

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS: TRENDS, GROWTH AND GAP

Akanimoh Odungide Udowo, Daniel C. Akarika, PhD & Abigail Prince Ukpe

danielakarika@yahoo.com

Department of Mass Communication, Akwa Ibom State University.

Abstract

This paper critically examined the public relations and communication management in organizations in order to ascertain the trends, growth and existing gap. The study adopted the qualitative approach to research, relying on secondary data sources. The study anchored on the framework of the system theory and stakeholder theory found that the tools/communication management methods used by PR executives in organizations include: organization newsletters/handbooks, websites, meetings, news release, news conference, special events, posters and leaflets, social media among other tools. The paper argues that the greatest asset of any organization is her public relations department/unit, as such, the management of this vulnerable asset through communication should be the priority of any organization. The paper recommends that PR executives should keep abreast with the current trend in the communication industry in order to master the use of modern media of communication and the approaches of reaching the internal and external public with their specialized peculiarities. This will go a long way in assisting the PR practitioner in all engagements geared towards the transformation of the organization as well as the society.

Keywords: Organization, communication, management, information, Nigeria

Introduction

The ultimate desire of every organization is harmony which leads to stability, organizational progress and growth. The greatest asset of any organization is her public relations department and therefore the management of this valuable assets through communication is one of the key challenges affecting organizational goal achievements.

Public relations, as a management function, plays a critical part in the design of competitive... strategies such as cooperative planning, research, marketing, information and other forms of ... intelligence aimed at achieving the organizations objectives (Grunig, 2015).

Public relations as a management function, manage, oversee, communicate and interact with both the organization and its target audience in order to achieve a mutually beneficial and long lasting relationship (Akinwalere, 2022). According to British Institute of Public Relations, as cited in Jefkins (2006, p. 202), public relations is "a deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics". Public relations plays a major role in any educational institution as it manages the flow of both internal

and external communication. The role of public relations in educational institution is to inform and quite often to publicize the activities of the institution as well as to record minutes of board meetings, and develop brochures for financial campaigns (Ojomo, 2006).

Educational institution either have a public relations department or outsource their public relations function to an outside agency. In which ever situation that exist, the major function of public relation is to communicate to both the internal and external publics of the organization. The major publics of educational institutions include the media, employees (both academic and non-teaching), students and community.

Public relations experts need, therefore to have an understanding of the attitudes and concern of community, employees, students, and other interest group and strive to establish and maintain a cordial relationship with them (Okoi and Okon, 2018).

Communication is often implicated as the leading cause of most organizational conflict situation (Akinwalere, 2022). This is because every organization is required to communicate with its internal and external stakeholders. A lot of

organizations have neglected the problems caused by poor communication management. These problems poses a lot of threat and sometimes make life difficult for these organizations. The viability and success of any organization is determined by the achievement of its objectives and goals. However, such achievements and overall survival of an organization is inevitably dependent on effective communication management.

Being an important phenomenon in organization, vechio-sadus (2007) observes that “communication allows people, tasks, processes and systems to interact purposively and co-operatively to achieve health, safe and secured environment (HSE) objectives”

Communication is acknowledged in every society as an indispensable tool for human cohesion. What is however not acknowledged by many people is that effective communication is not always achieved among parties that engage in it given the growing complexities of the world today (Core, 2000). In view of this, organization owes a responsibility not only to itself but also to its various publics in ensuring effective communication management within its operational environment. This paper basically examin

Review of Literature

Communication and Communication Management

Communication is one of the most important activity in any organization. It is through it that organizations maintain fruitful relationships with their various publics. Akarika (2021, p.67) defines communication as “an expression of thoughts, feelings, ideas, messages from the sender to the receiver through verbal, non-verbal, written and non-written forms”. The success of any organization depends on the efficiency and effectiveness of the communication system and the nature of interdependent relationship (Akarika, Umoren and Ikon, 2021). Therefore, every interaction in an organization is made possible through the process of communication. The major objectives of communication in an organization is to inform and educate employees at all levels in the company's strategy and motivates employees to support the strategy and organizational performance goals. This to a large extent is

dependent on the organizational policies inherent in any organization (Akarika, Iwok and Jessica, 2022).

Thus, the purpose of communicating messages within an organization have to do with the essence of sending and receiving messages within an organization... as well as the function each message is supposed to perform (Akarika, 2021). Therefore, the need for effective communication management. Communication management is the systematic planning, implementing, monitoring and revision of all the channels of communication within an organization and between organizations. It also includes the organization and dissemination of new communication directives connected with an organization, network or communication technology.

Communication and management are closely linked together since communication is the process of information exchange between two or more person and management includes managers that basically gives out information to their people. Communication and management literally go hand in hand.

