

PUBLICITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS: THE PRACTICE AND MISCONCEPTIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACY

OKOYE, MOSES UDEMEZUE PhD

Department of Mass Communication
Madonna University Nigeria, Okija Campus
Email- okoyemoses282@yahoo.com
Call-08034971544

BSTRACT

Publicity is a critical component of our modern day society. The desire and struggle to present acceptable picture in the mind of the public is a major pre-occupation of not only politicians, but the need for all players and stakeholders in the inter-play of power to control resources, social, individual groups and institutions has made publicity important factor. This paper highlights what publicity is, trying to differentiate it from public relations. It is basically a qualitative research, using secondary data and some theoretical assumptions to make deductions about publicity; the difference between public relations and publicity. Public relations builds friendship while publicity sustains it and shapes it from time to time. This explains the mix up between public relations and publicity. However, as a result of the fierce competition for media access by the myriad of opinion molders, a high level of expertise and professionalism is emerging to correct and redefine the concept of publicity process that will make event manager understand what he is doing. Event management has become a major publicity but even the event manager himself calls what he is doing public relations. Journalists don't go aimlessly in search of the news. More often than not they go to an occurrence that has either been organized or arranged. But instead of the event manager seeing his work as publicity creating news for the public, he sees it as public relations.

Keywords: Publicity, Public Relations, Democracy, Society, Practice

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about publicity. Thus, the first thing it tries to do is to explain what publicity is all about – what publicity is and just as important, what it is not. It

might also discuss the role of publicity throughout society, in government, business education, and charity. Publicity is everywhere. It is important. Modern society could not function well without it. According to Ekweonu&Umeh(2020), an organisation's event of any kind serves as an opportunity for marketing the organization indirectly. What this means is that often times, organisations deploy all they have in their arsenal in their bid to accomplish a set out brand image goal.

There are nuances between publicity and public relations. It is not public relations even though many persons improperly use the terms inter-changeably. Publicity may be a part of public relations, but it is not and cannot constitute public relations all by itself. "Public relations is regularly and sometimes worryingly, referred to as 'PR', which is often confused with 'press releases,'" (Smith & Taylor, 2002, p.416). Issuance of press releases is only a part of real public relations activities. A simple definition of public relations is the development of and maintenance of good relationships with different publics. The publics are the range of different groups on which an organization is dependent. These include employees, investors, suppliers, customers, distributors, legislators/regulators/governments, pressure groups, the community, the media and even competition.

Most of these groups have different (sometimes complicity) interest in any particular organization. Ekweonu&Umeh in (Okunna2020) agreed that most times, lay men misunderstand or misinterpret public relations to be what it is not. They went ahead to state that the term public relations PR has been branded around so much and has perhaps become so mundane that both PR professionals and lay people have come to believe that they are knowledgeable about the concept. This is why in spite of its many years of existence; efforts are still being made to distinguish public relations from publicity, advertising, marketing sales promotion, propaganda and even totally unrelated activities like giving and receiving gratifications or outright bribes.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The misconceptions between public relations which is management function and which deals with staff or employee relations, community relations, and supplier relations customer relations, stockholder relations etc. The practice and misconceptions, for instance where trade exhibitions of product is looked at by the organizers as public relations programme instead of publicity programme is what inspired this study. To make a demarcation between the two profession, especially in democracy and modern day politics being the one of the main client of publicity which offers different opportunities for political campaigns, and there is a need for

a contextual appraisal of the nexus between public relations and publicity

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper aims to explore the differences between public relations and publicity. It will specifically look at the following:

1. The crucial roles of public relations in the management of any organization.
2. Provision of a better understanding between public relations functions which are more of managerial functions and publicity which are more of media and information management.
3. Make a clear demarcation between the two professions, correcting the misconceptions among practitioners and organisations who think the functions are the same.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Publicity: In this study, publicity is any form of activity by an organization or individual that generates or makes news. It could be intentionally staged or occurring accidentally, every effort by an organisation to inform the people about its activities.

