, the discussion starts with geographic and socio-political context and ends with remarks on the socio-resistant flavour of these campaigns.

3. Socio-political and geographic context

Situated in the Arabian Gulf, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a monarchy of seven emirateswith some degree of autonomy Commins, 2012). Like the other monarchies in the Arabian Gulf (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain), the UAE gained its wealth from its natural resources, mainly oil and gas. In 1971, the UAE adopted its programme of labour immigration (the *kafala* sponsorship system) to respond to its construction and infrastructure needs as well as to support its economic development. The UAE's very small population combined with a lack of knowledge and education led the country to attract and rely on both white- and blue-collar immigrant workers, the majority of whom are Asian labourers working in construction. According to the UAE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, of the population of 4.5 million labour force in 2015, 32.68 percent worked in construction followed by 23.67 percent in trade and repair services; the rest were spread throughout manufacturing and other services (mohre.gov, 2016). Labourers' living and working conditions have been criticized by global NGOs, humanitarian associations and the media. The concerns regularly include low pay, poor living conditions, few entertainment opportunities, poor safety and working conditions, and difficult transitions between jobs. Until 2015, the regulation and sponsorship conditions prevent the workers from contesting, however the 2015 revised labour law includes provisions for workers on ways to voice out their concerns. Although significant progress has been

made to address some of the social and labor issues, the improvement of the working conditions is still ongoing and the topic remains on the agenda all over the region (Aljazeera, 2015).

4. Methodological approach

This paper discusses PR campaigns that address civic life and public interest. Through the examination of brand messages and activities, this study explores the power of PR to influence relations in a non-Western, monarchical environment. In this case, I examine public relations not as functionality or process but as a 'contingent, socio-cultural activity that forms part of the communicative process by which society constructs its symbolic and material "reality"'(Edwards and Hodges, 2011, p. 3). I use a case study approach that is designed to enable learning about a phenomenon (Punch, 2014). I aim to learn from these case studies what good public relations can do for a society and its structures.

The discussion of these case studies starts with a factual description of each case that is a description of the problem and the solution for the specific case. Following the discussion of the four cases, I reflect on the power and social change. I attempt to answer the following research question:

How powerful are the campaigns being studied and to what extent do they enable and drive socio-cultural change?

These case studies were selected based on their popularity. Popularity can be measured through audience metrics, revenues and financial results or the evaluation of peers in the arena of industry festivals and competitions (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the Dubai Lynx Festival of Creativity, which is the MENA region's version of the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity, is the most notable. Also important is the MENA Effie awards, a local version of the global Effies. Each of the campaigns discussed achieved impressive metrics that qualified them to win the awards in the PR category.

The case studies are from the UAE and designed in Dubai.

5. Case studies and data analysis

Case A. Sprite *Cricket Stars*

(youtube.com/watch?v=YNSrRYe6UGY)

Building on the brand's promise of refreshingly authentic, this campaign aimed to bring together its target audience, South Asians in the UAE from various backgrounds. Arabian Gulf societies are structured in classes; South Asian workers are marginalised. Sprite wanted to break this taboo and bring together people from various backgrounds while offering better conditions to workers.

The campaign insight emerged from the truth that South Asians of various nationalities share one passion, one authentic truth: they love cricket.

Sprite decided to use this passion and give back to this community of labourers. The PR campaign objective was to connect people through this refreshingly authentic truth.

In 2011, Sprite organised a cricket tournament inspired by the model of the World Cup and made of these workers into cricket stars. Over a period of six months, the workers completed trials and then trained intensively to prepare for the big game: a grand finale at Dubai International Stadium. The grand finale included more than cricket stars. Because of their fandom of Bollywood cinema and their passion for cricket, famous actors and players were brought specifically from India to attend the games, play and connect with the workers.

Sprite reported that the event was a huge success; the workers connected with each other regardless of their social class or professional status. The game drove them, and the game united them in their diversity. This offered a break from the norm of workers being isolated and also broke the norm of who could talk about workers' living conditions. Thus far, human rights reporters and international media have been more vocal than anyone else about GCC labourers' conditions. This campaign, while also bringing attention to this social problem, used a different tone: it brought joy, entertainment and excitement to the workers. It also had a contagion effect; more companies, such as the telecom operator Du, conducted similar activities to provide entertainment to this demographic (Khaleej Times, 2015). Furthermore, the success of the campaign reached other countries, and similar tournaments have now been organised in Bahrain and Qatar (Coca-Cola Company, online), bringing entertainment opportunities to the hardest working population in these countries. Neighbouring countries, such as Qatar, have planned to build entertainment venues for their new workers' accommodations, recognising the need for better living conditions for these workers (Hosea, 2014).

