

International Public Relations Strategies in an Evolving World: An Explicatory Analysis

Charles C. Makata; Nkiru G. Onuorah & Vincent Odoh

Abstract

The growing interdependence among countries finds expression in the fact that no country can survive alone. Attempts are always made by countries to relate with one another for mutual gains. This underscores the strategic importance of international public relations. This work looks at the aim of international public relations in our contemporary world and the various strategies used by countries to achieve mutual relations. Some of the strategies include: Information and communication, international media relations, image laundering and management, research and counselling strategy, international cultural, religious and sporting relations, crises and issue management, international advertising and sponsorship strategies. The researchers concluded that these strategies are needed in international public relations practice to achieve intended results.

Keywords: *.International Public Relations .Image laundering .Research .Mutual relations .Sponsorship.*

INTRODUCTION

International Public Relations Association (IPRA)'s Gold paper Number 7 of 1990 noted that professional international public relations operates in every sphere of life which include the following: government (local, state, national and international sub-areas of government activities), business and industry (small, medium and trans-national), educational institutions, hospitals and health care sector, charities and good causes, and international affairs .

International public relations covers lot of activities and functions. Some of these functional areas include: corporate communication, corporate image and reputation management, attitude and opinion management, employee relations, community relations, investors relations, media relations, customer relations, customer relations, financial relations, issues and crises management, corporate social responsibility, corporate identity management, corporate advertising and; corporate strategy and policy formulation. Other areas include: environmental public relations (environmental scanning), sponsorship, protocols and lobbying, research and counselling, corporate designs and publication, event management and marketing, image laundering. Each of these areas is a wide functional area of international public relations which represents an extensive study on its own.

International public relations is an all life-embracing activity, carefully conducted among or between foreign individuals, organizations, communities and their environments towards ensuring global mutual understanding and continued attainment of global peace.

Theoretical Framework

Jefkin (1985)'s Transfer Process model forms part of the theoretical base for this study. As one of the leading widely known and applied model of public relations, its major message according to Nwosu and Uffoh (2005, p.18) is that public relations strategies can and

should be used in an attempt to change over or convert people's attitudes from their negative to positive states.

The transfer process model explains that public relations strategies can be used to change hostility to sympathy, prejudice to acceptance, apathy to interest and ignorance to knowledge. The model in addition can be adopted at the entire corporate/organizational activities which tend to ensure mutual understanding and reduction of youth restiveness and other crimes.

Another leading theory for this study is the RICEE theory. Nwosu and Uffoh (2005,p.58) state that one of the outstanding and original public relations theories that have been developed and which will contribute towards the achievement of peace and a safe and sustainable environment in the world is the RICEE theory. Propounded by Professor Ikechukwu Nwosu in 1996, the RICEE is a public relations theory which can be applied in the topical issue of conflict management or how public relations can be applied in managing or controlling environmental issues and problems. The public relations RICEE theory is a name taken from the first letters that form the five main components of the theory. As aforementioned, R refers to Research, I refers to Information, C refers to Communication, E stands for Education and the last E refers to Evaluation.

Nwosu (2006,p.140) asserts that research is relevant in modern public relations practice in many ways which include: helps to gather and accumulate data regarding audience attitudes and opinions; aids trouble shooting by serving as a means of keeping surveillance within a corporate organization and its environs; equips PR departments with concrete evidence and verifiable facts for advising management on the image and reputation problems of an organization.

International Public Relations: An Overview

Moore and Kalupa (2005,p.546) stated that evidence of the spread of public relations through-out the world is the establishment of international and national organizations of public relations counsellors and practitioners.

The International Public Relations Association (IPRA), which was established in London in 1955, is made-up of individual members whose associations are located around the world. Membership is open to all practitioners of known professional competence, who have practice international public relations for five or more years. Its objectives are to provide an international exchange of information, experience, and ideas to improve the skills and ethics of the public relations professional; and to make a practical contribution to a better understanding between peoples through public relations.

Black (1989) stated that the growth of global communication by satellite has brought the idea of the interdependent world into an everyday reality. Television screens bring immediate pictures of political events and natural disasters from all over the world. Many important factors have increased interdependence. They include new developments in science and technology, especially computers and the growing sophistication of software. Fibre optics, electronic mail and telefax transmission have all speeded up communication but differences in values, beliefs, and laws persist. A public relations programme which may be ideal for one country is likely to be less successful in another country. The essential principle in international public relations must always be, "Think globally but act locally".

