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Public Relations and Other Professions

The practice of public relations encapsulates the tenets, principles and objectives of several other related callings such as advertising, marketing and business management. The profession successfully carved an unmistakable influential place for itself and the practitioners, as it continues to provide an umbrella under which all the other allied professions now operate in the ever-expanding public domain.

The success of any business organisation depends on its relationship with the various publics to which its services and products are targeted. To do this successfully, public relations strategies should be expertly interplayed with other related professions in the context of the social, cultural, political and economic environment in order to achieve the best results. It is through this that its role as a barometer for opinion moulding and its effect on the society can be measured.

In this chapter, three professions closely related to public relations would be lucidly examined. The other area of interest is the attention on the roles consultancy plays in public relations.

Public Relations and Journalism

Journalism's main concern is to source for news and make it available to all within the shortest possible time. By training, the journalist, as the watchdog of society, will stop at nothing to

unearth supposedly hidden information, no matter who is concerned. He is obliged to report whatever he sees from his own perspective and based on his in-house style and emphasis. All the talks about junk journalism and government propaganda against the more vocal section of the press are expected, as most of what is written may not be palatable to the concerned groups all the time. Otherwise, the pursuit of truth and fairness is considered the hallmark of good journalism.

In the business of informing, educating and entertaining, the journalist has the entire universe as his constituency and the utopia as his goal. Limiting factors such as ethnicity, religious beliefs, primordial loyalties and cultural barriers are literally swept aside in order to protect the interest of all without any fear, favour or bias. A perfect society is the target of journalism as it daily attempts to whip up the imperfect humans to be near perfect. Mistakes, omissions and slips, no matter how small, are not allowed to pass undetected by eagle-eyed journalists. The criticisms are so adverse sometimes that they make an otherwise unimportant issue, big. In the process, inconsequential personalities are turned into instant celebrities. These characteristics of expecting everything to be perfect in theory and the continuous deviation of events from the perceived norm in practice, make most events become news and we all scurry to know what it is all about.

There is a raging controversy as to the status of journalism as presently practised in Nigeria. Is it a craft or a profession? Many practitioners are bound to wonder at the pertinence of this view while the proponents can at best adduce technical reasons for their postulations. In the same vein, public relations could be examined on similar parameter of whether it qualifies as a profession or an art. For the purpose of this discourse, both public relations and journalism would be regarded as professions in their own rights in as much as they have been so recognised in law. This is because only recognised professions would have laws that guide their practices. The promulgation of the media decree and

the establishment of the Nigerian Institute of Journalism and the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (Decree 16 of 1990) validates this position. The media decree has merely legalised what has been in existence over the years – that journalism is a distinct profession from any other. The NIPR decree stating the academic qualification of members, the licensing procedures, sanctions against erring members and its training profiles, make it a profoundly professional organisation. Having established these facts, further arguments on the status of the two professions could then be good subjects for academic debates as there is still need to fine-tune the practice of the professions.

John Crinsford (1973) puts it thus: "No man can achieve professionalism on his own – he needs the Institute." This is how Frank Wylie and Sam Black (1978) define public relations:

Public Relations is the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation's and public interests.

On the other hand, they define journalism as:

Events of the day distilled into a few words, sound or pictures, processed by the mechanics of communication to satisfy the human curiosity of a world that is always eager to know what's new.

From the two definitions, it is clear that the task of public relations is quite distinct from that of journalism.

It is possible to identify some areas of commonness in the two professions. Such areas would be in relation to work traits, resourcefulness, foresightedness and objectivity coupled with good command of the official language (English). Clearly, a journalist would act differently and most times antithetically to typical public relations situations because of the nature and dictates of the profession. The journalists and public relations

practitioners are required by statutes governing their callings to possess certain minimum qualifications related to the practice of their jobs. As there are experienced but not too academic journalists, so do we have public relations practitioners who are talented but not very academic. To practise the two professions, such interested greenhorns are expected to undergo certain training after which they are tested and certificates are awarded. Both are also in the business of information gathering, processing, storage and dissemination. The two jobs are generally complementary. Beyond this, the journalist and public relations professionals have different operational objectives, ethics, target audiences, tools and strategies for achieving the goals they set for themselves.