There are basically three pricing steps in the communication management process:

- (i) Plan communication
- (ii) Management communication
- (iii) Content communication

i. Plan Communication Management:

This is the process of developing an approach and plan for all project-based communication activities based on the information needs of each stakeholder, available resources in the organisation, and the needs of a project. A communication plan outline the information needs of stakeholders. When the information should be distributed, and how it should be delivered. Communication management plans should cover the who, what, when, where, why and how.

ii. Management Communication: This is a function that enables managers to communicate effectively with their teams, build stronger relationships, improve employees' experience and wellbeing, and continuously drive employees' success in the work place. Effective management communication is one of the biggest drives of organizational success. Organization with well-set management communications strategies have a competitive advantage over

those who neglect the importance of communication in the workplace. However, the way managers communicate with their teams has changed significantly. According to the State of the American Manager Report by Gallup, “the manager account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement”.

iii. Content: This is the information contained with communication media. This includes internet, cinema, television, radio, audio CDs, books, magazines, physical art, and live event content. It is directed at end-user or audience in the sectors of publishing, art and communication. For example, a banner advertisement or the content; a blog post, subject line, website, event among others. Communication can be divided into two broad categories: Content and relational. Content is the what of any message. It is the facts and figures, the ideas and opinion that we translate through a medium conversation, memos, or notes on the bulletin boards. Content give readers viewers, and audience reasons to follow a communications argument.

Many definitions of public relations have been documented by many scholars. Some are based on what public relations is and others are based on other business processes, such as communication arts and marketing. In this study, it is important to only focus on the most working definitions of public relations. Harlow came up with the following definition after analyzing more than four hundred of definitions of public relations:

Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its public; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools (Kayode, 2014).

The other definition is that public relations is a management function of a continuing and planned character, through which public and private organizations and institutions seek to win and retain the understanding, and support of those with whom they are or may be

concerned by evaluating public relation about themselves, in order to correlate as far as possible, their own policies and procedures to achieve by planned and widespread information more productive cooperation and more efficient fulfillment of their common interest (PRSA, 2009).

Public Relations Institute of South Africa defined public relations as “the management, through communication, of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organization and its internal and external stakeholders” (Mersham, Rensburg, & Skinner 1995 cited in Sriramesh, 2003).

Recent research has shown that organization have taken up the use of social media as a communication tool for marketing and public relations messages (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). Thus, the development of social media as a communication platform has drawn numerous interest from researchers in the field of public relations. For example, prior study on the utilization of social media as a tool for organizations public relations strategies has been undertaken (Briones, 2011).

On the other hand, public relations practitioners have been struggling to describe the strategic contribution of the information flow in the success of an organization for many years (Rawjee, 2012). Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps in the understanding, acceptances and cooperation between an organization and its publics (Piperopoulos, 2012, p. 248). It also involves the problems or issues of the management. Public relations helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinions; define and emphasize the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to effectively utilize change; serves as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools.

However, public relations thrives on effective communication. Drew (2021) explain that the communication that takes place from public relations practitioner or units to managers results in as ascending information flow.

The success of a public relations campaign depends on effective communication or information flow taking place among both the internal and the external interested parties of the

organization. Therefore, there must be effective communication strategies developed by the public relations practitioners so that the company succeeds in terms of growth, profitable and sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

This work was anchored on the framework of the system theory and the stakeholder theory

System Theory

This theory is a management theory that sees on organization as a system. Proposed by Ludwing Vin Bertalanffy in 1928, this theory posits that every organization is part of a system with three components: the organization, its publics and its goals. The theory states that organization that adjust to changes survive and prosper while organizations that do not are doomed to fail. It further explains that it is very important for an organization to receive messages from its publics and act appropriately. System theory, therefore, identifies the relevance of communication in an organization as well as feedback mechanism which is very vital for the survival of any organization. System theory can help public relations practitioners to understand the relationship between an organization and its publics, as well as the role of public relations in the attainment of the organizational goals. Bertalanffy, (1968) cited in Okoi et al (2018).

There are four elements of system theory: inputs (which is incoming information), identifying problem (which helps to point out a crisis in a message as fast as possible), throughputs (which involves processing information and understanding the message), and outputs (which refers to the response from the organization). In relation to this study, it is important for public relations officers of organizations to manage communication appropriately through the available channels of communication, based on their understanding of the relationship between their organization and the organization publics.

Situational Theory

Situational theory arose not only to agree with the concept of stakeholders describing relationship but also to assert that not all people in stakeholder groups would be equally likely to communicate with the organization. In their agreement,

Gruning and Repper (1992) cited in Esuh and Ihejirika (2018) felt that public relations people could more effectively manage communications by identifying specific publics within stakeholders groups.