Publicrelations: Here public relations refers to the areas of interaction and extraction of any management mark, the significant points of operational public relations for an organisation and these areas could be direct, concrete as in customer relations. It could abstract as in the case of organisational reputation.

Democracy: Democracy refers to the pattern of government in given state – where the government is of the people and for the people, the representatives duly elected by the people via an electoral system.

Society: In this study, society comprises groups of people who are united in a common cause with related interests and are conscious of their mutual interests.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ikyase and Egberi(2015) posit that social conflict theorists view society as an arena of social battlefield where different individuals, organisations, political groups related in form of context with one another in order to gain publicity so as to obtain power, share scarce and valued resources. Most of which have economic implications, which according to Sarki (2019, p. 135),“... in turn have implications for access to influence in society and the so-called levers of power.”

Singh (2008) noted that social conflict theory views even financial crime as a function of the conflict that exists in society. The theory suggests that class conflict causes crime in any society and those in power through publicity gain access to media in order to manipulate the laws to protect their rights and interests and that of those they recruit to perpetrate crime. Singh (2008) went ahead to say that misconceptions about publicity is compounded by the fact that publicity communicators in the official sector, whether central or state, even as organization or individual are generally not accountable for results in developmental terms. If they are judged at all by results, it is in terms of publicity for a minister or official in the press. He noted that in contrast to the professional communicator whether in the private or official sector is the publicity seeker. His purpose is fixed, unlike the variable purpose of public relations or the professional communicator. He engages in social action as part of publicity and practices publicity as part of social action.

What this means is that communication (being it publicity) as a concept has to be viewed as a self-regulating system despite its equivocal nature. Communication occurs at various levels-neurological, linguistic, human, face to face interactional, besides, at the level of community complex organization and nation state. In fact, communication as phenomenon is constantly ubiquitous only our understanding of it changes according to the perspective from which it is viewed. For instance, if publicity finds its way into the editorial column of newspaper, it is viewed differently as an editorial.

PUBLICITY AND NEWS MAKING

According to OsoandMojaye (2019) the desire and struggle to capture the public mind and or manufacture consent has become a major preoccupation of not only politicians but all players and stakeholders in the interplay of power to control social resources. Studies have shown two main characteristics of the news making process. First is the fact that news is event dependent. In fact the classic definition of news is that it is “an account of an event.” The other characteristics is that the news is mostly based on the voices and activities of official, Institutional and powerful social actors who are endowed with the appropriate resources to organize media strategies to gain access to the media. OsoandMojaye (2019) state that those who gain access especially for favourable coverage are those able to effectively deploy such media strategies in the competitive struggle for media attention and visibility. What this means is that this media strategies involves offering appropriate informationsubsidy. Some scholars writing in this vein has argued that in effect the range of effective voices in the public sphere is an outcome of battles over information management in society in it broadcast.

What this means is that due to the fierce competition for media access by the myriad of opinion moulders, a high level of expertise and professionalism has emerged to handle the publicity process of organizations and will soon draw a clearer line between Public Relations and publicity.

It is also becoming increasingly clear that while journalists and editors want to maintain their autonomy and control in the news production process their latitude of freedom is more and more subject to resources constraints. Journalists are been asked to do a lot under very severe manpower and material inadequacies on press handout. Weakened media organizations remains an easy prey for an increasingly powerful and predatory publicity manipulations. According (Oso&Mojaye, 2019), Journalists don't go aimlessly in search of the news. More often than not they go to an occurrence that has either been organized or arranged or that has happened accidentally. A beat is a place of news trading, where journalists expect that by the activities of those working there, something will happen, which can generate news.

Publicity can vary from promoting a product (product PR) to promoting a company (corporate PR among employees, customers, investors, the community, local government etc that require press releases to communicate with.[Smith, and Taylor, 2003), are of the opinion that we need to separate product PR sometimes called marketing PR from brand publicity and corporate PR corporate image management. What it means is that publicity objectives can vary from promoting a product PR to promoting a company (corporate PR).