International Public Relations is now the new buzzword of the twenty-first century and a rapidly growing area of public relations practice. However, public relations theory and research has been slow to keep abreast, lagging behind marketing, human resources or management disciplines, which have long developed theories and models of their practices in the international context. It is only recently that public relations has gone global and new regions of the world, such as Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America, West and Southern Africa are being discovered by PR academics. Even in academic literature,

the terms---international public relations and global public relations are being used interchangeably and in several contexts. global public relations is referred to the internationalization of the profession, which is being practiced in more and more countries through-out the globe, while international public relations is the planning and implementation of programmes and campaigns carried-out abroad, involving two or more countries (usually referred to as parent and host countries).

Moore and Kalupa (2005,p.538) stated that international public relations is a product of the second half of the 20th century, just as public relations became identifiable on the American scene in the first half of the century. As this work has noted, there has been a measure of confusion in the definition of public relations. In the instance of the world-wide practice, the confusion has been no less conspicuous. Jon B. Riffel, former Chairman of the International Committee of the Public Relations Society of America defined international public relations as just public relations everywhere. Willis Player, Senior Vice-President, External Affairs of Pan American World Airways, stated that as a discipline, an art, or a practice, there is no such thing as international public relations, suggesting that, although there are broad basic principles that may be applied anywhere, a different approach is required in each country and, to a certain extent, in each community. It is these broad basic principles that are signals projected through overt messages and un verbalized action with a brief suggestion of some of the reasons for the necessity of different, specially planned approaches in every country under consideration.

Uduji (2012,p.342) stated that one of the most widely quoted definitions of international public relations is that of Wilcox, Ault, Agee and Cameron (2001), who defined it as the planned and organized effort of a company, institution or government to establish mutually beneficial relations with the publics of other nations. Definitions of public relations emphasize mutual understanding as well as relationship building between an organization and its publics. Relationship building and strengthening are vital factors in building global brands and global reputation. Interestingly enough, consumers or other publics would hardly define or perceive their connections with a company as relationships. Conceptualising how individuals or certain publics understand an organization may present some difficulties, especially in an international arena.

Black (1989,p.205) stated that there are two separate worlds of public relations. One consists of all the practitioners world-wide, who practice public relations for the benefit of their employers and clients. The other world is the very wide range of activities which falls within the limits of public relations practice.

Publics for International Public Relations

Nworgu (2002,p.202) stated that in every public relations programme or strategy, public identification is very important. It helps the public relations expert to tailor his communication programmes to specific publics. In public identification, there is the need for a psychographics and demographic analysis of the publics, so as to understand their basic characteristics. The publics of a country at both local and international scenes, are those individuals or groups whose actions, inaction and reaction can affect the country either positively or negatively.

In trying to understand the publics for public relations whether at national or international level, Gruning and Hunt (1984) cited in Nworgu (2002,p.206), categorization of publics, readily comes to the mind. To them, the publics for international public relations can be divided into:

1. Latent Publics: These include those who are affected by an organisation's actions but who do not recognize such actions. Therefore, the role of international public relations at this stage is creating awareness.
2. Aware Publics: These are people who are affected by an organizations' action and are aware of such effect. Hence, international public relations can be used to suggest solutions to the identified problem.

3. **Active Publics:** These are organized groups whose sole aim is to find solutions to their problems. Therefore, international public relations should be used to enable them solve their problems, without affecting the overall interest of the organization.

Also, the publics for international public relations can be divided into two categories, the internal and external publics. Examples of internal publics include: Policy makers, Labour Leaders, Political Parties, etc while the external publics include: World Bank, Foreign governments, multinational companies, international organizations etc. These categories of publics are directly or indirectly related to the international relations process. Their opinions on the country matter a lot. Therefore, they are part of critical publics with whom the country must communicate daily and regularly. To this end, Ajala (2001,p.45) stated that in (international) public relations, the emphasis is on planned effort and not on taking things as they come.

International Public Relations Consultancies

Ajala (2001,p.124) stated that such services as attitude surveys, fund raising, printing and production of annual reports and accounts could be highly expensive in terms of funds and regularity of their use for an organization to execute in-house programme. In some cases, those specialist services are hired to augment the work of an in-house public relations department which does not have the facilities. Depending on the need of clients, consultancy firms may provide advice only and leave the execution of plans to internal public relations department. Others may provide the advice and undertake full execution of the plans.

International Public Relations Strategies

Most of the strategies used in international public relations are the same as used in any other aspects of the profession. The only major difference is the fact that the objectives and publics of international public relations are international in nature and highly demand expertise knowledge.

The international public relations strategies include:

1. Information and communication
2. International media relations
3. Image laundering and management
4. Research and counselling strategy
5. International cultural, religious and sporting relations
6. Crises and issue management
7. International advertising
8. Sponsorship
9. International marketing
10. Government relations and lobbying
11. Exhibitions and trade fairs

Thus, the above mentioned strategies do not indicate that there are no other international public relations strategies that may exist but those stated above tend to touch other aspects not mentioned. So, it becomes pertinent that the strategies should be explained.

