

THREE

The Media in Public Relations

Communication is a very active agent in the changes that are taking place in the world. The global village of McLuhan has been achieved and surpassed even beyond the imagination of the Canadian. The worldwide web, the information superhighway and other computer marvels of today will give way to many others in the years to come. Consequently, the definitions of communication and other issues to be discussed in this chapter only serve as reference point for further investigations.

Communication means many things to different individuals or groups of people. This is so because communication is usually sifted by people and interpreted in the light of their different dispositions and experience. Thus, a listener chooses whatever interpretation that best soothes him in any communication act, depending on his circumstances, scale of preference and what he hopes to achieve by the message. Essentially, all the definitions are saying the same thing, albeit in different ways Oliveira (1993) defines communication as "the transfer of ideas of knowledge in ways that enable the recipient to understand, react to, and act upon the information received." Viewed from another perspective, Mercado (1992) defines communication as "a process of sharing messages between a source and a receiver either directly or through a channel."

For communication to be effective, four elements must be present – *source* that initiates the process, *message* which contains information that the source is transmitting; channel or *medium* which enables the transmission of the message; and *receiver* that decodes the messages.

- Social communication is a process of transmitting modes of thinking, feeling and behaviour from one or more persons;
- The paramount goal of communication is persuasion, so that the “transmitting person (or persons) will impact on the “receiving” person (or persons) given intended behaviours; and
- Two-way communication through “feedback” which is important chiefly, as a message-adjusting device enabling the “transmitter” to secure the performance of the expected response from the “receiver”.

The communication concept and process earlier described could be represented diagrammatically following the S-M-C-R communication model.

Communication Process

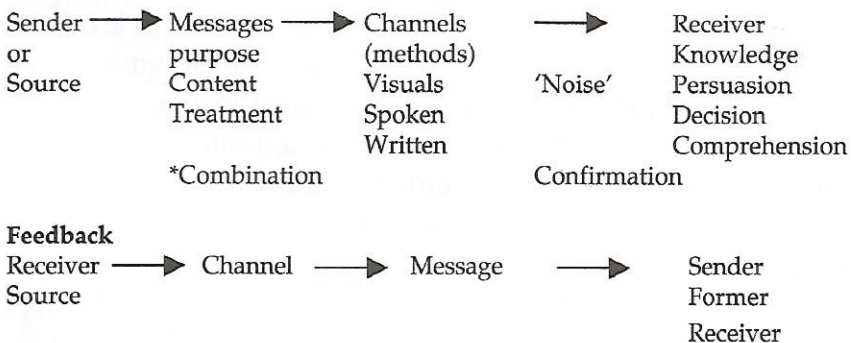


Fig. 3.1: *The Communication Process* by A. H. Maunder (1973) *Reference Manual*

At the point the receiver responds to the message, feedback and communication has taken place. The S-M-C-R becomes R-C-M-S. The obvious advantage in a simplistic model such as Maunder's is that the various steps in communication flow are clearly depicted. There is always a source, a message, a channel and a receiver.

In the distant past, interpersonal communication, with less sophistication directly engages persons in face-to-face communication and was what the world depended on. In the traditional African setting, "Oramedia" and the gongman carry messages to the doorstep of villagers. Time and technology have rendered these old methods inadequate in the face of urbanization resulting in mega-cities and the emergence of the information superhighway. Modern information has brought the entire world together as one global village of "all-at-onceness" made possible by the unparalleled sophistication, in the history of communication development. In actual fact, telecommunication has revolutionised the entire world. Today, internet satellite broadcasting, video news release, video conferencing, televideo, cable network, computerised printers, e-mail, fax machines, among others, have made information reach many more people with a speed never imagined possible less than a decade ago.

Necessity for Communication

Man has been able to develop communication to such a level that the act now distinctively marks him out from other living beings. The sophistry and complexity to which communication has been put by man is still unfolding and would continue to be so for as long as man's insatiable appetite for knowledge is sustained through science. One is familiar with letters as a means of communication between individuals. In Ghana, this has gone a step further with the advent of *talking letters* in recorded cassettes by the predominantly illiterate population.

Communication therefore seeks to eliminate friction, create awareness and promote human development in all spheres. The

world has advanced so much that the entire world can watch same programme on television or listen to same on radio via satellite. You can phone across continents with the caller right in front of you via televideo. While this portends good communication for a corporate world, it also signifies the search for further conquests of the world. Whereas effective communication improves human living condition, poor and inexact communication often leads to conflicts and confusion.