Smith and Taylor(2003, p. 417) citing Norman, asks the question, "is there a new role for PR in marketing?" That is taking the PR definition which talks about relationships between an organization and its publics. What that means is that the definitions say nothing about products, and nothing about the media. Public relations can be interpreted as more of corporate communications than a product activity such as product publicity/ product PR.

Oso and Mojaye (2019) state that in this age where social actors are so image and perception conscious and individuals, groups and Institutions devote a lot of resources to promotion, publicity, and visibility through the mass media competition for access to the means of publicity or public communication has become very stiff and highly priced. What this means is that the importance of the mass media stems from the fact that they represent the most effective means of publicity, Influential system in contemporary society. This centrality of the media has led to what Blumler (1990) referred to as the modern publicity process which

he defined as a competitive struggle to influence and control popular perceptions of key political events and issues through the major mass media channels.

However, it is good to note that the ease with which they can be used and their being so common, especially with the social media also indicates their inherent danger. Once a press release is issued what becomes of it is beyond the control of the person who issued it, the journalist and the public takes over. If press conference is badly handled can create wrong image and generate bad publicity. So also is a speech badly delivered? Smith and Taylor (2003) agree with careful management of publicity when they said publicity and visibility should not be raised before a solid platform of credibility has been developed through decent, safe products, friendly customer service caring ethical and socially responsible policies. Publicity gives an indication of the diverse nature of coding and decoding messages in communication unlike public relations whose mission maybe just to create friendship while, positive publicity is dependent primarily on good relationship with the (Media relations) and clear understanding of information management.

PUBLICITY AND MEDIA RELATIONS

Publicity – is a “news story” or a publicity release” prepared with the intent and expectation that it will be used by a newspaper magazines, radio stations or television stations to constitute their news bulletin for the day. Take a look at the local and national newspapers trade journals, radioprogrammes and television spot the commercial news items or features that have made news. Although they appear to be written by an editor or journalists according to (Smith & Taylor, 2003), many of the news items and features have been written by publicity professionals who are specialized in speech writing, advertising, editorial publicity can achieve many similar communication goals such as increasing awareness or responsibility. What this means is that news and feature editors do not have time to scout around for all the items they run. They depend on a constant feed of professionally presented news items and news release from organizations. Some groups and organizations and individuals have more talent and more resources and do a better job of publicizing their accomplishments or ideas than others.

But when publicity is not flowing freely so that all sides of all questions are openly aired and debated organizations, citizens and the entire society grow alarmed. Well they might, for the first thing a dictator does is throttle the mass media and bring about an imbalance of information in favour of the dictator’s point of view. What this means is that publicity will help us to do the best possible job of presenting

ideas and causes in professional way and in the best tradition of an open, democratic free exchange of information and opinion. Publicity should help organizations and individual members of the society to communicate more effectively, to read and listen more critically, to understand the media more fully, and thus, to operate more effectively in the whole society process.

According to Uzo (2013) publicity can be generated through writing press releases and feature articles for the press, video news releases for television programmes syndicated radio tapes for radio programmes and digital press packs for all and sundry. Publicity can also be generated through press conferences, press receptions and media events (what the media less reverently call message notes) it can also come from public speaking at conferences, lectures, seminars, dinners and sometimes business meeting such as AGM. What it means is that through publicity, credibility can be developed before raising visibility of a product through advertising. Credibility is created by a proper product and/or quality of service backed by the right publicity when this happens all other marketing mix follows.

The information contained in a press-release must be scrupulously accurate. An editor may find that a release is press worthy and may use it on that basis. If however, the release is inaccurate, the editor is made to look incompetent, his or her paper or broadcast is made to look unprofessional and worst of all, and the public is misled. According to publicity experts, publicity managers take their responsibility to the public at large just as seriously as professional editors do with the freedom accorded the press for several responsibilities one of which is an uncompromising respect for the truth, in so far as the truth can be determined.

