

MPC Major Research Paper

Communicating Sustainability: An Analysis of the 2017 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report

Linnea Franson
500808173

Frauke Zeller

Ryerson University
Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this MRP. This is a true copy of the MRP, including any required final revisions.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this MRP to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research. I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this MRP by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I understand that my MRP may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This MRP provides an analysis of the communication strategy of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in an attempt to better understand the role of communication in sustainable development. In 2014, UN Member States put forth the SDGs, following the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), serving as renewed targets for the global population from 2015-2030 (Miller-Dawkins, 2014). The SDGs and their ambitious yet transformational agenda aim to promote prosperity for all of humankind, while protecting our planet. This MRP establishes how the goals of the SDG campaign are being communicated in the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017* (SDG Report 2017). The report is released annually based on the latest available data and provides a snapshot of the efforts to date. In addition to exploring how the report is designed and communicated, this MRP will result in a list of recommendations for future international communication initiatives. These recommendations are informed by the literature review touching on the changing nature of international development and communication while also applying and linking three key areas of theoretical discourse: Knowledge Translation, Hofstede's (2003) cultural dimensions, and concepts of Framing Analysis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my profound gratitude to those who have guided me and encouraged me throughout the process of writing this MRP.

To my supervisor Dr. Frauke Zeller, thank you for your time and continued support. Your guidance and feedback throughout this project have been invaluable assets and I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the impact you have had on my education. I would also like to thank Dr. Wendy Freeman who provided me with insightful feedback as my second reader.

And last, but certainly not least, I would like to extend a giant hug to my family, friends and fellow MPC class of 2018 for their love, understanding and unwavering support throughout this process.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	6
Literature Review.....	8
Research Questions.....	22
Data Collection Approach.....	24
Method of Analysis.....	25
Findings and Discussion.....	28
Conclusion.....	52
Reference List.....	54

Introduction

This MRP provides an analysis of the communication strategy of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in an attempt to better understand the role of communication in sustainable development. In 2014, UN Member States put forth the SDGs, following the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), serving as renewed targets for the global population from 2015-2030 (Miller-Dawkins, 2014). The SDGs and their ambitious yet transformational agenda aim to promote prosperity for all of humankind, while protecting our planet. What is unique about the UN's concept of sustainability is the recognition that being eco-friendly and ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with a variety of strategies aimed at building economic growth while also addressing a multitude of social needs. More specifically, the SDGs consist of 17 unique objectives associated with 169 targets. These goals are based on the principle of interconnection – a comprehensive framework consisting of a variety of matters including climate change, elimination of poverty, and gender equality (United Nations, 2015). The 17 unique interrelated guiding objectives are outlined below in figure 01:



Figure 1 (The United Nations, 2017)

The SDG agenda reflects the UN's fundamental values and mandate by encouraging respect for human rights and advocating for a world that is equitable and just. The SDG agenda requires an integrated approach involving collective action at all levels of society in an attempt to address the challenges of our time. The goals provide a more universal vision for the world. In light of this, the success of the SDGs require the involvement of a multitude of stakeholders: the governments of both rich and poor countries, society, businesses (the private sector), and the people. While many actors took part in developing the SDGs, many also questioned the notion that there could be clear and effective action on such a wide-ranging agenda (Miller-Dawkins, 2014). Despite these concerns, the SDGs lay out a framework for development cooperation over the next 15 years, while also altering the scope of what is meant by “sustainability” and “international development” (United Nations, 2015).

This MRP establishes how the goals of the Sustainable Development Campaign are being communicated in the SDG Report 2017. This report is released annually based on the latest available data and provides a snapshot of the efforts to date. In addition to critically analyzing the report's content, this MRP will result in a list of recommendations for future international communication initiatives. These recommendations are informed by the literature review touching on the changing nature of international development and communication while also applying and linking two key areas of theoretical discourse: Knowledge Translation, Hofstede's (2003) cultural dimensions, concepts of Framing Analysis.

Literature Review

The following literature review will discuss the current state of research regarding sustainable development, knowledge translation, frame analysis and cultural analysis. The information gathered from this review will support the research focus of this MRP in an attempt to gain a better understanding the role of communication and knowledge translation in international sustainable development.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

The concept of “sustainable development” can be understood as economic development that is conducted without depletion of natural resources, rather, promoting the sustainability of our resources over time (Sachs, 2012). This concept represents the standardized directive for meeting our global development goals while sustaining our societies without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their needs. Sustainable development is rather new as our understanding, definition, and response to the multitude of interconnected sustainability issues has changed over time. For example, today, the sustainable development issue of poverty is understood as a complex condition consisting of a multitude of interwoven elements trapping people into and perpetuating their destitution. In the past, however, consumption was understood as the common measure of poverty (i.e. the ability for individuals to provide the basic human needs for themselves) (Fowler, 2013). As such, responses and aid initiatives in the past took a top down approach and focused more on providing clean drinking water, health supplies, and income generation (Fowler, 2013).

More specifically, Fowler’s (2013) work claimed the following:

Initially the system assumed that inputs of finance and expertise from Northern-donor countries could accelerate and direct change in poorer countries of the world...In later

years it became clear that development could not be externally directed but required local ownership and sufficient capacity to guide the process. (p. 3)

The SDGs represent a radical shift in our understanding of the meaning of international development and sustainability. No longer taking a top-down approach, the SDGs recognize that issues such as poverty, social inequality, and environmental destruction are no longer local/isolated issues, but are global and interconnected (Vuk & Sachs, 2014; Sachs, 2012). Today, “recent global environmental changes suggest that Earth may have entered a new human-dominated geological epoch, the Anthropocene” (Lewis & Maslin, 2015). As humans enter the age of the Anthropocene, the ideas behind the SDGs have rapidly been adopted (Sachs, 2012). Fowler (2013) claims that an important condition has been added to the idea of international development in recent years, “namely that change should be sustainable today and for future generations” (p. 3). Sustainable development now embraces the triple bottom line approach to human welfare (Sachs, 2012). This triple bottom line approach to development has emerged from the widespread recognition of evolving global needs involving an amalgamation of issues: environmental sustainability, economic development and social inclusion (Sachs, 2012). At present, this epoch is marked by the reality that these burdens are both global and local as the human race faces many overlapping crises in the 21st century (Sachs, 2012; Jeremic & Sachs, 2014).

Role of Communication in Sustainable Development

Noting that the concept of sustainability encompasses a multitude of issues involving empowerment, human rights, the environment, participation, and more, communication of the SDGs plays a critical role in sparking international change (Servaes & Lie, 2015). Servaes and Lie (2015) discuss both normative concepts and contextual concepts that influence the

communication of global initiatives. In terms of normative concepts, it was found that “communication for sustainable development and social change is never neutral”, rather, “in taking a normative stand, it becomes clear that some concepts, especially some normative political concepts are favoured more than others” (Servaes & Lie, 2015, p. 127). Contextual concepts involve “globalization, gender, social movements, cultural diversity”, and they actively shape “the circumstances that determine existence, direction, success, and impact of communications interventions in the development sector” (Servaes & Lie, 2015, p. 128).

Establishing the outcome of the media and mass communication in international development is a complex puzzle. Rogers (1976) claims that in the past “the role of mass communication in facilitating development was often indirect and only contributory, rather than direct and powerful. But this varied upon such circumstances as the media, the messages, the audience, and the nature of the intended effects” (p. 227). Today, our world has become increasingly connected via social media and the internet. This reality has both positive and negative consequences when it comes to international communication. Specifically, “new social media and information communication technologies (ICTs) have given the world an unprecedented opportunity for inclusive, global-scale problem solving around the main sustainable development challenges” (Sachs, 2012, p. 2211). As Sachs (2012) asserts, people are participating in more online collaborative networks, open source solutions and group problem solving in the 21st century. Though social media and ICTs have the ability to communicate and disseminate strong direct messages internationally, Cullen’s (2001) and Armenta, Serrano, Cabrera and Conte’s (2012) work on the digital divide highlights the reality that individuals existing in impoverished and/or rural or underserved contexts may struggle to participate in the

adoption of the SDGs as a result of a lack of access to ICTs. This may prove to be a major issue for international governing bodies as they attempt to communicate with the global population.