In a situation where there is mutual distrust, communication becomes endangered and the possibility of people becoming apathetic and generally disillusioned is great. Whenever there is a serious blockade of information flow either through censorship of the press or outright intimidation of the people, they resort to rumour peddling. Allowing the public to rely on rumours as a source of information could be very dangerous because they are prone to distortion and exaggeration as they pass from one person to another. Usually, it is very difficult to verify the sources. And incredibly, most people hold fast to rumours, especially when they involve celebrities whose lives are generally couched in secrecy. This situation is frequently experienced in dictatorial regimes of the world usually characterised by (optional) civil strife and general breakdown of law and order.

The political debacle of 1993 in Nigeria (a populous black African country) resulted in the closure of four media houses with as many as sixteen different titles in their stables. The 'Goebbelian' tactics adopted by government information apparatus and functionaries could not withstand the resolve of the people to tackle disinformation and brazen autocracy. Soon, guerilla media sprang up to counteract the government's media and since the 'underground' press is always for the grassroots people, they endured. All the things that government would not like the people to know were given to them cheaply, amplified in lively colours and splendid prose. At a point, the problems multiplied so much so that the press had some respite save for some occasional harassment. Public relations thrives better in a free

society. The private electronic media have confirmed this in Nigeria. Ray Power FM Stations and the African Independent Television have revolutionised and democratised information in Nigeria.

Channels of Communication

Communication channels deal with the means and methods of reaching the target publics. The monumental advances made in communication technology and the public demand for better and more information, dialogue and participation, have become permanent features in our lives. In order to facilitate this need, three main channels are frequently used, namely

- (a) Electronic Media;
- (b) Print Media; and
- (c) Created or Other Media.

It is therefore important to classify the media before discussing their relevance to public relations.

The media depend on news interviews and features. Though public relations generates considerable news for the media, yet the media is often suspicious of the type of news public relations sources are willing to part with. Public relations practitioners are having a rethink of how much media exposure their work need. The reasons for this new development is very clear. While the journalist is trained to nose for news, no matter how sordid, the public relations man is to project the image of his organisation in the best light possible to its various publics. Public relations does not however go out of its way to misinform, it only tries to see situation from the client's view objectively and presents same in a balanced manner. This does not in any way mean that public relations practitioners and their media counterparts have not found common grounds on which to relate. Indeed, more than 80 percent of news in both the print and electronic media are sourced from public relations.

Political activism and changing economic fortunes of world powers as well as the infant economies in the third world have brought public relations to the fore in running the affairs of men. The presidential electioneering campaigns in the United States of America is a typical example of the role of political public relations which became more noticeable in other democracies around the world.

For as the political costs mount and the skills of persuasion become more specialised, public relations will become an important instrument of democratised governments for effective citizen participation and voter-support. Public relations now directs the course of elections and the settlement of political issues.

Nonetheless, business and industrial concerns still dominate the use of public relations and its techniques. As it is with democracy, so it is with business, since people constitute the target of their services and products. In business environment characterised by growing discontent brought about by inflation, uncertainties in the quality, quantity and price of services and products, unstable government regulations coupled with shortage of needed capital, public relations strategies become a necessity for corporate business management. Where possible, the business class has penetrated the public policy process machinery to have a greater voice in policy formulation. In all these situations, public relations come in handy to facilitate and smoothen the rough edges.

Public relations dwells extensively on public opinion and behaviour which it tries to understand and respond to in all its ramifications. In the process, public relations seeks to influence its publics by "creating an opinion, where there is none, by reinforcing an opinion that already exists, or by changing an existing opinion." The goal of public relations therefore is public behaviour, using various communication techniques and public opinion as its strategy, lever and means. The media are the tools which are mostly used to reach the various publics at which the messages are targeted. This media exposure of issues of public

interest is also backed by interpersonal relations which promote simultaneity in giving and receiving messages to the intended target publics, as groups or individuals.

Therefore, press relations remains a very important aspect of public relations but practitioners should always remember that the press as represented in radio, television and newspapers are only media of communication and cannot substitute for the publics which constitute the targets of public relations. It is important to note the present trend of selling news to the highest bidder in Nigeria. The electronic media are gradually waging a war against news in preference to paid propaganda. Privatisation and commercialisation of the electronic media have made things difficult, as an outright policy of paying for news may lead to short-changing the listening and viewing publics. With the recent deregulation of the electronic media issuance of licenses to private companies, and democratic government, the erstwhile monopoly enjoyed by quasi-government media has been broken. These privileged media have been at the receiving end as they may not have the capacity to withstand the required dynamic, creative and revolutionary production systems which are the hallmarks of private ownership. To stay competitive, news should continue to be what it is while commercials and advertisements are treated along known and accepted professional practices.

Tools of Public Relations

Public relations uses fact sheets, speech, texts, handouts, bulletins, news releases, feature articles, interviews, press conferences, video and audio releases, personal contacts, face-to-face communication, media visits, facility visits, among others, to address various issues as they relate to its various targets.