The brand reports that in addition to a sentiment of gratitude that was expressed towards Sprite, the brand growth reached 14 percent year on year, with 34 percent sales growth during the campaign period, including 57 percent growth among labourers. The campaign reached more than 330,000 labourers, which led Sprite to run the event year after year. In 2015, it reached 500,000 people (Saudi Gazette, 2015).

Case B. Coca-Cola *Hello Happiness*

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlA9tXYxD8g)

Building on the 2011 'Sprite Cricket' campaign, the 'Hello Happiness' campaign was another initiative by the Coca-Cola Company and its agency, Young & Rubicam, to address workers' living conditions. The context was the same for the labourers;

long working hours, low pay and little entertainment opportunities. Coke found another authentic truth: family connections. The company placed phone booths in various labour camps in Dubai in which the workers could exchange every cap of the soft drink for three minutes on an international call (the soft drink costs approximately 2 Dhs = US$0.54; the workers make 22 Dhs = US$6.00 per day). This idea developed from talking with the labourers and realising how important it was for them to reach out frequently to their families. With a monthly pay that varies between US$120 and US$200, the workers could not afford to pay for extensive mobile time to talk to their families. To reach out to an extended target audience, Coke released a three-minute YouTube video. The video uses an emotional strategy to connect with a wider audience and persuade them how good this experience was to the workers. The video includes testimonials of workers who expressed that they enjoyed talking to their wives and siblings for a longer time; others manifested their excitement towards the booths. However, this operation only lasted for a month.

This campaign's objective was to spread love and happiness among the audience, South Asians, and thus increase their affinity and love for the brand. Coca-Cola notes that 'The Hello Happiness initiative pays tribute to the hard work and efforts of these labourers and serves as a gesture of goodwill and appreciation' (The National, 2014). The brand also reports effectiveness metrics such as a 13.55 percent increase in brand love, with 6.7 percent more weekly drinkers amongst South Asians in the UAE. The 2014 Coke Continuous Consumer Tracker notes that the video earned over 3 million views, 14,000 tweets, 45,000 shares and 67,000 likes, (Dubai Lynx, 2015) provoking a conversation among the UAE population. According to the brand, the campaign continued raising issues of the labourers' living conditions, and the video takes an emotional appeal to continue the conversation about human rights, race and diversity. However, the comments on social media are both positive and negative. Although some believed this campaign offered a good opportunity for the labourers to talk with their families for a longer time and more frequently, others considered it unethical and opportunistic for two reasons: first, the campaign required the workers to buy a Coke as a condition to use the booth and second, as will be discussed below, there is a perception that Coke took advantage of and used the working conditions for its commercial tactics.

Case C. *Taking Home Happiness* by Coca Cola

http://www.dubailynx.com/winners/2016/pr/entry.cfm?entryid=1643&award=3

Following the previous two campaigns, the Coca-Cola Company launched in 2016 'Taking Home Happiness' project, another initiative in line with the spirit of the happiness and cricket campaigns. Once again, the campaign aims to build brand love among South Asians living in the UAE and connect with them while doing good. The concept developed from interviews and observations with the workers who expressed how much they appreciated taking home gifts to their family and friends. However, they were concerned about the excess baggage for which they do not want to pay. Young & Rubicam Dubai came up with the idea of distributing a hundred free bottles of Coke to South Asian workers returning home with excessive luggage at Dubai International Airport. When the workers opened the lid, they were happily surprised with the free extra baggage allowance (each bottle contained an allowance of at least five kilos of extra luggage).

The brand's agency, Y&R, explains that

> '[O]ur strategy was to connect with consumers on an emotional level in order to build a positive association with the brand. This project was a part of a larger plan to increase market share via small scale activities and promotions within the same theme. Thus far, Coca-Cola's key competitor had been actively speaking to the target through other passion points such as cricket and Bollywood, which is why we decided to tap deeper into the real problems and needs of the group in order to build a long-term connect between the target and brand.' (Y&R, dubailynx.com)

A total of 2500 kilos of free luggage was distributed. As in previous campaigns, a YouTube video was produced showing travellers happily surprised and pleased by the campaign. The video went viral, which sparked a conversation among the public. The campaign metrics reported by the brand included 1,069,174 viewers on YouTube with a positive response of over 19,000 retweets and shares across multiple platforms including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs (Dubai Lynx, 2016).