In addition to the lack of ubiquitous ICT access on a global scale, another major impediment to successful international communication and sustainable development is the reality that we operate in siloed communities/societies with their own unique challenges. Critically, according to Le Blanc (2015) a “lack of integration across sectors in terms of strategies, policies and implementation has long been perceived as one of the main pitfalls of previous approaches to sustainable development” (p. 176). To remedy this, Le Blanc (2015) proposes that the campaign’s comprehensive and interconnected goals may be the key to enabling integration and policy consistency across sectors. Ultimately, the SDGs (and the communication of these goals) serve a special purpose in that they steer the actions of the global community while also generating awareness of the issues (Jeremic & Sachs, 2014; Le Blanc, 2015). Fundamental to the success of the SDGs campaign is widespread public adoption, acceptance and recognition of the magnitude of the issues the SDGs seek to mitigate (Jeremic & Sachs, 2014; Servaes & Lie, 2015). The literature suggests that through further communications research, scholars can continue to provide insight into new approaches to effectively communicating the SDGs (Rogers, 1976; Miller-Dawkins, 2014; Golding, 1974).

Knowledge Translation

Knowledge translation plays a vital role in the public’s uptake of information involving the conversion of complex and lengthy information into digestible and clear messages. The idea that policy decisions must be based on sound evidence has been widely accepted, yet the affairs among researchers and decision makers remain to be characterized by mutual strains and

misinterpretations (Schryer-Roy, 2005). In this regard, researchers and decision makers represent two distinct groups. Knowledge translation (KT) aims to bridge the gap between these two unique groups.

Schryer-Roy (2005) define KT as:

The exchange, synthesis and ethically-sound application of research findings within a complex set of interactions among researchers and knowledge users. In other words, knowledge translation can be seen as an acceleration of the knowledge cycle; an acceleration of the natural transformation of knowledge into use (p. 2).

Additionally, Kerkhoff and Lebel (2006) claim “research, politics, researchers, and the public are intertwined in a constant struggle of justification, explanations, and decisions in an uncertain and complex world.” As the literature suggests, the pursuit of sustainable development involves complex relations between both research and action (Kerkhoff & Lebel, 2006; Caplan, 1979). The “two-communities” theory proposed by Caplan (1979) illustrates the idea that researchers and policy-makers exist in two distinct and disconnected worlds which possess dissimilar values, cultures, languages, and reward systems. This points to the vital role of knowledge translation to bridge the gap between different stake holder groups including researchers, policy makers, and ultimately the public at large. From this perspective, this MRP highlights the reality that skills related to knowledge translation differ for each stakeholder group, yet successful KT as it relates to the SDGs must involve the convergence of these different skill sets. For example, research plays a critical role in how we understand the SDGs and our progress to date. Researchers play an influential role in shaping our understanding of sustainable development and generating public awareness around the challenges that sustainability poses to society at large (Kerkhoff & Lebel, 2006). Policy makers then must

leverage research to create policies that are reflective of the SDGs. Finally, the public must adopt or reject the policies proposed. For the SDGs to be successful, stakeholder groups must work together. Therefore, from a KT perspective, the SDGs' primary audience is in fact all stakeholder groups involving researchers, policy makers, and the public.

The SDG Report 2017 can be seen as a KT piece, taking key research regarding the SDGs and their progress, and translating this information into a report-style communications piece for the global public. It is important to understand the link between the research/key findings presented in the SDG report 2017 and the need for this information to be understood by the public, ultimately translating to actionable objectives that have a lasting real-world impact. Drawing on research, the SDG Report 2017 aims to summarize the SDGs campaign's progress to date and highlights the need for reliable data to inform decision-making, as part of the campaign's broader purpose of transforming the world and building lives of dignity for all of humankind. Essential to international development, knowledge translation involves the transformation of knowledge into action and embodies the practices of both knowledge construction and knowledge application (Graham, et al, 2006, p. 22). Knowledge translation is about leveraging research/data to promote and create actionable initiatives that drive change within society. The concept of knowledge translation is critical to this MRP as widespread action resulting in positive real-world change begins with harnessing and mobilizing research as depicted in the SDG report 2017.

Frame Analysis

The SDGs frame the international development landscape for the next 15 years; therefore, it is of vital importance for audiences to understand and adopt their dominant messages. Originally developed by Erving Goffman (1974), the term “frame analysis” involves the exploration of the “culturally determined definitions of reality that allow people to make sense of objects and events” (Shaw, 2013). More recently, Entman (1993) claims the concept of framing consistently entails both “selection and salience” (p. 52). Framing involves the careful selection of certain details of reality and amplifying these details to make them more salient within a communicating text (Entman, 1993). Ultimately, frames “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). The literature on Framing Theory suggests that frames direct our attention to certain elements of truth, while concealing others (Entman, 1993; Shaw, 2013; Kuypers, 2009).

The frames selected by the media not only acquaint the audience with the issues being presented (i.e. advise the audience on *what* to think about), but also instructs the audience on *how* to think about issues. Ultimately, how information is presented influences the choices people make about what they value and how they process that information. For example, both Entman (1993) and Zaller (1992) claim that when it comes to politics, the public tends to be less informed; as such, the way political information is framed has a powerful effect on their reaction to communications. More specifically, the literature also acknowledges the importance of frames in political communication and the media as elites control the framing of issues which have a

major influence on how audiences understand problems and solutions (Shaw, 2013, Entman, 1993, Zaller, 1992).

Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) identify 5 common frames used by the media: human impact, powerlessness, economics, moral values, and conflict. The human impact frame involves the media's portrayal of the individuals affected by a particular issue (Neuman, Just, Crigler, 1992). How the media portrays an individual of interest ultimately influences how the audience will perceive the story in negative or positive ways.

The powerlessness frame can be understood as the media's portrayal of individuals or groups as victims of powerful others and/or societal forces (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992). This particular frame is especially powerful as it relates to political communication where the media may leave politicians and other dominant actors responsible for social problems out of the news story, ultimately portraying problems as a result of uncontrollable social forces. News coverage via the powerlessness frame generates a sense of despair and pessimism against issues and an overall sense of powerlessness to dominant groups and actors (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992).

The economic frame employed by the media involves the concepts of financial gain and loss by clearly defining winners and losers (i.e. the powerful and the powerless) in economic terms (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992). This frame possesses significant news value as news stories are often framed in such a way that emphasize the economic impact of an event on the individuals, groups, and/or institutions within a society. Similarly, the conflict frame pertains to the media's preoccupation with defining winners and losers while emphasizing the conflicts

between separate parties (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992). This is especially prevalent when it comes to the coverage of politics in the media where the media's reporting revolves around making winning and losing a central concern.

Finally, the moral interest frame presents an issue in the context of morals, norms, and social prescriptions, appealing to the audience's values and moral judgements (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992). Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) established that the morality frame is most commonly employed by journalists indirectly via the use of quotes to maintain their objectivity as reporters.

The dominant frames outlined above are relevant to the SDG report 2017 as we can employ these broad concepts to better understand how the campaign's messages are being represented and analyze their saliency. I argue that these framing techniques can be applied to the socio-political sphere and, specifically, they can unveil how the UN constructs their narrative to present the concept of sustainable development in a specific way. The application of framing theory to the UN's SDG Report 2017 is necessary because when it comes to promoting international cooperation and creating and maintaining international order, the global population and their political leaders rely on language to understand concepts and govern societies. The language, metaphors, concepts, symbols and visual images used in the report ultimately identify key issues, present solutions and shape responses to the issue of sustainable development on a global scale.

Frame theory is grounded in the shared beliefs, meanings and organized thoughts that shape the interpretation of events. The enduring and more politicized concept of “ideology” “refers to the relationship between organized thought and social power in large-scale, political-economic contexts” (Lull, 2013, pg. 14). Though ideologies can embrace frames, they are more complex. Ideologies reveal underlying connections pertaining to our social construction of reality in terms of thinking, reasoning, educating and socializing (Oliver & Johnston, 2000). When it comes to the SDGs and the communication tactics used to disseminate their purpose and legitimacy, it becomes important to understand the macro-level concept of ideologies. Notably, the manipulation of information and imagery by society’s power holders can create a “dominant ideology which helps sustain the material and cultural interests of its creators” (Lull, 2013, pg. 14). In this sense, the UN has created a system of ideas, or an “ideology”, through the creation SDGs. This ideology is amplified by the media and deemed legitimate as it is communicated persuasively to the global public. The framing of the SDGs and the overriding ideology created by the UN is never neutral; rather the created “systems of ideas are used in ways that favour the interests of some people over others” (Lull, 2013, pg. 15).