The above are some of the tools which public relations uses in its relationship with the media in order to achieve effective communication with its target publics. The use for which any of the tools is put will depend on the content and objective of the message being disseminated and the relevance of the tool. Public

relations believes that news need not be bad to find willing ears. Public relations is concerned with giving factual, relevant and value-added information to its target publics especially through the media and by direct contact.

Media relations have developed over the years in sophistication, methodology and efficacy. Nonetheless, the changes are only in terms of style and objective rather than the basic tools that are used. The following are some of the essential tools of public relations and programming methods.

Print Media

News Release (Press Release)

This is mostly used by organisations to keep the public informed of their activities, particularly, when new services and products are being introduced, and sometimes to announce important events. Public relations practitioners are yet to understand how best to present their news releases such that they become irresistible to the editors. In "Gatekeepers as Target Publics", Linda Morton (1995) disclosed that practitioners claim that producing *information for releases to the media* is their most important duty. Conversely, journalists who were sampled in a study did not share this optimistic view as 54% regard news releases received as *sloven and amateurish*, 65-75% believe they frequently promote *products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion*, 62% believe that we place *too much importance on trivial uneventful happenings*. The study further states that 84% public relations releases are *usually publicity disguised as news*. Below, therefore, are eleven guidelines by Roger Haywood (1982) that could aid the packaging of good news releases:

- (a) Develop your writing skill, draft, redraft, edit, polish and perfect the copy. Read publications and understand what makes news and how it is put together. Analyse

the writing skills of good journalists. Understand the good and criticise the bad. Develop the abilities to sieve information.

- (b) Always ask, **who, what, why, where, when and how**, and be sure that these questions are answered in every news story. Train yourself to eliminate as determinedly as you add. If material does not answer any of these questions, what is it doing in your story?
- (c) Write stories to suite the house style of the publication. If, for practical reasons, your story has to get to a wider range of media, always draft it in the style to suit the most popular of these. Better still, produce different stories for different types of news outlet.
- (d) Always keep the copy tight, concise and factual. Never forge an issue or create a misleading impression. Be certain of the facts.
- (e) Substantiate any claim. Separate facts from beliefs by putting the latter into 'quotes'.
- (f) Write the story from the point of the journalist. Although it is a statement from your organisation, it should be presented so that it can be used directly in the publication with the minimum of editing. Comments, observations or speculative information can only be included in a story, in quotes or as footnotes.
- (g) Get the main newsworthy point into the first paragraph and preferably the first sentence. Organise the paragraphs so that the most newsworthy are at the top. This usually allows the journalist to edit from the bottom. The paragraphs you can most easily afford to lose, therefore, should be the ones towards the end of the story.
- (h) Keep sentences short. Use positive and not negative statements. Use active verbs. Avoid inverted clauses,

and cut out any subjective material of superlatives. Keep separate points in separate sentences but with continuity. Break each collection of points into separate paragraphs.

- (i) Put the copy into modern journalistic styles. Eliminate any old fashioned phrases, formal or pompous languages, jargon peculiar to the industry, clichés or colloquialisms that are not accepted as standard English (or appropriate language).
- (j) When you have written your story, check through and make sure that it meets all the criteria mentioned above. In particular, be certain that the news is at the beginning. Often, good draft news releases cannot afford to have the first paragraph taken out!
- (k) Go through your copy, tighten, edit, improve, check all spellings and punctuation. Get someone else to read it before it goes for release.
- (l) Ask critics to appraise and query it. Avoid becoming sensitive about your own copy. Learn to be self-critical. Attempt putting yourself to the highest standard possible.

Newsletter

Newsletter is issued by an organisation at regular intervals to document its activities and make it available to staff, shareholders and members of the public who relate to the organisation. This is quite common in both public and private organisations. The newsletter serves both the internal and external publics and is a veritable tool for information dissemination within the organisations.

Journal

The journal is used to keep employees abreast of developments

within the organisation. It is a more detailed and technical publication on the operations of an organisation, with contributions from all departments and units. To this extent, it is usually published quarterly, biannually or annually. Sometimes, the circulation of the journal is restricted but are frequently made available to the general public. The regularity of this publication however depends on the ability of the organisation to sustain it as well as the intensity of its activities. Usually, the publication is not sold, but is distributed to the target publics for information, awareness and education.

Handbill and Brochure

These are publications that contain series of information designed to educate the public on the objectives, goals and product, of an organisation. They are usually published whenever there is a new product, suspected waning interest in old product or in case of services to be introduced to the market. Handbills and brochures are often simple, graphical, self-explanatory and brief in presentation; intended to provide direct and usable information to all concerned.

