

Received Date: August 21, 2025**Accepted Date: September 13, 2025****Published Date: October 01, 2025**

Hofstede's cultural dimensions and public communication in Morocco: between identity heritage and institutional modernity

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Abstract

Globalisation and digitalisation have had a profound impact on public discourse and modern communication within contemporary institutions. In Morocco, these developments have resulted in an ongoing attempt to reconcile the tensions inherited from deeply rooted cultures with the contemporary demands of institutionalisation, namely efficiency and transparency. Based on Hofstede's intercultural model and the work of Bourdieu, Giddens, Morin, and Habermas, this article takes a systemic approach to culture and communicational interactions in public organisations in Morocco. Drawing on an analysis of national administrative culture and theories of structuration and communicational rationality, the author shows the impact of societal values, hierarchical distance, collectivism, and cohesion on inter-state relations and public institutions. Far from being reduced to the circulation of information, public communication, in its modern function, is articulated around a field of tension and power relations where modernity, tradition, and the space for co-civism are negotiated.

Keywords : Hofstede's cultural dimensions and public communication in Morocco: between identity heritage and institutional modernity.

1. Introduction

Creating an environment for communication that is characterised by fluid exchange, the intersection of cultures, and the rapid circulation of information is the result of globalisation and an unprecedented redefinition of the relationship between institutions and citizens. Public organisations in emerging countries, including Morocco, respond to the dual demands of efficiency and transparency from a connected citizenry and the value of social cohesion, and the symbols and identities that encompass it. The tension in modern Morocco is between increasingly vertical institutional communication and public communication that is participatory and inclusive, concerned with legitimacy and fair equity.

Public communication has evolved and, in addition to being an instrument of dissemination, communication has become an important tool of governance and a measure of an institution's democratic maturity (OECD, 2025). Recent scholarship on communication policies suggests that organisational performance depends to a significant degree on the institution's ability to create genuine interactive spaces where administrative discourse is framed not as a commanding authority, but as a collaborative resource available to citizens (Khouya, 2023). This is part of a more profound transformation in legitimising discourse. Public

discourse is an instrument of the state and a symbol of the power and cultural structures of society.

In this context, Geert Hofstede's cultural analysis remains relevant to understanding the communication logics in Moroccan organisations. The cultural dimensions Hofstede articulated – power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance – are fundamental variables in shaping organisational behaviour and discourse practices (Komisarof, 2025). The communication model, however, requires a contextualised rethinking. In the area of public communication, it is not a matter of assigning a static cultural type to an organisation, but of the dynamic cultural processes whereby an organisation balances cultural traditions and modernity.

This raises the important question of how Morocco's history of national identity hybridisation and cultural specificities influence public forms of communication today. Addressing this question involves the integration of multiple theories. Giddens' structuration theory, Bourdieu's sociology of language and theory of symbolic power, Edgar Morin's complex theory, and Habermas's theory of communicative rationality. These perspectives help move from a purely descriptive approach to a more comprehensive systemic and relational view of public communication in Morocco, which is framed within the context of co-constructed meaning and symbolic negotiation in an interstice between the state and civil society.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Hofstede: national culture and public organisation

Hofstede's cultural dimensions provide a framework for analysis that establishes a link between collective values and organisational practices. In societies with a strong hierarchical distance, such as Morocco, communication within institutions is designed to maintain the prestige of the senders and respect for authority, which influences decision-making circles and

discursive strategies (Komisarof, 2025). The collectivist culture, omnipresent in many public administrations, encourages consensus-building, the importance of community ties and the submission of the individual to the group. This leads to the circulation and promotion of discourses that emphasise social cohesion and national unity.

Within intercultural studies, changes in globalisation demand an extension of Hofstede's model to include transcultural dimensions. Shifts in professional identities, digital

interactions, and diversity policies affect structure, interpretation, and authority relations in new and unprecedented ways (Ertem-Eray, 2023). In Morocco, the changes involve a hybridisation of communicative and discourse analytic codes. Organisational communicative practices in the structural frameworks of Arabic, French, Amazigh and so-called "lower" communicative practices (Internews, 2024) code switching and codes switching become symbolic matrices of legitimisation, belonging, and hybridisation of communicative codes in different Amazigh, Arabic, and French layers. Public communication, however, is understood as the preservation of identity, adaptation to change, and morphological continuity remain inauthentically aligned patterns of public communication paradoxically self-authentic self-changes. 2.2. Bourdieu: language, habitus and symbolic power

Bourdieu's perspective on language and symbolic power focuses on the performative aspects of public communication. Administrative language functions beyond the mere transmission of information; it either dominates or includes people, depending on the linguistic capital of the participants. As contemporary analyses note, the ability to discourse using the State's language directly impacts one's access to social recognition and rights (Christensen, 2024). In multilingual societies, the instrumentalisation of language for discrimination becomes a matter of communicative justice. The office's public messages, made easier, translated, and uncluttered, contribute to the downward redistribution of symbolic capital and the democratisation of institutional voice. Hence, public communication has the capacity to either exacerbate social distance or bridge it, depending on the extent to which it reproduces or transcends cultural hierarchies.