For instance, in political publications many print publications take advantage of their wide readership and print persuasive pieces in the form of unsigned editorials that represent the official position of the organization. Arora (2014) shared his opinion by stating that, despite the ostensible separation between editorial writing and news gathering, this practice may cause some people to doubt the political objectivity of the publications news reporting. What it means is that though usually unsigned editorials are accompanied by a diversity of signed opinions from other perspectives in publicity. In publicity other publications and many broadcast media only publish opinion pieces that are attributed to a particular individual which may be an in-house analyst or to an outside entity. Then one particular controversial question in publicity is whether media organisations should endorse political candidates for office based on publicity? Political endorsements create more

opportunities to construe favouritism in reporting and can create a perceived conflict of interest according to Arora (2014).

Garba and Tejumaiye (2019) state that manifestations of abuse or misuse of publicity through media will lead to misinformation, illiteracy chaos and disorder, corruption and underdevelopment in all its ramifications, become the lots of any society where the publicity managers failed to have a clear understanding of what publicity is. What this means is that in society like this the power of the media is neither appreciated nor effectively deployed by publicity managers or their clients who have means and access to the media. It means that for the society to function well and all rights are protected and responsibility discharged efficiently by governments and its agencies and organizations and members of society the concept of publicity must be clearly defined while rules and regulations guiding the practice of publicity are upheld with mixing it up with public relations which is about creating mutual relationship. Publicity should state in clear terms what a particular organization, concept or an idea stands for. Arora (2014) notes that societies have different reactions to politically motivated violence, coarse language (hate-speech) or any other situation that is unacceptable to or stigmatized by the local culture or laws. Even with similar society, different clients, organizations and even individuals will ask the publicity manager for different approach to suit the message they want to put out to the public.

This means that publicity decisions revolve around what facts are necessary for the society to know. Arora went on to state that when certain distasteful or shocking material is considered important to publicity story, there are a variety of common methods by publicity managers for mitigating negative audience reaction. Advance warning such as (stop spreading fake-news) are explicit. Disturbing materials may allow listeners or readers to avoid content they would rather not be exposed to. Offensive words may be blurred. Descriptions may be substituted for better pictures in press releases. Disturbing issues might be moved from a cover to an inside page through publicity media relations or from day-time to late evening.

Arora (2014) is also of the view that there is often considerable controversy over those techniques especially concerns that obscuring or not. Presenting certain facts or details is self-censorship that compromises objectivity and fidelity to truth and which does not serve the public interest. The publicity implications of different interest groups vary and a combination of many could operate under a given circumstances. However the contents, that the modern publicity manager should do more functional analysis and have more understanding of the types of image needs

that motivates today's clients and be guided in such a way that publicity does not in any way become deception.

CONSIDERING PUBLICITY MEDIA

There are certain basic elements the publicity managers must take into consideration in selecting publicity media. First is the characteristic of the media in question. The mass media are increasingly becoming commercial oriented, producing specialized services for sale in the form of programmes like all other forms of commercial organisations, they are in competition with each other for patronage from audiences and organisations, who may need their service for publicity. Okoye (2013) noted that in this case, despite the adherence to ethics and the normative principles of public service and social responsibility, media producers are highly interested in selecting what will give them the competitive edge in the new highly saturated media market. It means that the interests of readers are of importance to the publicity manager and the media in deciding what to publish as news.

Obiaku and Sabo (2019) stated that many of unresolved issues like endemic poverty, unresolved national questions, violent political conflicts, fragmented political terrain, challenges of regional integration, among others issues determine the publicity content of many publicity and media news programmes and the audience reaction. What this means is that the type of publicity may determine which of the media channel is best. For instance violent-political conflicts can best be handled in the newspaper than the television because of its visual power to demonstrate.

While the traditional public media (newspaper, radio and TV) remain important instruments in publicity management, the new media are increasingly becoming veritable channels in strategic publicity management. According to Oso and Mojaye (2019), they provide direct links to the audience. They have obliterated time, space and distance in communication encounter. What it means is that the new media, when placed side by side with the traditional have some advantage of being more cost effective and they are interactive, hence their feedback is more instantaneous.