Once again breaking the norm of silence, this campaign builds on the little low wages that the South Asian workers earn and how needy this group is. The online conversation amplified the PR action and empathy towards the labourers.

Case D. The Pride Initiative by Emirates NBD

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGExmlENkrY)

For this 2014 campaign, Emirates NBD, an Emirati national bank, endorsed the cause of children with special needs. The 'Pride Initiative' campaign, produced by FP7 Dubai, aimed to show the population that children with disabilities deserved to be respected and not pitied. In the UAE, the subject of children with disabilities had been taboo (Thekkepat, 2014). Disabled children were not well-integrated into society: they lacked education and were not substantially engaged in the community. Because of this lack of awareness and appreciation of these children's needs, there were almost no facilities to teach them or help them develop. As of 2014, the UAE had only 16 active disability therapy and learning centres, and their costs are prohibitive.

Emirates NBD initiated a positive conversation with and about children with special needs. The campaign aimed to show people that these children were capable of contributing to the society; the campaign also attempted to change people's perceptions, as they only viewed these children with pity. The campaign sought to build an image of equal citizens and erase the one that pitied them.

Because these children had several talents, such as painting, the campaign decided to create an art exhibition. They named the exhibition 'Perspectives' and it showcased exclusively curated work by the upcoming artists. People from the partnered member museums as well as the private and upper-class customers of Emirates NBD were invited to what appeared to be a regular auction that was co-managed by a leading auction house (Christie's), and oeuvres of the art of these children were presented as works of artists. People – art patrons- could buy and own the oeuvres as in any exhibition and auction. Then, these patrons were given the chance to meet the artists – children artists. As people did not know about the artists, they were very surprised to see children with special needs. A video of this event was seeded online and gained momentum on social media. Emirates NBD empowered the children and their families by giving them confidence for the future and demonstrating that they are accomplished and skilled persons, says the video. The campaign also changed the tone of the conversation about special needs children from pity to respect, generating positive word of mouth and awareness about attitudes towards children with disabilities. In addition to the positive social media campaign metrics, they raised $100,000 as well as the endorsement of other art galleries in Dubai.

6. Discussion

These four campaigns are grounded in promotional marketing and strategic communication. They also share a social component that speaks to their consciences in different ways; they expose 'inequalities in society', an issue that postmodern PR deals with (Holtzhausen, 2011, p. 159). Social good is a primary ingredient of these campaigns, at least in principle. The sociocultural context gives meaning to the PR actions, while social media helps amplifying the reach and impact of the PR programme.

The analysis is conducted as follows. First, looking at the PR discourse, including signs that are verbal or non-verbal, enables us to identify the message of the campaign and unveil its creativity and persuasion capabilities. Second, I analyse the manifestations of PR discourses and question their authenticities. Third, it is now agreed upon that social media is an important ingredient to any PR programme, this section examines the online mobilisation generated by these campaigns and discusses the extent to which these PR programmes are powerful.

6.1. Unveiling the message through activation programmes

The campaigns attempted to raise a conversation about discrimination. There are two dimensions to this conversation; one is within the target audience, and the second is with the wider community.

Both Sprite and Coke campaigns aimed to raise interest and build bonds with the target audience, South Asians, in the hope of gaining their love (Dubai Lynx, 2015). They were invited to participate in a promotional, on-the-ground experience. Experiential and activation programmes are increasingly recognized as effective in changing attitude and behavior (Ferrier, 2014). Using health promotion cases, Toledano and Riches (2014) argue effectiveness of event management for social causes campaigns.

The short videos of the activation programmes studied, cricket tournament, phone booths, excess baggage offers or painting for the auction, proved that the target audiences were involved and engaged with the brands. It is noteworthy that the online messages in the three Coca-Cola videos were not meant for the workers themselves because they have no access to the Internet and cannot afford to pay for it; they were meant for the community.