The publications are usually the main source of information for people wishing to have relationship with such organisation.

Annual Report

The annual report is more technical and detailed. It attempts to put an organisation's performance within a given period (usually one year) in perspective. The report is usually specific in stating the organisation's aims and objectives, functions, programmes, yearly accounts, profit (and liabilities) as well as the problems and prospects of the organisation. Annual reports feature most prominently in all business organisations, especially the banking and commercial-oriented companies. This has been so because it is the only way the various interests holding shares, customers and the supervising/monitoring agencies can readily assess past performances. This singular act has quietly conferred on the

private sector, a large measure of credibility and trustworthiness as against the operations of the public sector which may not be open to public scrutiny.

Annual reports are fast becoming a specialist concern. In order to add value to the reports and get extra publicity, the following strategies may be considered:

- (a) Bring out your corporate identity by locating its position in the competition, and production lines; emphasise the people that make the company tick and show the performance over a period of time, perhaps three years.
- (b) Draw attention to the latest development in the company – a new campaign or thrust.
- (c) Use multimedia approach at the annual meeting for maximum impact to complement the report.
- (d) Plan your graphics for multiple uses – action photographs, charts and maps.
- (e) Publish your report with state-of-the-art facilities. Engage specialists for the various concepts and designs needed for effective impact and corporate entity.

Note that ideas that sound very good on paper may not necessarily translate into the best reports when produced. Teamwork and advanced planning is therefore a necessity – the photographer, graphics designer, copywriter, public relations executives and other departmental managers would have to work together in order to achieve a total package reflecting the corporate image of the organisation.

Fact Sheets

In a world that is dominated by information overload, groups with diversified interests and goals, the demystification of long-held views and principles of undreamed social, political and religious dimensions, public relations fact sheets have come to

focus sharply on the needs and preferences of as much differing publics as possible. The media itself is inundated with several other materials for publication that a fact sheet in its summary format and with facts and figures usually compressed in one page, becomes very attractive. Sometimes, these papers are slotted into newspapers and journals for wide readership.

Speeches/Handouts

One of the problems of media relations in Nigeria today is the handout syndrome. Many media practitioners collect the handouts without reading along with the presenters. Where prepared speeches are used to and outright amendments are made during presentations, usually no notice of these are taken and so a lot of misrepresentations and quoting out of context take place. It is important that handouts are well prepared and packaged to enable the press use them without much difficulty. Public relations officers should endeavour to present the speech with some of the following in mind: The opening sentence must be able to get and retain the attention of the readers. A short and crypt statement that catches the essence of the speech could be used as a lead-in.

The press however need to realise that until a prepared speech has been done with, the handout remains a mere piece of paper. Afterall, the real news most times do not come from the text. There is need to have patience to listen attentively as the speech is being delivered.

Bulletins

This form of communication is mostly used as internal communication channels within organisations, meant to ensure effective two-way communication among employers and employees, organisations and shareholders, and also as a means of sharing information. The bulletin basically deals with specific issues that are addressed to particular groups of people in order to achieve certain goals.

Feature Articles

The print media offers opportunities to any organisation, groups and individuals who have specific messages on issues of interest in politics, religions, economy, social relations, scientific inventions, to share with the reading public. Feature articles are in-depth creative piece of writing which allows the writer the freedom to use preferred styles and express himself in the way that gets his message across distinctly. It also aims at making the readers more appreciative of the subject being discussed. This medium is very popular and public relations personnel are usually conversant with it. It is important to emphasise that editors are more willing to publish articles that are brief and exact. Features could be written in-house, commissioned and sometimes evolved by interested parties acting on their own beliefs consequent on the relevance and importance of the subject matter. Articles written with the intended newspaper in mind get better attention than those that are too generalised. A writer must necessarily be familiar with the house style of the intending press to be used, know the various columns available and the possible length of materials that may be acceptable.

Electronic Media

The traditional electronic media is represented by the radio and television as means of transmitting information to the target publics. Since the 1990, fax, computer, satellite, the internet and e-mail, have come to complement these known channels of information dissemination in a more refreshing and efficient manner. However, transistor radio, the older broadcasting medium has more or less become universal so much so that the Fulani cattle rearers in the African Savannah are often seen clutching their portable radio, listening to Hausa/Fulani programmes on local and international stations. In modern days, the radio has become a constant companion of the mobile man as he communicates from place to place in his automobile.

Community radio has been very successful in several parts of the world and its adoption in Nigeria will go a long way in accommodating the teeming population in the rural areas. Besides, social, political and developmental issues requiring their support would be better achieved through the ubiquitous grassroots radio. Before the advent of television, radio was such as a phenomenon in world information order that leapt across distances and barriers of illiteracy thereby surpassing other modern media in many countries. Information has it that there are over one billion transistor radio sets in the world at an average of one radio for every six people.