Cultural Analysis: Geert Hofstede

From an international communications perspective, it is imperative to understand how the SDGs and its overriding ideology is being framed on both an international level and in different cultural settings. As Lull (2013) claims, “through communication we create culture, and when we communicate, we communicate culturally: culture can be understood as the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation... [that is] by communicating with each other” (pg. 10). Today we live in an increasingly connected world

made possible by the mass media influence and the increased connectivity of the internet. It therefore becomes impossible to discuss the idea of culture without taking the dimension of communication and connectivity into account (Lull, 2013). The literature acknowledges that people of different cultural backgrounds are more or less receptive to different frames as individuals tend to rely heavily on their prior values and beliefs in the face of contradictory factual information (Lachapelle, Montpetit, & Gauvin, 2014). As the UN is responsible for the creation of the SDGs, acting as a centralized body of governance, it becomes important to question how the framing of the goals and the campaign at large are understood in a variety of different cultural contexts.

As the target audience of the SDG campaign and report is the entire world's population, addressing how the report is received in different cultural settings is imperative to understand if the information resonates and remains salient in a variety of contexts. This MRP will draw on the Hofstede studies on cultural differences (2003) to address this issue. Hofstede identified six cultural dimensions used by researchers to gain a greater understanding of the cultural differences between countries. These dimensions rank cultures on a scale of 1-100 and involve the following six dimensions used to understand different the inner workings of cultural practices:

- individualism-collectivism: preference for either a loose or tight social framework within society
- uncertainty-avoidance: response to ambiguity, new ideas/situations
- power distance (strength of social hierarchy): inequality (money and power)
- masculinity-femininity: competitive success or empathy for others

In later years, Hofstede added the following two dimensions:

- long-term orientation versus short-term orientation: long-term cultures emphasizes traditions; short-term cultures innovate and are more accepting to change
- indulgence versus restraint: ability to control impulses (strict or carefree)

(Hitchcock, 2017)

The individual vs. collectivism dimension concerns the ties between individuals within a society. Essentially, “the fundamental issue addressed by this dimension is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among individuals” (Kim, 2017, pg. 26). In this regard, Western countries typically reflect more individualistic cultures, whereas less developed and Eastern countries typically tend to be more collectivistic (Kim, 2017, pg. 26).

The dimension of “uncertainty avoidance” involves the ways in which societies deal with an uncertain future; for example, the “socialization process in some societies enables individuals to face the future with less anxiety” (Armstrong, 1996, pg. 1201). In many East and Central European countries, in Latin countries, in Japan and in German-speaking countries, the aim is to avoid ambiguity through providing “greater career stability, establishing more formal rules, and not tolerating deviant ideas and behaviours...” (Kim, 2017, pg. 27). In weak uncertainty avoidance cultures such as English-speaking, Nordic, and Chinese countries, individuals are willing to take more unknown risks as “people may have a willingness to risk personal loss to do good for society and perform meaningful public service” (Kim, 2017, pg. 27).

The “power distance” dimension “deals with the issue of inequality between members of a given society. The physical and intellectual capacities of people are different. Power distance measures the degree that societies allow these inequalities to perpetuate over time” (Armstrong, 1996, pg. 1201). As Kim (2017) states: “People in large power distance societies accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place that needs no further justification, whereas those in small power distance societies strive for power equalization and demand justification for power inequalities”. This suggests that those in low power distance societies tend to believe that use of power should be both ethical and legitimate, whereas high power distance societies tend to accept the hierarchical order and do not demand justification for power inequalities (Kim, 2017, pg. 26).

Hofstede’s cultural dimension of “masculinity vs. femininity” involves the differences between the roles of the sexes within society (Armstrong, 1996, pg. 1201). Societies that are classified as more masculine, involve a focus on material success and competition, whereas feminine societies tend to be more concerned with care for those in need and quality of life (Kim, 2017, pg. 27). For example, “masculinity is high in Japan, in German-speaking countries, and in some Latin countries such as Italy and Mexico; it is low in Nordic countries and in the Netherlands” (Kim, 2017, pg. 27).

The indulgence vs. restraint dimension pertains to happiness, life control, and importance of leisure (Kim, 2017, pg. 28). With a lack of social norms, societies that exhibit high indulgence allow people to move freely to fulfill their needs, whereas societies that exhibit more restraint have stricter social norms. Societies exhibiting indulgent values include “South and North

America, Western Europe, and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, whereas restraint prevails in Eastern Europe, in Asia and in the Muslim world” (Kim, 2017, pg. 28).

The six cultural dimensions listed above will be applied in this research to gain a deeper understanding of how our values are influenced by culture. This plays an important role not only in this MRP, but also within the broader context of international communication and knowledge translation. As our cultural differences shape our values and belief systems both as individuals and nations, it is imperative to understand how these differences play into the interaction and uptake of the SDGs on a global scale. According to Afjei (2015) “the way that societies conduct their economic affairs, and the level of societal concerns about the consequences of economic actions, are also influenced by social, moral, and cultural factors” (p. 18). Discerning how to effectively communicate messages to a culturally diverse global audience is crucial to the success of the SDG campaign.

Effective communication of the SDGs involves a variety of concepts, methods, and channels to facilitate communication and translation across boundaries. The above literature review draws upon concepts surrounding the notion of sustainable development, the role of communication, knowledge translation, cultural differences, and framing analysis. These concepts come together to inform the overall research interest of this MRP by providing a foundation of knowledge to better understand the challenges faced by the UN regarding the effective communication of the SDGs to an international audience.

Research Questions

This MRP analyzes existing literature regarding sustainability while applying a frame analysis and cultural analysis to examine the SDGs most recent report in an attempt to better understand the role of communication and its associated challenges in sustainable development.

The analysis addresses the following research questions:

(RQ #1) *What is the communication strategy of the SDG Report 2017 in terms of:*

- (A) The report's target audience?*
- (B) The report's distribution channels?*
- (C) The report's overall structure?*

This question focuses on certain aspects of the SDG's overall campaign, specifically those that pertain to the SDG Report 2017. This will help establish a framework of elements to better understand the communications content and what groups the campaign is attempting to reach. This question involves a general inquiry of whom the campaign is reaching and what main ideas are being communicated/highlighted. Distribution channels

(RQ #2) *In accordance with framing analysis, how are the report's main concepts framed in terms of overall themes of pursuing sustainable development? How effectively does this translate into other cultures?*

This question will allow for an exploration of how the SDGs are framed in the report to determine what information is being promoted and what information is missing. In addition, this question will explore audience perception within different cultural contexts.

(RQ #3) *Based on insights from knowledge translation as a means of pursuing sustainable development, cultural studies (Hofstede), and answers gathered from the above questions, how can we:*

(A) Communicate the SDG Report 2017 to culturally diverse audiences?

(B) Design our approach to sustainable development communication within the broader context of international communication to achieve a high level of uptake of positive practices /recommendations /goals presented?

This question will allow not only for a richer understanding of the nature of knowledge translation as it relates to the communication of sustainable development, but to also how our unique cultural beliefs/ realities shape our own personal world view and inform our biases. Insight from the analysis will help provide suggestions for future international communication recommendations.

As a whole, the aforementioned questions aim to widen the scope of evidence to inform the design of future international development communication.