The Sprite movie uses testimonials from which two themes emerge: the labourers' hard work and their passion for cricket. The coach speaks of the lack of entertainment opportunities they have and how much this tournament means to them. The brand name and logo are observed only for about a second in the movie and on the players' jerseys. The movie ends with the following script reporting the metrics of the campaign:

'Blog mention: None
Tweets: None
Facebook fans: None
TV coverage: None
Sprite Cricket Stars: 42,156'

This speaks to the workers' conditions, but it also speaks to the brand's authenticity. The tournament is not about publicity but the social good of the workers. The real conversation that enables brand love happened on the field when the workers played their passion. More than 40,000 workers have actually played, and many more have watched and supported the games. Sprite used the fandom strategy to connect with its audience, both players and spectators. Their fandom to both the game and the Bollywood celebrities who attended the tournament and served as opinion leaders (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) extended to the brand, which enabled to build a 'brandfans' community (Hutchins and Tindall, 2016, p. 6). By reaching out to a broader audience, through the online channels, Sprite opened a taboo conversation about the Asian construction workers, and created meaning to its messages. Ihlen and Van Ruler (2009, p. 10) argue, 'The moment an organisation brings out a certain message, it produces a certain component of the public sphere by presenting meaning and constructing frames in the public debate'. Sprite actions brought for public conversation the topic of the construction workers' living conditions that went silent for a long time.

The Coca Cola movies used the before and after strategy. The movies started with images of and testimonials about the miserable conditions of the workers, especially in the Coca Cola Happiness campaign, and end with the transformation as

the brand resolved a problem and brought happiness to the consumers. The Coca Cola Happiness campaign used labels, such as the 'labour camp' sign hanging on the wall of the labourers' living quarters. The movie started with a dramatisation effect telling the viewers how little the workers make and how much they sacrifice for their families. At no point did the movie mention that the workers had to pay for the bottle of Coke. The copy "What if Coca Cola came with a few extra minutes of happiness" suggested that the brand was providing them with these extra minutes and not asking the workers to pay for them. The movie showed how to use the cap, but did not tell how to obtain it. It was also silent about the duration of the action or the number of participants. Actually, Coca Cola's Hello Happiness programme lasted for four weeks with only little activation each week (The National, 2014). This short time prevents from building relationships with the brand. Affective goals require long-term actions (Kent & Taylor, 2011; Krishna & Kim, 2016) and relationship building. Kent and Taylor note that organisations' ethics require to 'ask if our communication efforts are intent on honest persuasion, propaganda or marketing' (2011, 57). Coca Cola Happiness intrusions combined with the buying conditions to participate in the experience hardly convince of the organisation's goodwill intent. Several shots in the movie showed glum labourers watching from a distance rather than being engaged with the action. Furthermore, the overwhelming and pushy presence of the brand throughout the movie detracted from its positive sentiment. Although Sprite succeeded in connecting and winning the audience's hearts on a large scale, one could argue that Coca Coca was less successful.

In the Emirates NBD campaign, the PR activities challenged a cultural mindset: the way people look at their realities in their everyday lives. Thus, the PR programme aimed to persuade people not only to act or not act in a specific way (Morris & Goldsworthy, 2008) but also to think or not to think in a specific way. Here, as well as in the Sprite campaign, the benefit of the activation was persuasively disconnected from the brand's self-interest, and it was instead connected to its community and the social responsibility that the brand owes it. The campaigns brought out 'self-pride' as a worthwhile sentiment of doing good. The 'Perspectives' campaign challenged the norm and opened a conversation about a taboo little discussed before. The video is sensitive, emotional and powerful, as it involved minority group children who speak for themselves and are proud of their works. It presented evidence that the perceptions of disabled children as being unable to contribute to society were not valid; they were wrong. By enacting other galleries to present children's oeuvres and join the movement, by collecting funds and changing perceptions, the campaign proved value and manifested power that transcends 'the messages it creates and disseminates (. . .), the distribution mechanisms that it uses, the economic resources it structures and legitimates, and the relative value it accords some people over others' Edwards (2011, p. 43).

6.2. Authenticity and creativity to enact power

Authentic organisations are genuine and true to themselves. They are transparent, truthful and consistent (Taiminen, Luoma-aho, & Tolvanen, K., 2015). Molleda (2010) deconstructs the concept of authenticity and refers to multidisciplinary perspectives including sociology, critical studies, marketing and strategic communication to assess message authenticity. He provides an index represented by a set of questions. If the organisation's message addresses these questions, then the message could be perceived as authentic. Among these questions are included whether the message coveys:

- 'calls to become part of an action that goes beyond profit making and corporate gains;
- heritage of the organisation and its leaders, as well as references to historical background of the organisation and its corporate offerings or promises;
- sustainability and corporate responsibility programmes, decisions, or actions.' Molleda (2010, p. 233)