Conversely, the 'marvel of them all', television, has developed such a dynamic and far-reaching effect which has taken the world by surprise, having been enhanced through satellite that brings news and events to people's homes as they happen, howbeit to a more restrictive audience – the rich and middle class. In addition to these, there are several developments in the electronic media such as video news releases and video conferencing which make information more accessible to the people. Nonetheless, the television may not be able to achieve the convenience and dynamism of the radio, given the relative ruggedness of the latter and of course cost.

Telecommunications as Broadcast Catalyst

If terms such as "new world information order" and "information superhighway" are frequently encountered in communication discourse, it is because of the role telecommunications plays in making information more accessible and pleasurable to man. The interdependence of public information and communication necessitates a brief statement on how telecommunications has and would further revolutionise the entire world. Virtually every facet of our daily life and existence has been 'telecommunicated' from transcontinental channels such as telephone, e-mail, fax machine, computer, satellite television and many others. Specifically, Nigeria and indeed most African countries depend

on satellite TV signals from Europe for breaking international news.

Telecommunications has revolutionised broadcasting so much that an event happening in one part of the world can instantly be heard and viewed in all parts of the universe simultaneously. Thus, advanced telecommunications made it possible for the entire world to watch events like the World Cup and the Olympic Games within the confine of individual homes. Already, *the Cable News Network (CNN)*, – the astounding Ted Turner's idea – has virtually taken over all television sets. Programmes are beamed via satellites everyday for twenty-four hours and are received in several homes in many continents by installing TV dishes/satellite antennae or the relatively more compact TV cables. Other international satellite TV programmes received in Nigeria include Sky News and Musical Television (MTV), BOP, Euro-sports, Africa Independent Television, Minaj and many more. It would not be long that the domestic antennae type would be all that is required to watch events around the world in homes and at very reasonable cost. This is already the situation in advanced countries. The network programmes of the Nigeria Television Authority are only possible through the Nigerian Domestic Satellite system run by Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL). With the National Broadcasting Commission in place and the privatization of the telecommunications sector, one expects wider and more effective linkage in the future.

The importance of telecommunications in promoting interpersonal communication cannot be overemphasised. Today, the internet in a seamless web of communications and information networks has been acknowledged as yet one of the greatest innovations in telecommunications. Coupled with this are the other complementary services, voice mail, pager, video conferencing, answering machines, cellular phones, electronic mail, video phone, and large scale data transfer methods.

The Internet

One of the greatest developments in the last decade of the

twentieth century is the internet through which the world further compresses to the much talked about global village. As a veritable and instant medium of communication, information could reach the entire world within seconds. With constant development in the field of telecommunications and many more people having access to information technology, the future of this medium looks very bright. Today, it is possible to communicate with specific audience by sending the message to individual e-mail addresses which can be received across the globe instantaneously.

Video News Release

As the frontier of market-oriented economies extends to the developing countries with the electronic media either being deregulated, privatised or commercialised, video news release promises to be a sure feature in the electronic media. Green and Shapiro (1988) define video news release (VNR) as the:

TV version of a press release. VNRs are news stories sponsored by corporations, professional associations, government agencies, lobby groups and/or their public relations outlets. These are usually distributed to TV stations free, with the hope that the articles will be aired in local newscasts.

Video news release was introduced into the American media in the early 1980s in cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Washington DC initially as a small cottage industry. Today, it has blossomed into large scale business with dozens of independent producers and distributors of varying sizes jostling for the millions of dollars that organisations invest each year on VNRs.

The VNR is relatively new, and it is undergoing lots of improvement in order to give the best benefit to the sponsors as well as the "captive" audience. There is competition for a wider range of audience. Two major criticisms of the VNR are that they tend to be "too commercial and too one-sided".

Public relations practitioners and private TV producers wishing to give this new mode of news release a trial may do well to observe the following production basics developed by Green and Shapiro:

- (a) Tell the story with pictures. Too many clients-sponsored videos ignore the medium they are trying to exploit. "Taking heads" and long voice-overs are boring.
- (b) Split the audio tracks. Keep the narrator on one track, and the sound bites (people speaking on camera) and natural sound on the other. Many stations like to revoice a package using their own talent and this makes it easier for them to do so.
- (c) Keep your reporter – narrator off camera. Most stations will not use strange faces and voices.
- (d) Include extra sound bites (interview segments) and b-roll (cover footage). Many stations prefer to recur the story to fit their own format.
- (e) Identify everyone speaking on camera, the sponsor, and the reporter with superimposed titles, before the package. Every station uses a different style in their broadcast, and if your superstars appear on video, stations may not use it.
- (f) Use news writers, news producers, news camera crews, and news announcers. Your video will stand a much better chance of being accepted if it looks and sounds like a real news story.
- (g) Whenever possible, use a disinterested third party to get your points across. An independent expert will have much more credibility with news people than a corporate spokesperson.