Data Collection Approach

This MRP intends to study the communication strategy of the UN's SDG campaign in an attempt to better understand the role of communication in sustainable development. This study focuses on certain aspects of the overall SDG campaign, specifically those that pertain to the SDG report 2017. This report is published annually and provides a general overview of the global progress made to date, while also highlighting key areas for improvement in order to meet the campaign targets set for the year 2030 (The United Nations, 2017). The report is made publicly available online in a downloadable PDF format and is prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) with input from many international and regional organizations (The United Nations, 2017). The SDG report 2017 is the most recent and up-to-date publication from the UN regarding the SDGs as the report's information is based on data collected as of June 2017 regarding specific indicators of the SDG framework (The United Nations, 2017). To supplement the report, additional online data is analyzed in order to understand how the report is communicated to the general public. Specifically, prevalent SDG websites that promote the campaign's message and a variety of social media platforms (mainly Twitter and Instagram) are examined. While there are a variety of items/aspects that comprise the SDG campaign, including social media and online distribution channels, due to the scope of this MRP the main object of analysis for this study is the SDG report 2017.

Method of Analysis

While it is known that the UN Sustainable Development Goals contribute to the evolution, growth and conservation of our world (Jeremic & Sachs, 2014; Le Blanc, 2015), there is a gap in scholarly inquiry concerning the methods employed by the campaign to achieve this outcome. This MRP draws on a wide range of sources. It builds upon an extensive literature review regarding the nature of sustainable development and international communication. This paper also draws on the concept of knowledge translation and theories of frame analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the SDG report 2017 in terms of the how the content is being presented, what is emphasized/explicit, and what is omitted. Hofstede's cultural dimensions are also employed as a means by which to analyze and appreciate how different cultures understand and interact with the report itself, and more broadly SDGs themselves. To address the research questions, a three-part analysis is conducted using the aforementioned theories. The specific methods of analysis employed for each of the research questions is described below:

(RQ #1) *What is the communication strategy of the SDG Report 2017 in terms of:*

(A) The report's target audience?

(B) The report's distribution channels?

(C) The report's overall structure?

This research question locates and identifies the SDG report 2017 as part of the overall SDG campaign. Ultimately, this question addresses the report itself in terms of its specific target audience, distribution channels, and structure. These points are addressed through examination of the report's content, word choice, placement of information (i.e. how the report's information is organized and presented), and the report's distribution channels.

(RQ #2) *In accordance with framing analysis, how are the report's main concepts framed in terms of overall themes of pursuing sustainable development? How effectively does this translate into other cultures?*

This research question focuses on the SDG report 2017 while employing framing and cultural analysis. Given the scope of this MRP, broader/macro-level concepts within the report will be analyzed as opposed to conducting a detailed and specific content analysis on the word-level of the entire report. Specifically, the primary framing approach employed in this MRP involves Neuman, Just and Crigler's (1992) 5 media frames: human impact, powerlessness, economics, moral values, and conflict. In addition to the report's broad concepts and media frames, images and figures are analyzed to gain a better understanding of the report's composition in terms of what messages are being communicated, which audiences it intends to reach, and which concepts prove to be salient. Hofstede's (2003) cultural dimensions are then applied on a broader level to gain deeper insight into how different nations/groups can be expected to interact with the SDG campaign, how the campaign is framed in different cultural contexts and what communication strategies are most effective in the broader scope of international development.

(RQ #3) *Based on insights from knowledge translation as a means of pursuing sustainable development, cultural studies (Hofstede), and answers gathered from the above questions, how can we:*

(A) *Communicate the SDG Report 2017 to culturally diverse audiences?*

(B) *Design our approach to sustainable development communication within the broader context of international communication to achieve a high level of uptake of positive practices /recommendations /goals presented?*

Suggesting how to enhance the communicative effectiveness of the UN's SDG campaign calls for an approach that is both analytical and practical. Based on insights garnered from research questions 01, 02, and 03, research question 03 examines the communication challenges of the SDG report 2017 and the associated campaign at large. In response to these challenges, this MRP culminates in a list of recommendations/best practices for governments and international organizations to understand the power and capabilities of research and communication as it relates to the SDG report.

Findings and Discussion

The following sections present the research findings for analysis and discussion, to address the topic of the role of communication in sustainable development. The discussion is led by findings from both the content/framing analysis and cultural analysis and is guided by the relevant literature introduced above.

(RQ #1) *What is the communication strategy of the SDG Report 2017 in terms of:*

(A) *The report's target audience?*

(B) *The report's distribution channels?*

(C) *The report's overall structure?*

Audience

Rooted in the premise of leaving no one behind, the communications strategy of the SDG campaign emphasizes the importance of popularizing the goals on a mass scale to reach their intended audience. As the SDG campaign states, its intended audience is the 7 billion individuals on the planet, as they claim their intention is to reach “everyone” (United Nations, 2015). Specifically, the United Nations describes the SDG campaign as “a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity” as it urges “all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership” to implement this plan (United Nations, 2015). Upon analysis of the report, it is clear that the United Nations intends to communicate with the global public – an explicit goal of the campaign reiterated in the SDG report, is to “leave no one behind” as the SDGs represent “a universal agenda, applying to all countries” (United Nations, 2017).

Distribution

In terms of the report's distribution, the SDG report 2017 is made widely available in an online PDF downloadable format via the United Nations website (www.un.org). A main channel of the report's distribution is the SDG campaign at large. This is the only online platform where the SDG report 2017 is available, however, without knowledge of the campaign, the average person would not have the capability or the interest to seek out the campaign's progress reports. In addition to the United Nations website, there are several related partner websites that promote the overall goals and purpose of the SDG campaign. Primarily, the UN has created a central website (sustainabledevelopment.un.org). This website outlines main milestones, provides resources to users such as reports and briefings, stakeholder engagement, a calendar of upcoming events related to the SDGs and who is participating in the campaign. The United Nations Development Program also has its own website dedicated to the SDGs. This website outlines the goals and suggests ways to get involved through donating, fundraising, or buying SDG merchandise. Finally, there is a globalgoals.org website which provides information on the global goals initiative. Some of the campaign's related initiatives include: Goalkeepers, World's Largest Lesson, Goal Keepers Data Report, Global Goalscast, Healthy Not Hungry, and Radio Everyone (The Global Goals). This website also provides downloadable resources such as pictures, icons and other brand assets to add to your own material to communicate the goals. In this sense, the SDG partner websites are more about targeting "everyone" and spreading the SDG campaign's message to a wide and diverse audience. Interestingly, the partner websites mentioned above do not disseminate the SDG report 2017. As previously stated, the online publication of the report itself can only be found on the main United Nations website suggesting that the report itself is not intended to reach "everyone". This leads to an important distinction

between the SDGs and the SDG report 2017. Though the campaign's related websites attempt to reach a wide audience and promote the goals to the general public, the SDG report is not a main feature of the campaign; rather, it is a communications piece that must be sought out only after one is made aware of the SDGs.

The campaign is also widely discussed on a variety of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. These platforms are used as tools to spread the word about the SDG campaign and to create awareness and empower people with the knowledge to initiate change within their own communities. By promoting the SDG campaign on social media, the UN encourages mass participation, underscoring the importance of having regulation on the use of ICTs and the internet. Allowing world citizens to use these tools with freedom ultimately empowers individuals to exercise their human rights. Access to the internet is key to this end and speaks to the goals of the campaign itself. The emphasis is on encouraging people to leverage the power of social media within their own communities, while also encouraging the participation of governments to create an atmosphere for the uninhibited use of social media.

Overall, the SDG campaign employs a number of different online channels which possess unique target audiences in an attempt to reach the global population. The dissemination of the report itself to the general public relies on the overarching SDG campaign as a method of distribution in both online and offline contexts as online participation is indented to spark real-world action. As mentioned previously, without adequate knowledge of the SDGs and the campaign's online resources (i.e. websites and social media channels), there is little promotion of the SDG report offline. For the report to reach its target audience of "everyone", the main vehicle

of distribution is the SDG campaign and the campaign's online resources. Aforementioned, the SDG report 2017's target audience is in fact the global population; however, the report's online method of distribution and implicit promotion via public awareness is problematic for several reasons that will be explored further in the analysis.