Gruning and Hurt (1984) cited in Esuh et al (2018) proposed what they call a situational theory of publics to give as more specific information about their communication needs. According to these researchers, three variables predict when the public will seek and process information about an issue: problem recognition, contrast recognition and level of involvement. The key is that publics are situational. That is, as the situation, problem, opportunity, or issue changes, the public with which the organization must communicate will also change.

Method and Material

This study relies on secondary data sources which include: books, personal sources, journals and websites in order to critically examine public relations and communication management in organization, examine possible trends, growth and existing gap.

Public Relations Role in an Organization

Ewuola (2005, p.33) highlighted the following as the specific role of public relations in an organization:

(i) **Community Relations:** Any organization must be seen as a good community citizen and should have the goodwill of the community in which it operates. An effective community relations programmes will need to be continuing an comprehensive. Organization can implement various programmes to improve community relations on a regular or even ongoing basis so clearly. One of the major functions of public relations is to bridge the business and community gap.

(ii) **Employee Relations:** The most important resources that a company has are its employees. Employee relations involve the body of work concerned with maintaining employer-employee relationship that contributes to satisfactory productivity, motivation and morale. Essentially, employee relation is concerned with preventing and resolving problems involving individuals/ which arises out of or affect work situations. The image and reputation of a company among its employee is also another responsibility of public relations.

(iii) **Product Public Relations:** When new product are introduced to the market, the role that public relation plays is crucial for creating awareness and differentiating the product in the public eyes from the other similar and existing ones. When existing product need a push, public relation is often called on to the improve product visibility.

(iv) **Financial/Investors' Relations:** This function involves communication with the wide variety of individuals and group that the company deals with in the course of its operation. This includes the stake holders and investors but it's not limited to them. Financial analyst and potential investors have to be informed about company finances.

(v) **Political/Government Relations:** The wide range of activities that public relations have to cover in the political arena includes influencing legislations that can be hindrances to the proper operation of the company. Public relation in politics may have to stage debates and seminars for government officials.

(vi) **Crisis Management:** When anything happens like an accident in a production plant, it is the job of public relations person to provide honest and accurate information so that the uncertainty by the people involved directly or indirectly can be assuage. Natural disaster's management, management wrong doings, bankruptcies and product failures are crisis which public relations must play a large part.

(vii) **Publicity:** Publicity is gaining public visibility or awareness for a product, services or company via the media. Public relation is the strategic management function that helps an organization communicate, establish and maintain communication with the public. This can be done internally without mediated communication.

(viii) **Industrial Advertising:** This is the major role that entails the advertising of the organization name and reputation through purchase of space or airtime. The maintenance of close coordinate with advertising department of media organization is required in this job. Industrial advertising also known as business to business advertising is the strategy of attracting the attention of another business and convincing that company to purchase the goods and serves offered by another business.

(ix) **Press Agency:** This is another role of public relation in an organization. Press agent is a person who arranges publicity and interviews with press, an individual or business. Press agency develops the production of motion pictures, radio and television programs for personalities, political figures and other crowd events.

(x) **Public Relations:** The main function of a public relations department is to enhance a company's corporate image/reputation. Staffs that work in PR departments are skilled publicists. They are able to present a company or individual to the world in the best light. The role of PR department can be seen as a reputation protector. Public relation provides a service for the company by helping to give the public and media a better understanding of how the company operates. PR can also come under the title of public information or customer relations as the case may be.

Tools for Public Relations/Communication Management Methods in Organization

The notion that all forms of media should be harmonized as instruments for PR and by extension, communication management methods cannot be overemphasized; there are several instruments/methods of communication management an organization can deploy to achieve successful results. These are:

(i) Organization newsletter or handbook that is distributed solely to employees of the organization. Organization can also take advantage of online tools that allow them to efficiently send out important messages while also encouraging employee collaboration.

(ii) Communication website which an organization can use to contact multiple audiences with customized messages.

(iii) Meetings is a crucial tool that can be used to achieve the best results.

(iv) News release provides a timely information about issues, events and programmes \policies of organizations.

(v) News conference cannot be over emphasized especially when there is something important to communicate to the various publics.

(vi) Special events can be organized and information disseminated in the course of the event.

- (vii) Posters and leaflets should be well articulated in a simple language.
- (viii) Social media as a tool have influenced PR practice in interactive video technologies such as zoom, skype and other applications have made interaction even better.

According to Boyitic and Ufuophu-Biri (2022), corporate public relations is practiced in almost all the universities in the south-south, Nigeria. Many universities in the region have public relations units attached to the registrar's office or the vice-chancellor's office. The department's primary function is to publish bi-monthly or monthly information bulletin and occasionally react to issues touching the university.