VNR is a creative development that would give public relations practitioners and the media unique opportunities to get

specialised news across to their audience, provided they are well-packaged. The nearest to the VNR in Nigeria are the news documentaries done by private recording studios for transmission on state or network stations. Their circulation is limited and the production is not yet standardised.

Audio News Release

This is a more popular and widely used method in media circles. It is cheaper and handy. The audio news release (ANR) was adopted earlier by the advertising agencies for broadcast purposes. Corporate bodies such as oil companies and big conglomerates joined later as the ANR enables them to present news from their perspective. The receiving media welcome the lapses so long as it facilitated their work especially if the basic rules of news reporting were followed.

Other Media

Modernisation has conferred several responsibilities on communication such that the erstwhile methods of message delivery have become very inadequate and inefficient in dealing with complex, sophisticated and highly critical publics whose needs and demands are equally daunting. Thus, public relations can no longer afford straight monologues in supposed speeches and public lectures. It is very important that visual aids usually have to be used to assist in better communication. A public relations executive wishing to educate the employees, shareholders or a selected section of the public on new methods of operation within the organisation would communicate much better if films, video or even slides are used to complement the speech. The combined effect of visuals and spoken words gets the message better accepted and understood, than it would have otherwise been. Although modernisation is changing many things, the days of village square film shows may not have gone as there is an increasing need to re-introduce those good and effective old communication methods whenever the campaigns

at hand demand such. It is better than talking above the heads of our various targets. In this section, other types of media not in the mould of print and electronic media would be discussed.

Billboard

Billboards are useful in public relations especially where an organisation wants to make a short corporate statement e.g. "*First Bank, truly the first*", "*A great Nigeria, is ours to build*" (*Vision 2010*). Besides, communication has become so dynamic that the print and electronic media no longer satisfy all its need. Information has leapt from newspaper pages, and studio broadcast, to rooftops, roadsides, vehicles, hills, human apparels and bodies and all to complement campaigns run in other media. The billboards used at the sports stadia and the post offices are all variants of the indomitable roadside billboards. Starting with the revolutionary customised billboards in Lagos that perform the dual purpose of product and service advertisement with street directional signs, there are more innovations expected in the billboard medium of communication in future.

Lobbying

Lobbying is closely related or similar to the personal contact means of information dissemination, especially to a specialised public. Lobbying is simply placing all relevant facts about a problem or request in the hands of those in position of influence. The ultimate aim is to influence action by way of persuasion. The various ways of doing this are through presentation of well-researched papers, leaflets, memoranda, pamphlets, visual aids and oral presentation. To make discussions meaningful, it is suggested that experts on the issue at stake be used to speak to other experts in the language they both understand. Lobbying could be useful in influencing government policies as frequently demonstrated in countries like Britain and the United States of America. This method could become thoroughly abused as in the case of Nigeria's ill-fated military leader's attempt to settle the June 12 Presidential 1993

Elections. It lobbied and corrupted the legal process, populace, legislators, traditional rulers and even the youths. The succeeding democratic governments at the federal and state levels are yet to imbibe the superior ideals of lobbying in participatory governance. Democratic governments regard lobbying as a very important tool of communication for the governed as well as their elected representatives. Ideas are freely canvassed among different groups and consensus are achieved.

Press Conference

This is a popular method for meeting the press, organisations, individuals and groups that have a compelling need to pass on some messages to the general public make use of this medium. It usually involves the print and electronic media and is organised ahead of time. The public relations executives or consultants are responsible for packaging the programme. Theodore Roosevelt, America's twenty-sixth President institutionalised the idea by inviting members of the press to the White House regularly. Today, press conference has become a standard tool for the profession used by all practitioners and organisations. Bill Clinton and indeed most American Presidents are still the best examples of the users of this most effective communication tool. Some Nigerian governments have experimented with it but it lacked continuity.

Face-to-Face/Personal Contact

In public relations, the nearer you can get to your audience the better. The face-to-face communication begins where the mass media end. Most times, it is surprising to find a high degree of ignorance among the elite in spite of the unlimited access they have to the media. They simply are listening or reading. The case of the mass illiterate population is that of total blackout and persistent talking above their levels of comprehension coupled with the total lack of means to acquire communication gadgets. It becomes more complicated when one realises the giant leaps

in the communication industry that has shrunk the world into a "global village".