1. Information and Communication Strategy:

International public relations (IPR) uses information as a raw material to clarify international issues thereby achieving global peace. Information plays a vital role in the development of any society. The quantity and quality of information at the disposal of the citizenry (both the national and foreign citizens) determine the level of development. Information is power and knowledge rules the world.

However, the inequality in access to information in order to create awareness and carry-out campaigns on some global issue in developing countries are obvious. MacBride *et al* (1980,p.137) stated that information imbalance is of both quantitative and qualitative; and exist within the third world countries. International development no doubt is closely tied to availability and accessibility of information in a given environment.

2. International Media Relations:

Nwosu (2007,p.123) stated that the bottom-line of international public relations practice is the maintenance of a sustained relationship between international organization or institution and its relevant international publics. The motive behind such sustained relationship is very obvious. The international organization or institution would be able to enjoy the support, goodwill and co-operation of the international publics, they in return, would enjoy quality services or products, environmental and social responsibility programmes as well as high ethical business standards, among others.

The international media relations is enhanced by the international mass communication which is a system in which various news and information media use specialized technical mass media to transmit or disseminate specialized and skillfully packaged pieces of information on a global scale to several foreign countries. The international mass communication media are divided into print media and electronic/broadcast media. Times International, BBC Focus on Africa, Readers' Digest, Newsweek, Wall Journal, Tell are some of the publications (print media) that circulate world-wide. Notable among international radio stations are BBC, VOA, VON, Radio Moscow, Radio Deutchwelle, Radio Australia, Radio Nigeria etc. Also, the international television stations include: BBC, CNN, Al Jerzeral, Press TV, NTA, AIT, Channels etc.

Today, internet has become the most technologically advanced medium of communication. It is a multimedia information super-high way that facilitates businesses, sports, politics, entertainment, information and other endeavours across international boundaries.

3. Image Laundering and Management:

The Ministry of External Affairs of any country seems as international public relations officer in the outside world, while it is expected that the ministry should effectively tackle the image problem of its country. Though, the job of improving the image of any country is too monumental to be left to the ministry alone (Nworgu,2002,p.199).

Good international public relations is impossible without good communication. Good relations can only take effect through the process of communication. If there is no communication, International public relations is bound to suffer because relations with people are established by communicating with them. International public relations communication is a process involving an interchange of facts, view points and ideas between countries and the publics in order to achieve mutual understanding. In fact, a good international public relations entails communication and dialogue. In order to achieve this, countries need responsible press, a press that will listen to the dictates of a given country, a press that will be responsible to carry-out news about new innovations, good ideas and policies, technological breakthrough and above all, a press that can stand its counterparts in the international level.

4. Research and Counselling Strategy:

Nwosu (2006,p.140) stated that international public relations is a philosophy of management of an international organization or institution and those affected by the activities of the organization or institution. The competitive environment of international business relations and endeavours therefore has placed high premium on international public relations practitioners and modern managers to employ research strategy in solving real and perceived image-cum-reputation problems confronting their organization. Research strategy is therefore relevant in international public relations practice in many ways to include: helps to gather and accumulate data regarding foreign publics attitudes and opinions; aids trouble shooting by serving as a means of keeping

surveillance within a corporate organization or institution and its environs and; equips international public relations departments with concrete evidence and verifiable facts for advising management on the image and reputation problems of an international organization or institution.

5. International Cultural, Religious and Sporting Relations:

Uduji (2012,p.363) stated that culture influences communication; and communication influences culture. If international public relations is about symmetrical communication between an organization or institution and its publics with the aim of establishing and maintaining mutual understanding, then culture is central to the practice of international public relations. Culture is important only insofar as programme effectiveness is concerned and culture is often restricted to a simple variable. Effectiveness is always defined with regard to the organization or institution's perceptiveness. In this sense, the aim of understanding other culture is simply to direct and control behaviour that is to influence publics attitudes and behaviors in ways that are advantageous for the organization or institution.

Religious relations strategy enables pilgrims from various countries to converge at an identified religious centre or place in order to achieve mutual understanding and ensure global peace with the intention that God created everybody. Also, sporting relations strategy drives globalization—one world community. The last FIFA Under- 20 Women World Cup hosted by Canada witnessed the attendance of Falcons from Nigeria. Their performance at Canada laundered the image of Nigeria as best African sporting country not a place full of crises and diseases like Boko Haram, Ebola virus etc.