Public Relations and Communication Management: Trends Growth and Gap

Just like marketing firms, public relations firm experience trends, too. More noticeable trends emerge each year as the gap between PR and marketing narrows. And like marketing, a number of things influence PR trends: consumer preference, employee expectation, and technology. As each of these areas evolve, PR strategies must also evolve in order to continue presenting an organization in good light.

Some of the top public relation trends according to Kiely (2022), include:

- (i) **Data and analytics:** This take center stage for PR strategies with today's analytics and PR reporting technology, data plays an increasingly essential role in PR strategies. What is more, having data-driven insight into PR strategies can help to adjust PR approach.
- (ii) **Diversity and inclusion:** More organization are doubling down on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. Many organizations see a (DEI) workplace as being a competitive advantage, especially during the ongoing great resignation. Organizations that promote diversity and inclusion as part of their PR tactics are not only appealing to customers but also prospective employees.
- (iii) **Influencer marketing:** This has been a central force in PR trends of the past several years. Influences continue to crop up in every corner of the web, from micro-influencers to TikTok influencers with millions of followers on instagram. PR campaigns will continue to rely on influencer programs for brand and growth.

(iv) **Personalized PR Pitch:** The concept of personalized marketing has spilled over into the PR world. In marketing, personalization serves to build customer loyalty and increases sales because it meets the customer wherever they are in their journey. The same can be said for personalized PR.

(v) **Authenticity in Post-Pandemic PR:** Along the same vein as DEI and personalization, authenticity continues to shape the expectation of customers and PR agencies.

Public relations have come a long way since its inception. The ever-growing competition among industrial concerns, political organizations, pervasive democracy regionalism in world politics, privatization and liberalization of the economy modern mass media, among others, are such factors which have made public relations inevitable (Kiely, 2022).

Presently, PR has now grown into a separate activity both in the developed and developing countries. Comparatively, like in other areas of human activity, PR is more mature in developed nations than in the developing countries. In the developing nations especially in the private sector, PR concepts and practices are not yet clear and PR in most of the developing countries is carried on borrowed ideologies and the process is generally devoid of research and any logical planning (Kiely, 2022).

A recurring concern in all disciplines is the near future and the challenges to be taken up in order to survive. The field of public relations does not escape this concern (Almansa-Martinez, Ana, Fernandez-Souto et al 2020).

Recently, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management has indicated that it is necessary to help “make the 2020 decade one of renewal and growth for our profession and ensure that we pass it on the future generation in the best possible way” (Dircon, 2020).

Different studies have identified several challenges to be faced in the coming years (Institute of Public Relations, 2020; Zerfass et al; 2019), this work will focus mainly on three:

- (i) The fight against disinformation, given the massive presence of fake news which calls to question our ethical journalism values of transparency, accountability and responsibility.
- (ii) A commitment towards gender inequalities with improvements in working

conditions for women where barriers and stereotypes still exist.

(iii) And the fact that the use of new media technology in public relations will continue to evolve

Research conducted by Dircom (2018) confirms that priority issues for public relation profession will be the digital enormities and the use of new information. Amana and Attah in Ndolo (2014, p.22) assert that “the engagement meetings, create new opportunities of learning process and news dissemination that is debilitating the constraint of geographical spatial demand and the dynamics of interpersonal communication”.

In our world today, access and exposure to information has increased tremendously. That is why even governments the world over are now shifting to the social media platform use because it is not just trendy but shrift in disseminating circulating and rebroadcasting any message (Onovo & Okafor, 2020).

The influence of technology as an instrument for public relations activities cannot be over emphasized. According to Samovar, Porter & McDaniel (2007, p. 366)

“Technology is inescapable for anyone living today. Everyday, we are bombarded with messages from various technological innovations ranging from our telephone (cell and standard) to our computers,

television and fax machines. This technology and even more newer innovations, is changing all phases of communication process. As, you should suspect, technological advancements have influenced and will continue to influence the future of intercultural communication”.

Public relations practitioners need to adopt intercultural communication approaches in all communication processes. Cultural interaction is needed for effective and efficient understanding among organization various publics.

Conclusion/Recommendation

The greatest asset of any organization is her public relations department/unit and therefore the management of this valuable asset through communication is one of the key challenges affecting organizational goals and objectives. As such, public relations executives should keep abreast with the current trend in the communication industry in order to master the use of modern media of communication and the approaches of reaching the internal and external publics with their speculated peculiarities. This will go a long way in assisting the PR practitioner in all engagements geared towards the transformation of the organization as well as the society.

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