2.3. Giddens: The Structuration of Institutional Communication

Anthony Giddens' structuration theory aids in overcoming the dualism of structure and agency by framing communication as a field of co-production between individual practices and institutional rules. In the Moroccan context, public communication devices – charters, portals, campaigns – represent structures that are, in a sense, both enabling and constraining. They impose certain forms, but also allow agents the freedom to interpret, adapt, and, in certain situations, transform them (OECD, 2025). Such devices of public communication structure the constellations of reflexivity and dialogue that institutions are capable of, in the expectation that not all the tools of communication are instrumental within reach.

2.4. Morin: Complex Thinking and Communication Systems

The complexity thinking proposed by Edgar Morin resonates particularly in the contemporary analysis of public policies. It leads to considering communication as an adaptive system marked by uncertainty, feedback, and interdependence of layers of action (Tabilo-Alvarez, 2023). Moroccan public organisations operate in an environment characterised by multiple causal loops: public opinion, media, and digital networks affect the perception of institutions, which in turn adjust their messages and strategies. This circular nature of the environment necessitates an iterative approach to communication, which must be based on the theory and practice of continuous learning and reassessment of impact.

2.5. Habermas: communicative rationality and the public sphere

To finalise this section, the normative theory of communicative rationality within Habermas's framework illuminates the purpose of public communication: fostering deliberation, mutual understanding, and legitimacy through rational discourse. As Freidland (2023) points out, digital globalisation has fragmented the public sphere into competing arenas. Now institutional discourse holders must compete with citizens, the press, and influencers. In this sense, Moroccan public communication should practise an ethics of dialogue and transparency: the public's communication rationality should be transparent, sincere, and justified rationally materialised to the public. Thus, communicative rationality, especially when digital rationality is involved, serves as a means of balancing administrative efficiency with a pared democratic ethics.

3. Methodology: Systemic interpretation and documentary analysis

This research employs a mixed methodology, including documentary analysis and systemic interpretation of public communication practices in Morocco. The study used secondary data (reports, official texts, and scholarly literature) and primary data retrieved from an empirical study conducted among Moroccan civil servants from various national and regional public administrative institutions.

3.1. Sample and tools

The sample for the quantitative study consists of 325 civil servants from different branches of the public administration. They are broken down as follows: 40% are senior managers,

33% are department heads, and 27% are technicians and enforcement officers. In terms of gender distribution, there is a slight male concentration: 58% men and 42% women. With regard to seniority, 39% of respondents have more than five years' experience, while 36% have between one and five years' experience.

The questionnaire focused on the evaluation of internal and external communication systems, perceptions of hierarchical levels, participation in decision-making, transparency of information, and overall satisfaction with the various communication channels. The statistical analysis, carried out using SPSS 25, involved descriptive processing (frequencies and percentages) and cross-tabulation.

A qualitative contribution to the research was also made by conducting 12 semi-structured interviews with communication managers and senior executives in the public administration. The aim of these interviews was to analyse the effects of culture, in particular hierarchical distance and collectivism, on the construction, circulation and reception of public messages.

3.2. Approach to Systemic Interpretation

The systemic interpretation adopted draws on Edgar Morin's complex thought and Giddens's theory of structuration. It views public communication as an adaptive system comprising three levels:

- ❖ Cultural structure (values, norms, hierarchy),
- ❖ Institutional structure (procedures, channels, flow charts),
- ❖ Social structure (citizen perception, collective expectations).

This perspective enables the analyst to move beyond mere descriptive accounts of non-primitive practices and to focus on the culture-communication dynamic as an integrated system within public organisations in Morocco.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Role of Hierarchy and Collectivism on Public Communication

In the case of Morocco, the results from the questionnaire indicate that public communication is predominantly influenced by an established hierarchy and respect for the decision-making chains. In that sense, 71% of the respondents consider that 'communication decisions must be approved by

management before the decision is made public,' whereas only 22% claim to have an individual initiative in external communication.

Table 1. Perception of hierarchy in internal communication

Hierarchical level consulted before communication	Percentage (%)
Senior management/Cabinet	71
Division/department head	23
Clerk or technician	6

These results reveal the importance of hierarchical distance within institutional practices. However, 64% of respondents believe that this hierarchy is "necessary to maintain consistency in messaging," which shows that it is perceived as a symbolic element rather than an obstacle to communication.

Qualitatively, this assessment is also corroborated by the interviews. A sectoral ministry official states:

"Public communication must follow a clear line of validation, as it affects the credibility of the state."

This attachment to authority reflects the continuity of an institutional culture of deference (Bourdieu, 2024), in which public discourse is legitimised by the status of the person expressing it.