Although all these boxes could be checked for the campaigns studied, they are insufficient to appraise the authenticity of the message. For instance, Coca Cola has used the theme of happiness globally for a long time. The campaign studied here is a localized version of the global Coca Cola Happiness campaign with an attempt to challenge hegemonic power (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011), as it chose a voiceless minority group in the UAE to connect through this value. Coca Cola may have good intentions beyond profit, but the fact that only a few participants engaged with the phone booth while others observed, and the participants had to pay to engage in this short-lived action failed to communicate the authenticity of the good intention or the social contribution of Coca Cola. It failed to generate a mobilising power to address the issues of migrant workers. The criticism of the campaign from the audience testifies to this; one user, Jonathan, commented on the YouTube video:

'[The campaign lasted] only for a month. That's like giving hope, exploiting your good, temporary deed, and left out the little "1 month-then-dismantle" bit of info out of the video; which left the majority of migrants feeling used and exploited to boost Coke profits. Do you not have the money to keep those booths up? You did put them there, advertised them w/strong implications of good will when it was just a 4-week ploy, essentially just pushing people to buy your product'.

Another adds, 'Happiness is when the most valued world brand is using almost-slaves (paid $6 per day to work at immense heat) for a month long advertising campaign?' Some found the experience unethical and noted that not only was the campaign odious, but it also normalised the hardship of the workers and the dysfunctional structure of the system (Vauhini, 2014). Although the Happiness campaign has been successful globally (Schultz, 2016), the attempt to localize and adapt it to this specific group and influence the public have failed to carry favour. The campaign is perceived to serve the interests of the brand and misunderstood the specific cultural dynamics of the place (Edwards, 2011).

In the second Coca Cola campaign, 'Taking Home Happiness', which was implemented two years after Coca Cola Happiness, the brand seems to have listened to and learned from the users' comments on the previous activation programme and continued its conversation with the audience on the basis of goodwill. This time, the video did not dramatise the workers' living conditions, and bottles of coke were distributed for free to travellers, making them truly happy as they won the extra kilos for their luggage weight. Coca Cola learned how to protect its social capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and reinforce its relationship with its audience. The financial marketing objective of Coke may still prevail, which is not wrong if it is combined with good intentions; as Coombs and Holladay (2014, p. 41) write,

> 'We still can be skeptical that the organization is looking for some eventual gain from improving the relationships with stakeholders (. . .)The benefits are a natural outgrowth of the relationship network, regardless of the motive. Hence, we choose to consider the nature of the action because motives cannot be fully known. If an organization says it values care, reflects that value in its actions, and produces valued outcomes, we will consider it to be morally competent and reflecting the ethic of care.'

It should be noted that both Coca Cola cases succeeded raising a social media conversation about race, labourers' working and living conditions, and their low wages. In all cases studied, the organisations dedicated effort, resources and creativity to address social, cultural and economic issues in a country where silence and self-censorship are the norms. Creativity brought new ways of thinking about social issues and resistance in the Arabian Gulf. These brands included minority groups (migrant workers or children with disabilities) in the social conversation and brought up an agenda to the public. Thanks to the creativity in all the selected cases, PR practitioners found a way to raise discrimination issues and start a wider and more inclusive conversation about topics hitherto taboo. The campaigns started dialogue and conversation among communities (Hodges & McGrath, 2011) that were influential when truthful. Except Coca-Cola, the programmes were repeated over time: A cricket tournament became a yearly, organised event, and other companies, such as the telecom operator Du are embracing the social good.

6.3. Social media, the arena for social influence

There are mixed opinions about social media contribution to collective activism (Ward, 2016). Nevertheless, there is evidence that social media help raising awareness, which is 'crucial to building support and engaging an audience' (Ward, 2016, p. 170). This is even truer in countries where speech is controlled and freedom of expression limited. The Arab uprisings and the continuous struggle post the uprisings are evidence of the ways people turn to social media to exert activism. People turn to social media to express their support for causes through likes, shares, pictures or posts; they create and curate content to show their willingness to support the cause.