This method will promote the notion of giving primacy to **people** for they matter most in public relations. Indeed, look around you and you find, as John Crinsford did many years ago, that managers barricade themselves behind wooden or steel blocks instead of going halfway to meet the men who work for them and their clients. This underscores the need to eliminate physical barriers between the communicator and his target audiences.

Although they may be in a mass form as we address them, they are first and foremost individuals and then organised in group before becoming a mass. Furthermore, the erstwhile reliance of traditional public relations on mass media has become inadequate for our rapidly changing economic and social conditions. The old practice was hinged on a homogenous society. Ironically, before we could attain the ultimate in mass communication, the need to turn to these fragmented and diverse groups has become urgent. Brody (1989) puts this succinctly when he counsels modern public relations practitioners on the limitations of the mass media:

Mediated communication plays a relatively small part in delivering the hundreds of thousands of messages humans receive each day. Mediated messages, in addition, are less persuasive than those delivered interpersonally, behaviourally or environmentally.

The information explosion of today cannot replace the efficacy of face-to-face communication. The effectiveness of music, village square meetings, gongman, folktales, and several others in Frank Ugboajah's *'Oramedia'* are indispensable in communicating with the majority of illiterate population in the developing countries.

The most expedient way to keep communicating meaningfully is a symbiosis between the modern systems and tested traditional information system. In this way, the evolving information superhighway will not totally elude the people,

rather, they will join it at their own pace while deriving maximum benefit. However, Triwaks (1995) cautioned:

...do not embrace technology for technology's sake. Use common sense to determine when to use new media and when to use more traditional methods. It's great to have electronic relationships, but we will always need old-fashioned human contact.

Interviews

The media employ interview extensively as a means of getting direct information from the news source. This makes the information thus obtained more credible. Interviews, however, constitute one of the delicate acts a media person has to learn how to use in order not to fall prey to improper use. In the past, knowledge of shorthand was necessary for a journalist but modern communications equipment such as tape recorders, video tapes and dictaphones have made this mode of accurate record of interviews unnecessary. The tapes (audio/video) are preferred, the visuals and voice of the interviewee is on tape and can be kept fairly well to be tendered as proof should the need arise, and the interviewer could also use a notebook to record the answers. He should, however, take particular care to avoid quoting people out of context as this could impair the validity of his interview. A point of note is that information given in confidence must be treated as such. Public relations executives would do well to recognise the need to transcribe the recorded version of interviews and make same available to the reporters should the need arise. Usually, when this double checks are in place, problems of denials are eliminated.

Interviews require expert handling particularly when it is for the radio and television audiences. Radio and print media interviews can be controlled to a large extent in terms of the conduct and actual broadcast or publication. Simultaneity in television which requires more care and good composure is absolutely necessary. Suffice to say that the interviewer needs to

do extensive background research on the subject and object of his interview. The interviewee on his part needs to be at his best and demonstrate good knowledge of the subject under discussion in terms of how he responds to the questions. He must be authoritative, factual and logical in his presentation. The television interviewer and the guest should go further to ensure that they are not hesitant, verbose and fidgety while on screen.

The best interviews are those that are conducted with as little controversy and aggressiveness as is possible. A logical presentation of facts and views, good reasoning that are quietly, courteously, concisely and well delivered, do attract and retain the attention of readers, listeners and viewers alike.

Meetings

Small organisations use memo, notice or information boards to call staff to meetings/briefings. The meetings allow issues affecting management and staff to be tackled. Such issues usually include labour-related matters. The main advantage of this method of communication is that the target publics are easily reached. Also in such meetings, feedback is easily obtained although the fear of victimisation on the part of staff may affect genuine feedback. This method is, however, suitable for small organisations where messages are directed mainly at the internal public.

Mailing

In some cases, an organisation may wish to reach larger external publics as individuals. The purpose may be to package information about an organisation or product. In the same vein, personalities seeking elective offices to certain crucial positions may use this method of communication. The message may also involve technical details or statistics such that conventional mass dissemination method may not be adequate or suitable. An example of this is a company's statement of accounts to

shareholders. The advantage of this method is that the targeted individual feels recognised and will likely pay greater attention to the message. The method may not be suitable in societies with bad postal system and unplanned cities. Materials may get missing in the mail. However, feedback is minimal and uncontrollable in this instance as the onus of reciprocating is on the receiver.

Advertisements (Outdoor)

The partnership between public relations and journalism is sealed with regular corporate and product advertisements. Outdoor advertisement is coming on strong but it can only complement the mass appeal and reach of the electronic and print media. This is an area that makes the media more dependent on public relations than any other because more than 90 percent of advertisements originate from public relations sources either as employees of organisations or from public relations consultants acting on behalf of their clients. Television and radio advertisements are becoming more and more sophisticated especially for competitive products. The case of television is particularly startling. An Israeli expert found out that an average child spends about three hours daily watching television. At this rate, such a child when, he turns (70) years would have spent seven whole years glued to the tube. Such is the capacity to which the television is holding the young people.