Structure

Reports are considered to be one of the most common types of documents related to the United Nations (UN Documentation: Overview). The SDG report 2017 was created with the intention of sharing information about the work being done and the progress of the campaign in relation to each of the 17 goals to date. The report includes a foreword written by António Guterres (the Secretary General of the United Nations), outlining the purpose of the report and providing a general overview of progress made. The report then includes a section entitled "overview" which provides information regarding each of the 17 goals separated by headings. The bulk of the report is organized into 17 larger sections, each of which describe the issues and the breakthroughs that have been made in relation to each goal. Each section of the report is color coded to coincide with each of the unique goals and visually separates each goal so that the reader can visually decipher the difference between each section (Figure 02).

Running Head: COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY



Figure 2 (The United Nations, 2017)

Each of the 17 sections is 2 pages in length, with the exception of goals 16 and 17 which are 4 pages in length. In addition, each section includes one image along with a number of graphs and tables to visually represent data collected. The report culminates with a note to reader and a breakdown of how the regional groupings described in the report were selected.

What is important to note in terms of how the report is structured is that the reader is not required to read the report in its entirety from beginning to end, as the reading of this report is not necessarily linear in nature. Given that the entire report is 62 pages in length, it is unlikely that readers will take the time to read each section. In this sense, the use of headings and colour coding and images/figures is useful as audiences can read and successfully interpret any given page without having read any preceding or following pages. Though this reporting style makes it easy to interpret data and information, it also makes it quite easy for the reader to miss important information and/or omit sections of the report entirely.

Overall, the report provides the reader with a clear understanding of why the evaluation of the campaign's progress was conducted and how the results of the analysis will be used. The decision to present the findings of the analysis in a report as opposed to another method of presentation suggests that there is scope for considering more effective communication of the progress to date. This will be explored further in the analysis in terms of whether or not the campaign is relevant to the needs of the target audience.

(RQ #2) In accordance with framing analysis, how are the report's main concepts framed in terms of overall themes of pursuing sustainable development? How effectively does this translate into other cultures?

In conducting a frame analysis of the SDG report, the overarching unit of analysis is the broad theme of sustainability. The selection of the frame typology was done inductively as frames emerged throughout the research and analysis process. As brought forth by the literature, Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) identify 5 common frames used by the media: human impact, powerlessness, economics, moral values, and conflict, which will be employed throughout the analysis (pg. 74). I argue that the aforementioned media frames are employed by the United Nations and the SDG campaign itself to frame and communicate the concept of sustainability to the global public. Analyzing how the report frames issues related to sustainability helps us explain how concepts expressed in communication pieces can inform human consciousness. Frames are not self-evident, that is, they must either be built or demolished in order to analyze them. Specifically, the report itself employs concepts and strategies highly correlated with the frames of human impact, powerlessness, and moral values. These frames will be analyzed and explained in the analysis below.

Human Impact

As human impact relates to the “descriptions of individuals and groups affected by an issue” it becomes clear that the report frames the global population as the main group affected by sustainable development (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992, pg. 74). Specifically, the report claims that “in adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders resolved to free humanity from poverty, secure a healthy planet for future generations, and build peaceful, inclusive societies as a foundation for ensuring lives of dignity for all” (United Nations, 2017, pg. 2). In this sense, the report makes the claim that the global population must work together as well as within our own communities, to progress towards a more peaceful, inclusive and sustainable society. For example, a key concept of the SDGs is the idea that all 17 of the goals are “integrated and indivisible” (United Nations, 2017, pg. 2). The use of the human impact frame or stories of human impact reveals that humans are able to empathize with situations outside of their current realities. Aforementioned, the report and the overall SDG campaign intends to target the entire global population, presenting the concept of sustainability as a united and global pursuit. Though issues related to sustainability differ from region to region, the report emphasizes that it is the collective action of people working towards a more sustainable future that will drive the campaign’s success. The report illustrates this point by claiming: “This collective journey has at its heart a promise to leave no one behind. The 2030 Agenda is deliberately ambitious and transformational, with a set of 17 integrated and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals and targets to guide us. Crucially, it is a universal agenda, applying to all countries” (United Nations, 2017, pg. 2).

Contrariwise, upon analysis of the report and the goals themselves, certain language is used that targets specific groups affected by an issue. For example, the report mentions specific groups/individuals pertaining to: those in poverty (pg. 16-17); those who are experiencing a lack of access to food (pg. 18-19); those who have a disease/poor health (pg. 20-23); those who do not have access to quality education (pg. 24-25); women and girls experiencing issues related to gender equality (pg. 26-29); those who do not have access to clean water and sanitation systems (pg. 30-31); those who do not have access to affordable energy (pg. 32-33); those without access to a paying job (pg. 34-35); those without access to necessary technologies/infrastructure (pg. 36-37). The report also makes the distinction between certain geographic locations, grouping countries together into 8 defined regions: Sub-Saharan Africa; Northern Africa and Western Africa; Latin American and the Caribbean; Central and South Asia; Eastern and South-Eastern Asia; Australia and New Zealand; Oceania; Europe and Northern America (United Nations, 2017, pg. 59). More broadly, it should be noted that regions containing the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, require special attention as they may carry a heavier burden and require more resources/assistance to meet the goals of the campaign than other more developed regions (United Nations, 2017). Thus, the report frames human impact as being related to certain sub-sets of the population and highlights differences between groups/individuals, playing into the broader concept of the us vs. them, or top-down mentality of international development.

Powerlessness

The frame of powerlessness is understood as the “dominance of large forces over weak individuals/groups” (Neuman, Just, Crigler, 1992, pg. 74). The report itself reflects this concept

as a communication piece created and disseminated by the UN. The UN acting as a centralized body overseeing and monitoring the world's state of affairs asserts their power and dominance over alternative groups and individuals. This power bestows the UN the moral high ground from which they communicate their messages. The report also speaks to the concept of unequal power relations within the world at large in relation to the campaign's goals of achieving gender equality, ending hunger, providing clean water, providing education for all, reducing inequality among countries, etc. (United Nations, 2017). These concepts tie into an underlying thread of an "us vs. them" mentality when considering realities that may not coincide with our own. The goals are framed in a way that highlights power imbalances and calls for action to erase uneven privilege" (United Nations, 2017, pg. 3). For example, the report states: "Advancements have been uneven across regions, between the sexes, and among people of different ages, wealth and locales, including urban and rural dwellers. Faster and more inclusive progress is needed to accomplish the bold vision articulated in the 2030 Agenda. The recognition of these power imbalances is an important message proposed by the campaign. This ties in with the conflict frame which involves a "game interpretation of the political world as an on-going series of contests, each with a new set of winners and losers" (Neuman, Just, Crigler, 1992, pg. 74). Specifically, conflict frames can be used "as a means of attracting attention and readership" (Neuman, Just, Crigler, 1992, pg. 64). In the area of international relations, "individuals also utilize an us/them conflict frame to voice suspicion of other countries' motives" (Neuman, Just, Crigler, 1992, pg. 66). On one hand, the campaign points out power imbalances and identifies these disparities as problematic, yet on the other, calls on the global population to work together and form partnerships to achieve harmony.

Moral Value

The moral value frame involves “morality and social perceptions” (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992, pg. 74). Understanding the moral judgements that are manifested in the report can provide valuable insight into the beliefs around the issue of sustainable development. In line with the moral value frame, an alternative and unique framing technique employed by the SDG campaign is the concept of using an emotional/human angle to appeal to the audience on a powerful psychological level. The use of images, figures and carefully selected language within the report appeals to the reader on an emotional level and brings the reality of our world’s issues into perspective. More specifically, moral judgements can manifest in written texts and can be revealed by language choice. For example, specific language used in the report includes: “inclusive”, “equitable”, “empower”, “economic growth”, “resilient infrastructure”, “restore”, “combat climate change”, etc. (The United Nations, 2017). The deliberate use of this language eludes to overriding moral judgements about sustainability and the vision the campaign holds for our world. This language speaks to the campaign’s mandate of leaving no one behind, and the moral beliefs of the UN and the SDGs including freeing humanity from poverty, securing a healthy planet for future generations, building peaceful and inclusive societies as a foundation for ensuring lives of dignity for all (The United Nations, 2017).

Overall, as stated by the literature, Goffman (1974) and Entman (1993) propose that the act of framing involves both word selection and salience. When describing the sustainable development goal of poverty alleviation, the language selected in the SDG report 2017 frames the issue in a very specific way. Importantly, as claimed by Young (2014), much international development content is produced in western nations by local authors for native readers.