A typical journalist would most likely adhere to the 1861 *Chicago Times* view that *it is a newspaper's duty to print the news and raise hell*. In sharp contrast, public relations is not based on scoops and sensationalism. Rather, public relations is about people at their best, as they strive to improve their persons, professions, job competencies and services rendered to their organisations and the society. It is about the search for excellent and good relationships. In doing this, trust and truth are important conditions for effective and lasting relations with the target audiences. In the business of public relations, people matter most. The end-result of what journalism wants in spite of its differential methods may not be different from that of public relations as they are certainly concerned about making the larger society a much better place than it is.

The two professions seek to achieve their goals by aiming at the utmost good for the people in order to get closer to the ideals everybody aims at. Besides, mutual trust, professional excellence, respect and the determination to work together for the common good should be the overriding consideration. Nearly a hundred per cent of public relations effort is directed at doing things well. Public relations should be all round, positively touching the lives of its clients and publics. Interestingly, several studies support

the generalisation that more than half of the newsmedia content comes directly or indirectly from public relations sources. If the journalists depend on public relations sources for their news materials, then the public relations executive certainly needs the journalist and the media to disseminate information about his organisation. Both professions play complementary roles of message sourcing (public relations) and, channelisation, (print and electronic media).

In recent times, the bond of cooperative linkages between journalists and their public relations counterparts have been tinkered as news is commercialised irrespective of its intrinsic value and the need for the public to have unhindered access to information. In the job market, both professions attract similar candidates, with somehow identical background training in humanities, social sciences and in other areas of specialisation such as science and technology. Where a science-oriented executive performs public relations duties successfully, it is usually a case of talent and deep interest that are at play. It is however pertinent to stress the need for training and research, as the case may be, should the need for switching jobs arise. Academic qualifications may not necessarily determine success in public relations practice but it is very important for a challenging career.

Too often, employers make the mistake of employing any journalists to perform public relations duties. This has resulted in proven unmitigated disaster. Since an inexperienced journalist cannot be made an editor overnight, it is also erroneous to hire a thoroughbred editor to handle public relations portfolio unless he is trained and is sufficiently interested in learning from other experienced professionals. Retraining programme in these instances would prove invaluable, as it is not easy to transpose the two positions at will. The existing prejudices and assumptions each profession holds against the other will becloud important management decisions. How would a journalist-turned public relations executive view organising a luncheon for the press or

doling out the contentious and proverbial 'brown envelopes'? This is not to say that the public relations man has this as one of his schedule of duties.

The job of public relations is therefore not as easy as many people view it. Public relations has a system, technique, purpose and basic tenets without which its practice cannot succeed. It is not every handsome man or well-dressed lady that has the combined carriage, intelligence and exposure to take him or her through the delicate and sensitive profession of public relations.

Advertising in Public Relations

A phenomenon known as consumerism arose a couple of decades ago in the United States of America as a result of continued decline in quality of goods and services, as against what was promised. The public, being the ultimate target of these goods, got together to protest against the perceived unjust acts, as guarantees on products and quality promised were hardly delivered. Now the advertisers have recognised the need to let its publics know that advertisement can at best present services and goods to the consumer but that it does not in itself imply or force purchase – you have a right to choose. Advertising was little used in the days of importation of all sorts of goods to the Nigerian market as there was no serious competition. Furthermore, the consumers were at the receiving end as they bought whatever was available – a seller's market. However, the restructured economy gave impetus to home-made goods and several manufacturers and marketers who hitherto, had monopoly of the economy, were forced to compete with other goods produced from within and those coming in as a result of liberalised trade. This gave way to a new advertising boom unprecedented in the history of Nigeria. Even then, the consumers are yet to assert their rights as the American consumers did many years ago. Given the spate of price increases that never seemed to come down, consumerism may take a little more time to become a reality here. Advertising is time specific.