The campaigns studied used social media to disseminate videos to the broad community. Sprite and Coca Cola could not interact with their primary target audiences on social media, as this minority group is simply not connected to the Internet. The brands pushed the videos on social networks to broaden its social capital and initiate the conversation about workers' conditions. The sensitivity of the issue of workers' human rights may explain why the brand did not pursue further efforts and take an active part in the conversation. This can be seen as a missed opportunity to bond with the community. Coca Cola could have followed through with a fund for the workers or collected Coke caps from citizens so that the workers did not have to pay for their extra minutes, for example. The fact that the brand captured the attention and raised awareness was a good step to build on further actions. Kapin and Ward (2013, p. 29–30 in Ward 2016, p. 170) argue "liking a page or sharing a post (. . .) are not the actions and real impact you're looking for (. . .) but those actions are important! Why? Because, through them, people are telling you they will do what you ask to support the cause'.

In the 'Perspectives' campaign, Emirates NBD used several social media platforms to engage and educate the audience about children with special needs. The conversation entertained on social networks was followed by concrete influential actions including a charity fund and other gallery exhibitions. The PR action was carried through and became powerful enough to influence people's consideration of and perceptions towards children with special needs. The engagement with the community extended and amplified the effect of the activation. Social media was used not only to disseminate and extend the activation but also to sustain the viability and resonance of the campaign. This is an example of a mutually beneficial relationship between stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). It is also an example of the power of the PR action. Coombs and Holladay (2014, p. 50) note that, ' When we perceive that another can influence our behavior (. . .), then that other has power. People or groups have power when they can get another to do something they would not otherwise do.'

Brands and corporations do not have a monopoly on the conversation anymore and to some extent do not even have the power. They may gain power when their public conversations are ethically constructed and in respect of all stakeholders. The example of Coca Cola's 'Hello Happiness' proves that, thanks to social media, power today is dynamic and moves around. It moves off and on between the brand and its audiences. Organisations initiate PR programmes, but audiences have channels they can use to turn the tone of voice and control the conversation. Coca Cola left the conversation about 'Hello Happiness' and came back, two years later, with a revised campaign that addressed the points of contention expressed in the first. The brand proved that it listened to its audience and attempted to gain back its social capital. The power moved from the brand to the audience, and back to the brand.

It is true that the Coca Cola PR actions grabbed the attention of and may have had an impact on the general audience, but that impact was not strong enough to engage the government and policy makers, and hence enact change. The PR power in

this context is limited to raising awareness about the message. It had limited potential on resistance as it failed to 'restructure and legitimize economic resources and add value to some people' Edwards (2011, p. 43) the way Dove self-esteem campaign did for example when Unilever created a Dove self-esteem fund to help women around the world (Courtright, Wolfe and Baldwin, 2011). A Coca Cola Happiness fund for the workers could have paid for the extra minutes of communication with their families. Beyond that, power would have enacted a conversation with other corporations and NGOs capable of driving effective change in regards to the workers' rights issue. This means that out of a PR action, other campaigns over construction workers' rights and living conditions could develop from other organisations or a coalition group that join actions to improve living conditions of the workers. This was the case with the Emirates NBD Perspective campaign in which activists in the movement established a fund and enacted change thanks to their negotiations with other organisations and state representatives.[1] New relationships emerge between stakeholders eventually leaving the brand, which initiated the conversation, backstage. As the Foucauldian paradigm suggests, the power shifts from the brand to those agents, who are capable of carrying through the negotiation.

7. Concluding remarks

This paper examines power through PR advocacy campaigns. In this study, both practitioners and senior managers have a positive conscience and agree to social activism through corporate campaigns. When governments exert their state power in preserving the privileged status quo, corporations, can find alternative ways to raise social issues through their promotional departments. Organisational activism enacts resistance to power structures, be they be the government or other powerful organisations.

Through the cases studied, I argue that the power of PR offers the capacity to act positively and effectively towards marginalised groups in the society. With authenticity and listening, power comes from urging different views of objects or people and setting an agenda for discussion. Power is manifested when it influences others and enacts something.

The campaigns studied drive a macro effect rather than a micro effect. If more companies become sensitive to the issue of the labourers and other minority groups, and if more companies drive actions towards the improvement of their conditions, then the power to make those changes will emerge and be amplified. Edwards (2011, p. 43) argues, 'the power exerted by public relations work does not inhere solely in the messages it creates and disseminates, but in the distribution mechanisms that it uses, the economic resources it structures and legitimates, and the relative value it accords some people over others'.

This study looks into a limited number of cases that is not representative; more research would help explore power relations between organisations and communities. This paper shares international PR experiences and actions that reveal practices in a region seldom studied.

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[1] Unlike Coca-Cola that has nil story on its support for the labourers' cause on its website and social media platforms, Emirates NBD displays on its website its support and ongoing social commitment to people with disabilities.

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