Ultimately, this skews our information and “incorrectly excludes potentially valuable perspectives and unfairly privileges some viewpoints, creating disparities in access to knowledge and its benefits” (Young, 2014). Moreover, it is known that “frames are fashioned by particular words and phrases that consistently appear within a narrative and convey thematically consonant meanings across... time” (Kuypers, 2009, pg. 191). The relevance of frames is their ability to influence our attitudes towards a biased message. Crucial to this analysis, it is important to recognize the gate-keeping role of the United Nations in determining how they frame international issues deemed important to the world at large. Throughout the report runs a theme of moving towards a more sustainable and prosperous future. For example, the report claims: “the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to improve the lives and future prospects of everyone, everywhere... our challenge now is to mobilize action that will bring these agendas meaningfully and tangibly to live” (United Nations, 2017, pg. 2). On this matter, the UN frames sustainability as part of a larger global process of reform and prosperity for all humankind. Sustainability is the cornerstone of the UN’s envisioned change. For instance, the report states: “the 2030 Agenda is deliberately ambitious and transformational, with a set of 17 integrated and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals and targets to guide us” (United Nations, 2017, pg. 2). Given that frames make give grater saliency to carefully selected information, it is clear that the frames used in the SDG report 2017 ultimately define the issues, make moral judgements, and suggest solutions related to sustainable development.

Cultural Analysis - Hofstede

The media frames employed by the SDG report 2017 and campaign at large may appeal to different audiences in different ways depending on cultural backgrounds and beliefs. To better

understand how cultural differences play into the communicative effectiveness of the SDGs, Hofstede's (2003) cultural dimensions shed some light on variant realities. Overall, Hofstede's work highlights the fact that there are differences between cultures. These cultural differences shape how we view and understand the world, receive information and ultimately inform our individual decisions and values. Additionally, Kim (2017) claims that "national culture influences certain types of behaviour both directly (through the cultural values that predominate in a society) and indirectly (through the institutions that are given meaning by the attributes of the culture)" (pg. 25). Aforementioned, the SDG report 2017 is made available online to the world's population. The report itself is published in six languages including: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Spanish, and Russian. Noting that the main vehicle for the report's distribution is the overall SDG campaign and its associated online resources, it is important to analyze how effectively the overall campaign translates within different cultural contexts. Moreover, given the cultural diversity of the global audience of the SDG campaign, it is of vital importance to understand how the campaign's messaging translates in different cultural contexts, or if it assumes a dominant cultural approach.

In relation to Hofstede's (2003) dimension of indulgence vs. restraint, we learn that Western values are more closely associated with indulgence. According to Kim (2017), "the pursuit of democratic values is strongly correlated with indulgence" and more specifically "people in indulgent societies are more likely to attach importance to democracy, human rights, and freedom of speech" (pg. 28). From this perspective, the SDGs translate with ease within Western cultures who value indulgence as the campaign's messaging involves creating a world with peace and prosperity for all. As brought forth by the literature, indulgence ranks high in

South and North America and in Western Europe. On the other hand, in terms of the individual vs. collectivism dimension, Western countries tend to be more individualistic, where each person is expected to look after themselves and is more concerned with their own self-interest. In contrast, less developed and Eastern countries tend to prefer supporting what is best for the collective, or society at large and place high value on doing good for others. This highlights that the interconnected and cooperative nature of the SDG campaign might prove to be more salient in collectivist cultures who value collaboration and collective identity.

Given the reality that concepts regarding masculinity and femininity exist in all cultures, the degree to which one outweighs the other differs from society to society. In terms of Hofstede's (2003) dimension of masculinity vs. femininity, it is important to note that more feminine cultures typically value quality of life, relationships, providing aid to poor countries, and protection of the environment. As such, the SDG campaign may be well received and supported within feminine cultures. This cultural dimension is of particular interest, as one of the goals of the SDG campaign is achieving gender equality on a global scale. Cultures who are more masculine in their views may strive for a more performance-based society valuing economic growth and material success. Masculinity ranks high in cultures where women are denied basic rights and opportunities, suggesting that the SDG campaign's mission of creating prosperity for all may not be well received within masculine cultures.

Overall, it has been found that aid agencies have typically shied away from adapting their messages to different political and cultural environments as they are "concerns that programming in this area is simply too difficult, for example, because of conflicts between human rights and

local religion or culture, or certain political conflicts” (OECD, 2013, pg. 89). On the other hand,

“some agencies have been able to use human rights as a tool to influence harmful and

discriminatory practices that might otherwise remain unchallenged” (OECD, 2013, pg. 89).

Though reaching a variety of different cultural environments poses a major challenge to the SDG

campaign, adapting the campaign’s messaging in different cultural realities could not be more

crucial to the campaign’s success. The goals outlined in the campaign are received and

understood differently within different cultural contexts. Notably, a number of the goals of the

campaign may clash with the cultural practices of some regions entirely (i.e. gender equality). As

claimed by the literature, “aid agencies have often been reluctant to engage in human rights

programming because they fear that official partners might reject the human rights agenda, for

example, on grounds of political interference in domestic sovereignty or cultural relativism

(OECD, 2013, pg. 110). In addition, some regions and communities may simply lack the

resources and awareness to implement such changes proposed by the campaign in their societies.

Even if the global population *can* agree on an overarching set of goals, we still need to determine

and agree upon our priorities (i.e. which goals should we honour first?). This makes the overall

progress towards these goals challenging and uneven.

(RQ #3) Based on insights from knowledge translation as a means of pursuing sustainable development, cultural studies (Hofstede), and answers gathered from the above questions, how can we:

(A) Communicate the SDG Report 2017 to culturally diverse audiences?

(B) Design our approach to sustainable development communication within the broader context of international communication to achieve a high level of uptake of positive practices /recommendations /goals presented?

Exploring the key features of the SDGs themselves helps underscore the communication challenges of the campaign. Primarily, this universal agenda calls upon all nations to make progress within their communities. This speaks to the interconnected nature of the campaign as progress happens both at home and abroad; progression towards a more sustainable future is a result of the informed self-interest of nations as their progress becomes part of a larger global community. Progress and the movement towards a more sustainable future is made possible via both the individual and collective actions of nations, their governments, businesses, foundations, and other actors. In this sense, achieving a more sustainable future involves collective action to achieve total adoption of the principles and goals put forth by the campaign. Though this is a noble pursuit, the wide-ranging agenda is met with a number of communications challenges discussed below.

- **Audience**

Though the overarching intention of the SDGs is to make the world a better place and reach “everyone”, from a strategic perspective, this may not necessarily mean that the intended audience of the campaign should be the global population. The wide and far-reaching scope of the campaign (i.e. its attempt to reach the entire population) makes it difficult to create a single clear and compelling message to reach its target audience and resonate with diverse individuals. In other words, as the SDG points out, communicating the value of collective change is something that the campaign aims to accomplish, yet in practice, defining “everyone” as the campaign’s target audience, by default, targets nobody. The undefined audience of the report and the SDG campaign itself could be a major danger as the public struggles to identify whether or not the report is relevant to their realities in terms of who is being targeted. Without direct communication to intentional audiences, the campaign risks becoming irrelevant to groups they may wish to target. Given this reality, targeting the global population as the intended audience for the campaign is challenging. This finding leads to an important distinction between the report’s intended audience and its actual audience. Though the report claims that its intended audience is everyone, the report itself privileges certain audiences above others, specifically those with access to ICTs, knowledge of KT strategies, and audiences who speak at least one of the six languages the report is translated into. Moreover, by nature the written report style method of presenting the progress of the SDGs targets literate members of society, perhaps governments and stakeholders specifically. For example, the report claims: “our challenge now is to mobilize action that will bring these agendas meaningfully and tangibly to life. I call on Governments and stakeholders to recognize the gaps that have been identified in this report – in

implementation, financing and political will – and now to join hands to fulfil this vision and keep this promise” (United Nations, 2017, pg. 2).