This is possible because it is also measurable. The results are immediate and quantifiable as it is aimed at boosting sales or as a corporate public statement. On the other hand, public relations is about relationships which are difficult to quantify and may not be measured in statistical terms. In spite of this, the publics to whom public relations campaigns are directed, do not take eternity to respond to such programmes as the efforts are all capable of making impact in reasonable time.

Thus, advertising is one profession that several organisations often substitute for public relations, probably because of its immediate utility value and wider reach in the business arena. Even today, there is an unspoken 'rivalry' between advertising and public relations units in most organisations. Somehow, the advert manager sees the role of public relations executive as subordinate to his, whereas both are expected to coexist in a cooperative effort to sell the organisational products and services to the public. Ultimately, a mono-product-oriented company may emphasise advertising department while big conglomerates whose products and services are diverse and extensive might see the need to have a public relations department that would coordinate both the product and corporate image, which oftentimes are programmed to go hand in hand.

A good product positively advertises the organisation that makes it while bad products lead to loss of reputation. This is why organisations require the services of expert public relations professionals in and out of the company to mind the totality of their corporate performance. Hence the need to ensure that public relations serves the purpose of ensuring that reputation building transcends the annual declaration of several millions as profits to fundamental issues of cultivated excellent corporate citizenship and culture. Many organisations have combined advertising and public relations with varying degrees of success. This trend will continue but it is hoped that complementarity would be encouraged as against competition among the two professions.

MOBIL ACTS

About two weeks ago, we placed advertisements in national newspapers explaining that Mobil cares.

We wanted to apologize to people potentially affected when one of our three offshore pipelines connecting the Idoho production platform to the Qua Iboe Terminal in Akwa Ibom State failed, causing a significant spill on the waters offshore.

As promised, with the assistance of local indigenes, government authorities, industry partners and experts from home and abroad, we took immediate steps to disperse and contain the spill to limit its impact on the shoreline.

Mobil's priority remains to ensure that local communities are protected and that the environment potentially affected by the spill is restored.

We promised to keep you fully updated about our progress:

Goodwill aid – food and water – has been distributed to some remote communities through state governments where oil may have disrupted fishing.

Meanwhile, well-planned clean-up operation is underway. Trained crews are on the beaches removing the oil that has come ashore. This has been achieved by building relationships with local communities.

Our crews will continue their work over the coming weeks until we have done all we can to ensure the most rapid restoration of the impacted environment.

A claims point has been established and offices have been set up in affected areas. Mobil, working with the state and local authorities will ensure that anyone who has a legitimate claim to have been affected will be compensated.

While we do not yet know for sure what caused the pipeline failure, a detailed investigation is being conducted in full cooperation with the appropriate authorities. We will ensure that all necessary steps are taken to bring production back to previous levels, safely.

Oil production offshore is complex, technical process requiring huge, long term investments. It also presents significant engineering challenges. Mobil is a leader in this business and has been producing oil in Nigeria for almost thirty years.

During that time we have become a significant investor, employer and a valued corporate citizen in this country. We look forward to continuing our partnership into the future.

Every possible step is being taken to ensure that wherever we operate, we do so safely. This is Mobil Producing Nigeria's first incident of this kind and will do all we can to ensure it's our last.

Fortunately, few coastal communities have been affected by the spill. Naturally, they are concerned that we ensure their shoreline is cleaned and that compensation is paid.

We request cooperation and patience, so that the work can be completed swiftly, safely, efficiently and in the fairest way.

We will not rest until the problem is solved. Mobil Acts.

Paul L. Caldwell
Chairman/Managing Director
Mobil Producing Nigeria.

Mobil – The Energy to make difference

Fig. 6.1: Mobil Acts

Nigeria can boast of several advertising companies some of which are Lintas, Ogilvy Benson and Mather, Rosabel, Grant, Insight, Kilburn, Partnership, SO&U, Adwork, Promoserve, Eminent, and many more. The new agencies have literally changed the business landscape as the tempo of image projection, product presentation and the competitive edge has continued to be on the rise. In all these, there is always a point from where other professions take over.