Media Visits

Corporate bodies when launching new products or services that are novel and technical, are compelled to take such messages to the media houses. The forum created in the process, allows the organisation to present its product to a select group of media specialists who will ask questions and even challenge the veracity of the product being publicised. This method may be complementary to media organised interviews where editorial decisions are taken on topical issues, and appropriate persons

are invited to participate. The offer of media visits is self-invited and seeks to pass on specific messages. This method has developed considerably in Nigeria and it is a good public relations strategy that matches up other communication methods.

Facility Visits

Public relations news to media is usually held suspect because it may be difficult to have an objective and accurate account of an organisation's performance if its spokesperson is making such presentation. On the other hand, the public is more charitable and sympathetic with the views of a third party that they may have no reason to doubt the sincerity. The facility visits enable the impartial observers to express their candid opinions about what they see.

Trade Fairs/Exhibitions

This channel is designed to establish corporate identities and also enable target publics have access to the works and products of an organisation. Through this method, an ignorant public becomes educated and can therefore understand and appreciate the organisation to the extent that rational decision and choice can be made. Exhibitions and fairs have become very fashionable in Nigeria as the campaign for self-reliance and economic recovery continues to attract more attention. Goods and services, no matter how well produced are of no consequence unless people get to know about them. Thus the various international trade fairs, joint or individual state trade fairs, product trade fairs, are a good omen for Nigeria's economy. In this vein, exhibition (locally and internationally) requires that the products be modernised, including attractive packaging and accessible market outlets .

Exhibitions constitute special class of their own in corporate image making as they attempt to amplify an organisation's activities through public presentation of products and services. The fairs cover such diverse areas as agriculture, automotive, interior decoration, construction, goods and specialised

communication and technology. These fairs have gained very wide acceptance as they continually seek to market and introduce new products and ideas. Corporate bodies and individuals do sponsor such exhibitions as social service in the promotion of arts and culture; while projecting their own corporate image.

Summary

The tools of public relations which are mostly located in the mass media have been discussed in this section. Sometimes, the fact that the public relations executives have to continually use these channels to reach its audiences lead inexorably to the misconception that media relations is the most import task of public relations executives.

However, public relations will continue to use the mass media of communication as vital channels for reaching its varied target publics. In doing this, there is need to recognise the complementarity of the two distinct functions of public relations and journalism. Many employers still see public relations through the eye of journalism. This has led to emphasising "journalistic experience" and "press contacts" over the required training, flair and innate qualities in the making of public relations executives. The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations Decree 16 of 1990 may have come in good time to stem the tide of this ill-wind that had bedevilled the practice over the years. Many employers have fired their public relations managers because their organisations got bad press or total blackout on activities. This is a gross misconception of what public relations sets out to achieve. Modern public relations favours Grunig's view that – "...the better public relations practice becomes, the less public relations practitioners will need media."

He further stated that:

Excellent public relations needs the media less than does poor public relations and as organisations depend less on the media, the better their relationship with the media will become.

Media relations is just an aspect of public relations work schedule even as it is strategic to the achievement of corporate goals. The other aspects of policy formulation, counselling, internal communications, publications, frontline duties, seminars, round-table management, research and evaluation are very strategic for good results. Indeed, these are very challenging responsibilities that distinguish public relations professionals from publicists and press agents. It bears repetition to say that those who have made a success of public relations are those that have been able to add value to the organisations they serve in these other ways that requires appropriate education, skill, proactive disposition, problem-solving approach to managing issues and commitment to the ideals of excellent products and service delivery. Edward Bernays (1986:58) was of the opinion that:

Press relations is usually a very important part of public relations, but it is quite possible to carry out a substantial campaign without using the press at all. The press (radio and television) is a 'medium of communication' not a 'public' – there is nothing like film relations, exhibition relations or direct mail relations.

The present emphasis on media relations is indicative of the level of the public relations practice in Nigeria. As the economy becomes more private sector driven and the public private partnership programmes get entrenched, public relations practice would be enhanced and assume its rightful coordination of all communication processes in the new organisations.

The practice of public relations in the years ahead would be very challenging, dynamic and revolutionary. Public relations in Nigeria needs to overcome its present predicament of being populated largely by non-professionals; inappropriate use of public relations in organisations, dependence on old methods in an increasingly sophisticated communication age and general lack of cohesion within the fledgling profession tend to negate the advancement towards true professionalism.