In terms of the SDG report 2017 as a knowledge translation piece, it becomes necessary to understand whether or not the use of figures and images is an effective method of conveying information to diverse audiences. What is critical to understand is the reality that there is no singular knowledge translation strategy that can be effective in all contexts. Specifically, it has been found that “knowledge translation is a multidimensional concept that requires an understanding of its mechanisms, methods, and measurements, as well as influencing factors at the individual and contextual levels, and the interaction between those levels” (LaRocca et al., 2012). In addition, it has been established that “low- and middle-income countries face many challenges to applying knowledge due to limited resources... Knowledge translation strategies have been developed and continue to be developed to promote the use of evidence and knowledge by policymakers, health care professionals, and the public. But evaluation of these strategies has primarily occurred in developed countries” (Santesso & Tugwell, 2006, pg. 94). This indicates a lack of understanding of how different cultures interact with knowledge translation and whether or not the report is effective in conveying messages to those in diverse communities.

In summary, the key aspects of effective KT must integrate questions of accountability, culture, and the use of ICTs. The following analysis focuses on these 3 aspects.

- **Accountability**

The SDGs will not be achieved without significant public awareness, engagement, and action. Increasing public pressure and holding our governments accountable to the promises made to the UN is of utmost importance. It is apparent that communication regarding the SDGs needs to be more targeted towards the main opinion leaders, think tanks, non-profit/humanitarian organizations, businesses, etc. At this point in time, not all nations are part of the UN. Moreover, the SDGs are not legally binding and lack political/legal weight. The complexity of the goals and their interconnected nature make it hard to assign blame or award credit to those deserving. If the SDGs are considered to be promises made by global leaders and institutions, it becomes crucial to hold leaders accountable if the goals of the campaign are to be achieved.

- **Culture**

As highlighted by the cultural analysis, the diversity of the campaign's audience in terms of culture proves to be a significant obstacle. The goals outlined in the campaign are received and understood differently within different cultural contexts. A major challenge for communicators is communicating cross-culturally. The report itself employs the use of knowledge translation strategies that appeal to westernized modes of information transfer. As noted by the literature, evaluation of the effectiveness of knowledge translation strategies has primarily occurred in developed countries (Santesso & Tugwell, 2006). Overall, a lack of consideration for culturally diverse audiences allows room for improvement in this area.

- **Use of ICTs**

Online promotion of the SDG campaign itself is conducted primarily through online channels such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Vimeo, Flickr, and the United Nations SDG website (The United Nations). The SDG campaign has also launched a mobile application entitled “The SDGs in Action App”, which not only provides information about the goals, but also connects users with citizens around the world, while allowing them to create and/or take part in initiatives working to achieve the SDGs (The United Nations).

Upon analysis, much of the communication regarding the SDG campaign takes place online. In the context of the report and the SDG campaign’s online/digital presence, Sachs (2012) claims, “new social media and information technology have given the world an unprecedented opportunity for inclusive, global-scale problem solving around the main sustainable development challenges” (p. 2211). Though the electronic channels utilized by the SDG campaign provide benefits such as offering reputable information on a multitude of online platforms in a variety of languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic), the online method of distribution appears narrow in that it fails to reach those who do not have access to the internet and/or may not have the electronic resources or education/literacy skills to engage with the SDG campaign. Specifically, “a well-developed digital ecosystem is a primary requirement for effective digital development and the facilitation of transformative impacts in society through ICTs” yet, a lack of access to ICTs can “create and also exacerbate the inequalities that exist in society” (UN Secretary General & UNCTAD, 2015).

In terms of demographics, the largest segment of internet users today fall between the ages of 15-24 and have 5 or more years of online experience; thus, this demographic has been labeled “digital natives” (UN Secretary General & UNCTAD, 2015). Importantly, this cohort is more likely to produce and consume online content, yet only “one fifth of the youth cohort in developing countries are digital natives, compared with four fifths in the global North” which further supports the reality that the campaign is not reaching the intended audience (i.e. everyone), but prefers individuals of a higher socio-economic class in developed countries (UN Secretary General & UNCTAD, 2015). Moreover, critical to the success of the SDGs, ICTs play an essential role in unleashing and channeling “the potential of millennials and digital natives towards sustainable development processes”, yet the online strategy utilized by the SDG campaign overlooks demographics that may not be considered as tech-savvy (UN Secretary General & UNCTAD, 2015).

This may suggest that the SDG Report 2017, and the promotional campaign around the agenda itself, the current online campaign strategy is not reaching the intended audience of “everyone”. The use of online digital platforms, ICTs, and the deliberate language choices suggest that the report is biased; favouring audiences that are technically literate, able to afford digital accessibility, and who understand and value KT.

Recommendations

This MRP investigated the SDG report 2017 as a baseline for how the UN communicates their progress to a global audience. As a result of this investigation, the following list of recommendations/best practices are proposed and directed specifically at the UN and other international organizations. These recommendations are informed by the literature review touching on the changing nature of international development and communication while also applying and linking three key areas of theoretical discourse: Knowledge Translation, Hofstede's (2003) cultural dimensions, concepts of Framing Analysis.

- **Be critical.** We must assess the processes by which we manage and organize our world. Every system we create or strategy we produce to solve issues and organize individuals involves power and ideology. In order to develop more culturally sensitive competencies, we need to take a more multidisciplinary approach to how we perceive global issues and their potential solutions.
- **Target changemakers** such as governments, businesses, non-profit/advocacy groups, higher education institutions, and non-state actors. The UN and the SDG campaign itself needs to make forging partnerships and aligning campaign messages with outside groups a priority. This should include providing resources in the form of communications material and ongoing support to outside actors who have the power to adopt the goals of the campaign and implement strategies to achieve these goals within their unique communities. This involves tailoring information for specific levels and sectors regarding their unique functions and responsibilities.

- Understanding and listening to the unique needs of the campaign's audience involves greater participation and active management of the goals and the campaign at large. This entails collaborating with current aid providers and frontline humanitarian workers to build on what is already working in communities.
- Engaging with non-state actors to broaden the reach of the campaign should be a major priority in communicating sustainable development to the global population. For example, the importance of introducing the concept of sustainability in educational institutions and curriculum is of great importance to promote the campaign and inspire future generations. In addition, fostering public-private relationships and aligning the SDGs with the corporate social responsibility of large businesses/corporations is central to the campaign's success. Mainstreaming these concepts is invaluable.
- Outside of the report and the campaign's online presence, one of the most critical elements in determining the success of the campaign is the participation of the public and the adjustment of messages to conform to a variety of local settings. The SDG campaign encourages the participation of people at the grassroots level in an attempt to take a more bottom up approach to development. More specifically, the campaign stresses the relevancy of community identity in encouraging participation on local, national and international levels. Working more closely with local groups and creating change within culturally diverse communities needs to be facilitated.

- Citizens need to hold their governments and institutions responsible as they play a crucial role in generating social and political change. Civil society must act as the catalyst for progress by magnifying causes of discrimination, promoting equal rights and holding their leaders accountable for their actions.
- Continuing to build public awareness of the SDGs is crucial to the success of the campaign. Beyond this, however, promoting the SDGs and their relevancy to national strategies and plans is of great consequence.

- **Take a long-term approach** and continue to **track the progress of the campaign**.

Widespread action resulting in positive real-world change, begins with harnessing and mobilizing research. Leveraging data and tracking the progress of the campaign globally is a good way to spot gaps and make improvements going forward. What is important to note is that change is slow and on-going. Without tracking the campaign's success and monitoring progress to date, we cannot learn how to improve communication strategies and outreach methods.

- Outside of the formal annual SDG reports, communication of the campaign's progress needs to be more far-reaching and accessible to all. This involves communicating progress to diverse communities who may not have access to ICTs. More communications resources/material is required to communicate the goals of the campaign and the progress to date to diverse audiences with unique needs.

- Greater cooperation is needed between the UN, governments, and their citizens to ensure there is consistency in the application of aid and that they are acting in accordance with the agreed upon SDGs.

The results presented in this study provide a foundation of knowledge to better understand the challenges faced by the UN regarding the effective communication of the SDGs to an international audience. Ultimately, this study highlights the importance of concepts surrounding the changing nature of international development, the role of communication, knowledge translation, cultural differences, and framing.