To summarise the relationship between advertising and public relations, Sam Black's presentation (below) is clear and says it all.

Characteristics	Advertising	Public Relations
Use of media	buys time or space	relies on gaining media coverage
Control of message	tight control of content and timing	relatively little control
Credibility of message	relatively low credibility	relatively high message acceptance
Type of target	narrow target audiences	specific publics or market-related audiences
Focus on activity	market or sales oriented	attitude or situation
Time scale	relatively short-term	both short- and long-term objectives
Evaluation	established measurement	relatively limited techniques of evaluation methods
Payment for agency	agencies paid mainly by trade discounts and agency fees.	agencies paid by service fees based on time and/or annual retainerhip.

Fig. 6.2: Public Relations and Advertising Compared.

Marketing and Public Relations

The Chartered Institute of Marketing, London, defines the profession thus:

Marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customers' requirements profitably.

Frank Wylie and Sam Black's Mexican definition of public relations. Sam Black, commenting on the attempts by marketing professionals to claim expertise in public relations has this to say:

The proponents of marketing claim a very wide remit but have not yet claimed to cover parliamentary liaison, internal employee relations, community relations, crisis management, corporate social responsibility, environmental scanning and general involvement in corporate strategy planning.

This is so because public relations is a more encompassing profession than marketing. Of course, there are similarities and several meeting points, particularly as they exist side by side in many profit-oriented companies. However, this does not make them less distinctive.

The differences between marketing and public relations have been clearly identified by Oyeneye (1997) thus:

- Public relations creates and maintains mutual understanding and knowledge between an organisation and its publics, while marketing determines what a customer wants and offers it at a profit.
- Public relations is used by both commercial and non-commercial organisations. Marketing is mostly associated with commercial concerns.
- Marketing activities are directed at groups of people

referred to as market segments. On the other hand, public relations efforts are focused on the publics.

- While marketing deals mainly with customers and distributors, public relations relates with these two and many other groups such as: employees, shareholders, government agencies and officials of financial institutions, media organisations and practitioners, opinion leaders, suppliers of services and materials, competitors, and community members.

As is the case with advertising, marketing professionals should see the relationship more in a complementary sense rather than that which seeks to "take-over" the functions of the other. It is such avoidable decisions as this that made the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations situate its masters programme at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the Marketing Department. Such acts cannot but fuel controversy. Who would blame those who see marketing as superior to public relations?

What is Public Relations Consultancy?

Consultancy in public relations is the offering of specialist advice to an organisation at an agreed fee. The public relations consultant is expected to be versed in particular areas of activity on which he is consulting, based on serious studies and experience. The consultant is expected to have worked with similar organisations rendering similar services, through cross fertilisation of ideas and based on previous experiences. Consultants are therefore expected to be well tested and knowledgeable, seasoned practitioners, with relevant connections, enhanced background and enough confidence to achieve success. He is expected to be a registered member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, having satisfied all the academic and experience required, in addition to being registered as a consultant by the Public Relations Consultants Association of Nigeria (PRCAN). (See Appendix III for a retrospective on Public Relations Consultancy in Nigeria on

p. 195). Multinationals, banks, non-governmental organisations, governments and agencies, in many cases use consultants to beef up the in-house public relations efforts and also to serve as second unbiased opinion on sensitive issues that are technical in nature.

Among other functions, consultants also package special programmes, features, news, exhibition, lobby, opinion leaders and production of documentary films. Most consultants in Nigeria handle press relations as against the practice in developed nations. Ironically, press relations is better handled by the in-house public relations executives since the advantage of continuous interaction and intimate knowledge of the management is invaluable. This enables them to reflect its view to the general public appropriately. Consultants can only supplement these efforts from the outsider perspective. Organisations are, however, free to seek consultants' advice only if they can advise and participate in programme implementation and could even be involved in programme evaluation at the end. Consultants are relevant in as much as it is believed that they are free from bias, have wider experience and areas of influence. In this way, the organisation's management staff, as well as its various publics, may respect and appreciate the outcome of the consultant's counselling.