Their interactive nature makes them suitable for a two-way symmetrical communication which is highly recommended for publicity practice as it allows for public participation and citizen engagement in public affairs management (Okoye, 2013). Either in the conventional media or the social media experts are of the opinion that effort must be made by publicity managers to ensure that the news content is accurate, free from falsehood and in context, and that all sides are

presented fairly. Be it in editorials, analytical articles and commentary should be held to the same standards of accuracy with respect to facts as news reports.

CONCLUSION

In publicity people receive information in the form of news articles, editorial interviews, feature stories or events managements or occurrences after the messages have been reviewed and edited – filtered by the publicity manager in line with a particular mind in mind. The public receiving the messages thinks such messages are coming from the medium rather than an organization or individual member of the society since they are paid for.

Publicity helps explain existing issues and make advocacy but public relations is a management function that focuses on the relationships that individuals and organisations have with other groups called publics for the purpose of creating mutual goodwill. While publicity goal is to respond to inquiries, create understanding or neutrality, “companies should use PR to maintain relationships with all publics including consumers” (Arens, 2008, p. 340). According to Ukaegbu, (2019) publicity is one-sided communication whereas public relations is founded on two-way communication process without which mutual understanding will be difficult to achieve. What the above statement means is that publicity merely involves providing information on an organisation or a body, while public relations build acceptable corporate image. Publicity is a tool in public relations when the public relations manager has need to generate disseminate predetermined news stories and features meant to show his organisation in a good light

RECOMMENDATION

Public relations and publicity are highly important to every organisation. Both programmes must be left in the hands experts who understand the rudiments of public relations tools, press releases, speech writing, and presentation of publicity programmes so as to eliminate misconceptions and for effective result.

REFERENCES

- Arens, W.F. (2008). *Contemporary advertising*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing company Ltd.
- Arora, N. (2014). *Journalism ethics and mass media management*. New Delhi, India: Random Publications.
- Blumberg, J. G. (1990). Elections, the media and the modern publicity process. In Ferguson, M. (Ed.). *Public communication: The new imperative*. London: Page publications.

- Duyile, D. (2006), *Public relations practice: African Perspective*. Lagos: John West Publications Ltd.
- Ikyase, T.I. & Egberi, A.E. (2015). Political violence and democratic stability in Nigeria reflecting on the past and charting the way forward. *Review of public administration and management*. 4(8).
- Ohiaku, A. O. & Sabo, L. (2019). Linking perception with coverage influence of journalists' perception of presidential inaugural address in Nigeria on their reportage. *International Journal of Communication*. University of Nigeria Nsukka.
- Okoye, M. U. (2013) *Public relations in crisis management*. Lagos: Tough Teachers Publishers.
- Okunna, C.S. (2020). *Communication and media studies: Multiple perspectives*. Enugu: New Generation Educare Ltd
- Oso, L. & Mojaye, E. (2019). Media relations, event management and publicity process. *Journal of communication and media research*. 11(1).
- Uzo, H. C. (2013), *Principles & practice of advertising*. Enugu: Rhyce Publishers
- Sarki, R. (2019). Political thuggery and the challenge of electioneering during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. *EBSU Journal of Mass Communication* 6(1).
- Singh, J.K. (2008). *Media and public relations*. New Delhi: APH publishing corporation.
- Smith, P.R. & Taylor, J. (2002). *Marketing communications an integrated approach*. London: Kogan Page Limited.
- Smith, P.R. & Taylor, J. (2003). *Marketing communications an integrated approach*. USA: Kogan page limited.
- Garba, J. & Tejumiaye, A. (2019). *Mass communication research; An introduction*. Ibadan: Sceptre prints ltd
- Ukaegbu, M.I. (2019). *Economic and Social issues in advertising and public relations*. Port-Harcourt: Josime printers and publishers