6. Crises and Issue Management:

Ajala (2001,p.173) stated that crisis public relations, as is sometimes called by professionals, has become a specialist area. International organizations, particularly those in the area of health, food and drug manufacturing, transportation, leisure and sports as well as governments should have well prepared policy of emergency action. In developed countries, some public relations consultants specialize in crisis management and are therefore readily available to handle casualties.

Crises are either violent or non-violent. In each category, a crisis can be an act of nature, an international event or an unintentional accident. A crisis is an unexpected development which very often embarrasses an organization, frightens the publics and puts company's credibility and decency under intense scrutiny. In some worst instances, a crisis creates the threat of death and loss of property.

7. International Advertising Strategy:

Okoro (1998,p.13) stated that the term, advertising originated from the Latin word, "advertere" which means, 'to turn the mind towards'. Advertising as a persuasive communication can be used to turn the international publics' minds towards a product, service, idea, movement, opinion, cause or any fad or fashion or even to get people to consume less of a particular product or service. Advertising gets to us through various organs of communication or media. These include: radio, internet, cinema, newspaper, magazine, billboard, poster, television. It was through the international advertising on Ebola virus that the world came to know where it came from and how to avoid it; and the drugs that can cure it.

8. International Sponsorship:

Jefkins (1994) cited in Nworgu (2002,p.15) stated that sponsorship may not be undertaken wholly for International public relations purpose but even when its main objectives are marketing or advertising, there can still be an important public relations element in it. Therefore, International public relations make use of sponsorship in building goodwill and positive image. A nation or an organization can sponsor both sporting and non-sporting programmes as a way of creating a favourable image among the various publics.

One of the advantages of sponsorship is that the name of the sponsoring organization or country is constantly mentioned throughout the duration of the sponsored programme. Such gesture can create goodwill for the organization or nation concerned.

Conclusion

The role of international public relations cannot be complete without looking at its processes and activities. These processes come under international public relations strategies. These strategies are deliberately planned, systematic and research based activities of organization, individual market or nation which are aimed at building and sustaining productive mutual relations with the publics. These strategies work better because it is based on truth, backed by actions and communication as against gimmicks, propaganda and rhetoric. These strategies when applied, are seen as positive initiatives and therefore, do not attract negative reactions and impression. International public relations strategies are many. They are usually situation based and problem specific.

References

- Abbott, L. (1967). *Economics and the modern world*. New York: Harcourt Brace Inc.
- Ajala, V. (2001). *Public relations: in search of professional excellence*. Ibadan: Maybest Publications.
- Black, S. (1989). *Public relations*. London: Modino Press Limited.
- Dara, S. (March 12, 2009). Akunyili and the rebranding of Nigeria. *The Guardian*.
- Jefkins, F. (1998). *Public relations*. England: Prentice Hall.
- Ile, N. (2001). *Entrepreneurship development: The Nigerian perspective*. Umuahia: Distinctive Press.
- MacBride, S. et al. (1980). *Many voices, one world*. Ibadan: University Press.
- Moore, F and Kalupa, F. (2005). *Public relations, principles, cases and problems*. Delhi: Surject Publications.
- Nnabuko, J. (1998). *Marketing management*. Enugu: Precision Printers and Publishers.
- Nwodu, L. (2006). *Research in communication and other behavioural sciences*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.
- Nwodu, L and Fab-Ukozor, N. (2003). *Communication imperatives for development communication*. Enugu: John Jacob's Classic Publishers Ltd.
- Nwosu, IK. (2007). *Public relations: Insights from Nigeria*. Enugu: Ezu Books Ltd.
- Nwosu, IK. (2007). *Nigerian perspectives in public relations*. Enugu: Ezu Books Ltd.
- Nwosu, IK and Eneh, O. (2006). *Managing job ethics and productivity in Nigerian Universities*. Enugu: Institute For Development Studies.
- Nworgu, K. (2002). *Public relations: Special issues and topics*. Owerri: Ultimate Books.
- Nwuneli, O. (1986). *Mass communication in Nigeria: A Book of Readings*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publisher.
- Ogadigo, S. (2009). *Information dichotomy*. Ibadan: Ideal Press.
- Okoro, N. (1998). *Business of advertising*. Enugu: ACENA Publishers.
- Onyekakeyah, L. (March 2009). Nigerian asylum seekers and national image. *The Guardian*.
- Uduji, J. (2007). Public relations and corporate image/ reputation building and management. *Public Relations Journal*, (2).
- Uduji, J. (2012). *Public relations management*. Enugu: His Glory Publication.

MAKATA, Charles .C. lectures in the Department of Mass Communication, Renaissance University, Ugbawka, Enugu State.

ONUORAH, Nkiru. G. lectures in the Department of Mass Communication, Renaissance University, Ugbawka, Enugu State.

ODOH, Vincent lectures in the Department of Mass Communication, Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State.