The argument for complete handling of public relations needs by an organisation's in-house team may be sustained if the concerned organisation is small and has very limited scope of operation and range of publics to serve. In this case, informal consultation and compactness of its operations will aid the required effective coverage. On the other hand, the smallness of the organisation may even dictate the use of consultants on *ad hoc* basis, depending on the activities and the frequency of need for such services. Cost is usually an important fact or in deciding which options to choose from.

A technical and scientific organisation, by its very nature, may not need a public relations unit if its services are specialised and especially when it renders services to a bigger sister organisation.

The 'mother' organisation may combine its public relations need with that of the subsidiary or attaché. If however such an organisation, in the course of its activities, makes a breakthrough for which it feels the public must know, it could hire a reputable public relations consultant to handle the job. The patented rights for such breakthrough would have to be legally covered, so as not to cause disaffection with the 'mother' organisation. In essence, public relations consultancy becomes necessary in a situation whereby an organisation's activities require expert handling that may not be available in the establishment.

The practice in most organisations is to combine the services of in-house public relations personnel with that of consultants as dictated by the scope and cost of programmes. Such decisions would normally be guided by some considerations, coupled with the track record of the consulting firm, in handling similar programmes. Also, the liquidity and resources at the disposal of the consultant, quality, evaluation, relationship with its clients (and other competing firms), degree of originality, creativity, innovation and competitive costing would have to be other influencing factors. As Dorothy Lang puts it, "a (public relations) firm gives you many opportunities and with opportunities, what you seize is what you get."

Public relations consultancy is still in its infancy in the country and, consequently, it is faced with numerous teething problems ranging from the characteristic one-man outfit, inadequate knowledge of the intricacies of the profession, use of outdated equipment and methods, influx of people of unknown competence, poor staffing, emphasis of profit over and above quality of job delivery, non-specialisation and general tardiness. At the level of consultancy, a public relations specialist cannot afford to be a run-off-the-mill practitioner. He must be conversant with new trends in the profession locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally. A consultancy firm must constantly engage in research, case studies and evaluation of events such that it is able to pool together valuable information on all possible subject

matters, including those that may not be its major area of specialisation. Indeed, public relations is a scientific endeavour that seeks to understand and address the innermost desires of its various publics. For this purpose, the practitioners must be knowledgeable in as many areas of human activities as possible but in particular, the humanities, social sciences, information processing and technology and a smattering knowledge of basic concepts of physical sciences. The human person that is the target of public relations activities would constantly take the consultant on knowledge seeking encounters in any of these areas.

Consultancy Costs

Public relations consultancy involves charging mutually agreed fees. There are no specific ways of doing this other than the consultant and client sitting together to work out the programme at hand and the attendant costs. The consultant usually charges on the basis of executive time that would be spent on the job. Other costs are spread on such details as travelling allowances, research and others. Some consultants are retained by organisations and paid, based on the services rendered to the organisation.

Theoretically, retainership may imply a flat payment, irrespective of the service rendered but that is hardly businesslike, it may, on agreement, be negotiable. However, a retained public relations company would still charge for special events they are engaged in. Retainership of public relations consultant is worthwhile in organisations such as banking, oil, manufacturing and large service industries. In this case, the need for constant corporate relations cannot be underestimated.

The practice whereby public relations consultants accept generalist jobs ranging from protocol, to marketing and advert collections more suited for in-house executives, should be discouraged. These are simply not jobs for consultants. Consultants are expected to be more profound, analytical, sophisticated and highly skilled such that they should be engaged

in the more tasking aspects of public relations like helping the clients plan accurately and effectively for the future, based on their past and present performances. At critical moments of economic depression, businesses depend more on public relations expert counselling to pull them through. This is without prejudice to the fact that consultants in advertising and marketing often find themselves making public relations a part of their package. It is an area requiring some restraint. Much could be gained if public relations consultant relates to a colleagues in advertising and marketing for tasks that they are equipped to handle more professionally. The clients and the professions would be better for it.