Overall, whilst this study consisted of evidence related to the research questions it sought to answer, it is important to note that the results and their interpretation are not extremely extensive or all-encompassing. The limitations pertaining to the data collection method only allow for this MRP to interpret data within the set confines of the SDG report. As a result, this restriction may create biases and/or alter findings to a degree that may misrepresent the objective reality.

Conclusion

The SDGs ultimately have the potential to be the guiding principles by which we can transform our planet and begin the breakdown of our rigid cultural practices that threaten cooperation with other nations. What is compelling about the SDG campaign and the pursuit of a sustainable world is the notion of being able to meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future. Though achieving environmental, economic and socio-political harmony is a noble pursuit, this goal is met with many challenges.

The intention of this MRP is to provide an analysis of the communication strategy of the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in an attempt to better understand the role of communication in sustainable development. This MRP began by laying out the context and background of international development. When it comes to framing global issues, the SDG campaign provides an overarching framework for how we learn about and understand the concept of sustainability. Upon analysis, this MRP establishes that the power of frames to sway opinion is remarkable. It is suggested that the saliency of the campaign's messaging is uneven within a global context. The findings of this MRP indicate that cultural differences prove to be a major obstacle to international cooperation. Communicating the goals of the campaign to diverse communities is a challenging task that needs to be addressed if the campaign is to be successful. To further investigate this matter, conducting in-depth interviews in a variety of cultural settings may provide more insight into the complexities of unique cultural environments, perhaps revealing solutions to communication challenges that would otherwise remain hidden. Though beyond the scope of this MRP, it would be beneficial to include testimonials from

individuals existing in a variety of cultural and geographic settings to provide a more realistic and first hand understanding of how successfully the SDGs translate in diverse communities.

Targeted communications and support to policy makers, businesses, non-profit/advocacy groups, educational institutions and other non-governmental bodies may be the campaign's best method of reaching culturally diverse audiences. Looking to the future, it is imperative that the wide-ranging agenda of the SDGs is adaptive to different cultural contexts in terms of how the issues are framed and the communications strategies employed to achieve desired outcomes.

References

- Afjei, S. M. (2015). A Content Analysis of Sustainability Dimensions in Annual Reports.
- Armenta, Á., Serrano, A., Cabrera, M., & Conte, R. (2012). The new digital divide: the confluence of broadband penetration, sustainable development, technology adoption and community participation. *Information Technology for Development, 18*(4), 345-353.
- Armstrong, R. W. (1996). The relationship between culture and perception of ethical problems in international Marketing. *Journal of Business Ethics, 15*(11), 1199-1208.
doi:10.1007/bf00412818
- Bryman, A., Bell, E. A., & Teevan, J. J. (2012). *Social research methods* (Third Canadian ed.) Oxford University Press.
- Caplan, N. (1979). The two-communities theory and knowledge utilization. *American Behavioral Scientist, 22*, 459-470. Retrieved January 7, 2003, from EBSCOhost database.
- Cullen, R. (2001). Addressing the digital divide. *Online information review, 25*(5), 311-320.
- Entman, Robert. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 51-58.

Fairhurst, G. T., & Sarr, R. A. (1996). *The art of framing: Managing the language of leadership* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Fowler, A. (2013). *Striking a balance: A guide to enhancing the effectiveness of non-governmental organisations in international development*. Routledge.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Cambridge, MA, US: Harvard University Press.

Golding, P. (1974). Media role in national development critique of a theoretical orthodoxy. *Journal of Communication*, 24(3), 39-53.

Graham, I.D., Logan, J., Harrison, M.B., Straus, S.E., Tetroe, J., Caswell, W., & Robinson, N. (2006). Lost in knowledge translation: Time for a map? *The Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions* 26(1), 13-24.

Hitchcock, A. (2017, March 23). What are the Six Cultural Dimensions? Retrieved from <http://daily.unitedlanguagegroup.com/stories/editorials/six-cultural-dimensions>

Hofstede, G. (2003). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations*. Sage Publications.

Hofstede, G. (2018). Country Comparison. Retrieved April 05, 2018, from
<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/canada,libya,sweden/>

Introducing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Rep.). (2015). The United Nations.

Jeremic, V., & Sachs, J. D. (2014). The United Nations in the age of sustainable development. *The Economic and Social Review*, 45(2), 161-188. Retrieved from
<http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/1545341719?accountid=13631>

Kim, S. (2017). National culture and public service motivation: Investigating the relationship using Hofstede's five cultural dimensions. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 83(1_suppl), 23-40. doi:10.1177/0020852315596214

Kuypers, J. A. (2009). "Framing Analysis" How to Conduct a Framing Study. In *"Framing Analysis," Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action* (pp. 181-204). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. Retrieved from
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318926032_Framing_Analysis.

Lachapelle, E., Montpetit, É, & Gauvin, J. (2014). Public Perceptions of Expert Credibility on Policy Issues: The Role of Expert Framing and Political Worldviews. *Policy Studies Journal*, 42(4), 674-697. doi:10.1111/psj.12073

- LaRocca, R., Yost, J., Dobbins, M., Ciliska, D., & Butt, M. (2012). The effectiveness of knowledge translation strategies used in public health: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 12, 751. <http://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-751>
- Le Blanc, D. (2015). Towards integration at last? the sustainable development goals as a network of targets. *Sustainable Development*, 23(3), 176-187. 10.1002/sd.1582
- Lewis, S. L., & Maslin, M. A. (2015). Defining the anthropocene. *Nature*, 519(7542), 171-180. doi:10.1038/nature14258
- Lull, J. (2013). *Media, Communication, Culture: A Global Approach*. Oxford: Wiley.
- Miller-Dawkins, M. (2014). Global goals and international agreements Lessons for the design of the Sustainable Development Goals. *ODI Working Paper*. Retrieved from <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9295.pdf>.
- Neuman, W.R., Just, M.R. & Crigler, A.N. (1992). *Common knowledge: News and the construction of political meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- OECD, Bank, W., Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, & World Bank. (2013). *Integrating human rights into development: Donor approaches, experiences and challenges* (2nd ed.). Herndon: World Bank.

Oliver, P., & Johnston, H. (2000). What a good idea! Ideologies and frames in social movement research. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 5(1), 37-54.

Rogers, E. M. (1976). Communication and development: The passing of the dominant paradigm. *Communication Research*, 3(2), 213-240. 10.1177/009365027600300207

Sachs, J. D. (2012). From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals. *The Lancet*, 379(9832), 2206-2211. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/1023015910?pq-origsite=summon>

Santesso, N., & Tugwell, P. (2006). Knowledge translation in developing countries. *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*, 26(1), 87-96. doi:10.1002/chp.55

Schryer-Roy, A. M. (2005). *Knowledge translation: Basic theories, approaches and applications*.

Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2000). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 93-109.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02843.x>

Servaes, J., & Lie, R. (2015). New challenges for communication for sustainable development and social change: A review essay. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 10(1), 124-128.
10.1080/17447143.2014.982655

Shaw, E. (2013). Frame analysis. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/frame-analysis>

The Global Goals. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.globalgoals.org/>

The United Nations. (2017). Sustainable Development Goals [Digital image]. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/>

The United Nations. (2017). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017* (Publication). Retrieved <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2017/TheSustainableDevelopmentGoalsReport2017.pdf>

The United Nations. (n.d.). Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform Our World. Retrieved April 06, 2018, from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

UN Documentation: Overview. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://research.un.org/en/docs/reports>

UN Secretary General, & UNCTAD. (2015). *Digital Development - Report of the Secretary General* (Rep.). Retrieved http://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/ecn162015d2_en.pdf

van Kerkhoff, L., & Lebel, L. (2006). Linking knowledge and action for sustainable development. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 31(1), 445-477.

10.1146/annurev.energy.31.102405.170850

Vaubel, R. (2006). Principal-agent problems in international organizations. *The Review of International Organizations*, 1(2), 125-138. doi:10.1007/s11558-006-8340-z

Young, A. (2014). Western Theory, Global World. Retrieved from

<http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=7281>

Zaller, J. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion* Cambridge University Press.