On the other hand, the collectivist culture also significantly influences the way messages are crafted. Thus, 68% of civil servants who responded to the questionnaire believe that public communication should "serve the collective," compared to 19% who believe that it should target an individual or a group.

Table 2. Priority objective of public communication according to respondents

Message orientation	Percentage
Strengthening institutional cohesion	47
Promoting community spirit and traditions	21
Technical/procedural information	19

Personal communication or individual promotion	13
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These results indicate that public communications in Morocco tend to be executed within a framework of symbolic reproduction of the collective. It emphasises social cohesion and union to the detriment of individual innovation, reflecting the collectivist characteristics of Hofstede and updated by Komisarof (2025).

Results 4.2 could indicate a balancing act for hybrid communication as Moroccan public agencies may be moving towards a stage of continuum in the integration of modern communication technology. While results 4.2 discuss the need for Moroccan public agencies to balance traditional values, modern technology integration and the need to be economically and culturally effective, the diplomat interviews highlight that the integration of modern software and tools remains a challenge for national identity and integration.

An excerpt from the interview results provides a concrete example, as a regional director states, "communication has to remain true to our identity, even when it is delivered via modern networks."

Balanced hybrid communication, as described by Hofstede (1980), reflects the dual realities of public communications within Moroccan agencies. Focusing on the 57% of professionals who responded that new communication tools "improved the speed and clarity of communications," digitised client engagement via citizen portals, newsletters, and social media integration enhances the public user experience. The belief of 43% that "the official tone is still too rigid" provides contrast and points to an intertwined communication culture that reflects Hofstede.

Table 3. Assessment of the impact of digitisation on public communication

Perceived effect	Percentage (%)
Improved transparency and responsiveness	33
Simplification of internal exchanges	24
No significant influence	21
Increased complexity or rigidity	22

The progressive cultural transition is evident in these results: Moroccan public communication is shifting from a vertical,

institutional, and non-participatory system to a participatory systemic and horizontal communication model, albeit without breaking away from the symbolic anchors of legitimacy. This duality reflects the change from a static communication system to a learning one (Morin, 2023), able to assimilate societal transformations without a collapse of its core identity.

Conclusion

The empirical study shows that public communication in Morocco is still the expression of a communication culture that is deeply embedded and articulated with the values of hierarchy, consensus building, and collectivism. These traits, rooted in the historical and social traditions of Morocco, influence the way institutions formulate and communicate their messages. These cultural elements, rather than acting as barriers to modernisation, serve as a symbolic balancing mechanism, allowing public organisations to maintain the alignment, consistency, and coherence of their actions in the face of modern demands for efficiency, transparency, and accountability. In the public sphere, hierarchy is not seen as a barrier to subordinating control, but rather facilitates control and is a source of legitimacy, stability, and order. The collectivism of the public communication approach reinforces the social and communal function of communication, promoting social cohesion.

The results of this research show that communication performance hinges on institutions' ability to adapt these traditional values to changes in society and technology. Moroccan public communication is gradually transforming into a hybrid, flexible system that integrates new digital technologies, citizen platforms, and novel forms of participation with the cultural frames of reference of Moroccan society. This movement reflects a substantial shift in the direction of modernity that is "rooted" and that focuses on a communication governance model that is inclusive, transparent, and seeks to integrate rather than eliminate tradition.

In practical terms, the implications of this research point to the need to enhance the intercultural aspects of public service communication. This involves training public service managers in citizen-focused, multilevel communication, formulating policies aimed at promoting dialogue and reconciling diverse communication approaches, and creating a robust culture of cooperation between public institutions and citizens. The symbolic distance between the state and society, and the distance between citizens and public accountability, can be addressed through the institutionalisation of active and collaborative consultation methods, such as citizen forums, collaborative platforms, and structured public debates.

Moroccan public institutions must adopt integrated policies that take into account cultural identities, new technologies, and communication through the prism of transparency. This makes communication a true tool of democracy, anchoring it in governance, accountability, cohesion, and citizen participation.

Theoretically, research justifies the attempt to renew certain cultural models. Hofstede's model, which is still widely referenced, as well as other models analysing communication cultures, pose problems in the Moroccan context. By establishing fixed cultural models and ignoring the hybrid cultural developments of contemporary societies, Hofstede limited his analysis to national cultures via Western companies. Morocco proves that administrative and communication culture is a dynamic system with disparate ingredients — Arab-Muslim, African, Mediterranean, and globalised — that harmonise and intersect in contemporary practices.

In this regard, the future of research on public communication in Morocco involves the integration of constructivist and systemic approaches that can address the intricacy and dynamism of the interplay between culture, technology, and governance. Public communication in Morocco is characterised as hybrid and adaptive, as it combines modern rationality with an appreciation of cultural roots. It is a remarkable illustration of modernity in a context where, instead of being an obsolete remnant, tradition is a vital resource for creative institutional innovation and legitimacy.

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