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REVIEW ARTICLE

# African public relations and the mainstream of global practice

By Eno Akpabio

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**Abstract**

This article takes issue with portrayals of public relations practice and research in Africa as being at a primitive stage. The review of research presented here shows that there is a wide range of research taking up all major issues of public relations in the continent. For example, just as public relations research in the West has moved towards relationship-building, Africa has developed its own perspective in this approach. The article traces the beginnings and historical development of public relations practice and research in Africa and shows some of the areas of particular originality in theory and research on public relations in Africa. The article concludes with suggestions for needed areas of research in the African context.

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**Key words:** Africa, public relations, global, African research in public relations, public relations in Africa

**Introduction:**

Just as in other areas of human endeavour, public relations scholarship and practice in Africa is not very visible to the rest of the world. This means that its contribution to the practice is relatively unacknowledged and invisible. It makes the practitioners and academics in the continent appear unaware of current theory, research and practice in the field. It also means that academics from other fields rush to fill the void by providing an outsider's look at the practice. The result is a perception as unbalanced as the description of the elephant by the six blind men of Indostan. Granted that some of the efforts attempt too global and too comprehensive a view. The disadvantage of the lack of local knowledge about public relations in Africa still becomes apparent. There are also efforts, some quite recent from the continent, that

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exaggerate the achievements of theory and research in Africa. These, for example, ignore the symmetry/excellence theory as well as the move from the functionalist to a co-creational perspective (Botan and Hazleton, 2006). Quite gratifying are the scholarship and viewpoints from the continent that takes these and other developments into consideration, thus showcasing Africa as being in the mainstream of current public relations practice.

### **The origins of public relations in Africa**

The practice of public relations in the continent goes all the way back to antiquity. For example, Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) see the beginnings of public relations in the influence from Iraq (farm bulletins), India (King's spies), Greece (*vox populi, vox dei*), England (Lord Chancellors) and the Catholic Church (Congregatio de Propaganda Fide). Likewise one can find ancient roots of public relations in this continent in the town crier, gatherings in the village square, and the rhetoric of chiefs. Others such as Desmond Wilson (2008) see traditional communication forms like talking drums and wooden drums as mass media because of their ability to reach large numbers of people (Ugboajah, 1986). The role of these African traditional communication forms extended beyond just reaching persons to changing their perspectives, something consonant with early PR practice. Ugboajah (1986, p. 167) identifies some of their specific objectives as "mobilizing people's awareness of their own history, magnifying past events and evoking deeds of illustrious ancestors". This correct dating of African public relations is recognized by other African scholars who have cited examples from Kenya (Mbeke, 2009) and South Africa (Rosenburg, 2009).

The African independence movements have some similarity with the American revolutionary war. Samuel Adams was the arrow head of the public relations campaign leading up to American independence, and his method included the use of symbols that were easy to identify. Emotion-arousing slogans such as "Taxation without representation is tyranny", enabled him to get across his side of the story to a receptive public with the required spin. Other examples are the "Boston Massacre" and a blitzkrieg of similar messages set in flight through the media (Baskin, Aronoff and Lattimore, 1997). The African continent also rumbled with agitations for self rule with tactics such as peasant revolts, workers strikes, protests and mass agitation; all of which were dutifully reported by the nationalist press (Karikari, 2007).

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Just as modern public relations practice in the United States predated the nation, African public relations practice also predates the independence movement and the achievement of nationhood. Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) note that the first effort to raise funds dates back to the seventeenth century and resulted in *New England First Fruits* in 1643 which was the first of many public relations' publications. In the same vein, Otubanjo, Amujo, Melewar (2009) have gone to great lengths to pinpoint 1859 as the beginnings of modern public relations in Nigeria, which incidentally is also the year in which the first newspaper – *Iwe Irohin* – was set up, a little over a 100 years before Nigeria gained independence. In South Africa, during Apartheid the mostly white practitioners aligned their practice with the outlook in the United States and the United Kingdom while black practitioners in the homelands emphasized the development communication role (Holtzhausen, 2005). In Kenya, negotiations between Western explorers and the indigenous people resulted in safe passage for the former whose publications about the inviting scenery of the country greatly promoted Kenya as a tourist destination (Mbeke, 2009).

### **Correcting Misconceptions about African Public Relations**

Just as public relations has moved beyond the one-way publicity model in the West, the same is also true in most parts of the continent. Just as the vestiges of the past remain in the West, so also is the position with the practice in Africa. In fact, a wholesale movement to Grunig's two-way symmetrical approach is contested and has been questioned in some quarters. Pfau and Wan (2005, p.102) insist that persuasion continues to be "essential" and "integral", contending that the controversy over an optimal approach is not very helpful in PR scholarship. Baskin, Aronoff and Lattimore (1997) consign the approach to regulated businesses like public utilities which are interested in building long-term relationships with their publics.

Even if the contestation did not exist, creating the impression that African public relations practice is still in its infancy because of the approach adopted by a few practitioners is not a fitting description and is a throwback to the ethnocentric attitude that serves to denigrate a whole people in order to paint others in a better light. Van Leuven and Pratt (1996) assert that the practice has moved forward as seen by the way organizations in more economically advanced countries relate to strategic publics and their favouring of a relationship-building process. They contest that, in most of the developing world, public relations has

stagnated in government nation building and national communication campaigns with strong persuasive components. And practitioners in developing countries are “less inclined to seek information from their publics because they do not intend to shape organizational activities to the need of their environment” (Van Leuven and Pratt, 1996, p. 5).

In other words, in this view, boundary spanning and environmental scanning as well as the two-way symmetric model is not part of the job description for African public relations practitioners. Evidence from across the continent disprove this assertion. Idemili (1990a, p. 225) clearly notes that the first step in any public relations effort is to probe the opinion, attitudes and reactions of publics. This, he argues, confers a number of advantages: it makes public relations a “two way street”, helps the practitioner keep his/her finger on the pulse of the entity’s publics, assists in determining objectives and strategy, reveals festering trouble spots and makes for effective outbound communication. In the Nigerian banking industry, part of the mandate of public relations is to collect and analyze information regarding the changing attitude of key publics (Ogundipe 1990).

During the official launch of the Public Relations and Communication Professionals Association (PRCPA) in Mauritius, the association’s president Jean Maris F. Richard noted that: “we will demonstrate our ability to positively contribute to mutual understanding in our society – mutual understanding and communication being by the way the two pillars of our noble profession.”<sup>1</sup> In a ranking of public relations roles in Ghana, Wu and Baah-Boakye (2007) identify the cultural interpreter role as first followed by the personal influence model. Two-way symmetric and two-way asymmetric communication are frequently practiced; the press agency model is moderately practiced while the public information model is the least practiced in the country. In South Africa there is more management appreciation of the function of public relations, and as a corollary there come demands for more research and measurement (Holtzhausen 2005).

Next, we turn our attention to the assertion by Van Leuven and Pratt (1996) regarding public relations practitioners being involved in nation-building programs and public communication campaigns or persuasion programs for national development. It is true that Africa is grappling with the task of development, and the various challenges require efforts to persuade citizens to adopt behaviors that will lessen the risk of malaria, HIV/AIDS, polio as well as move the continent away from wars and poverty. Still, to label and consign public relations

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practice to just one aspect of the function is a disservice indeed. If the logic were to be extended, it means the American government's public communication efforts, an example being the Florida Tobacco Control Program (FTCP) (Niederdeppe, Farelly, Thomas, Wenter and Weitzenkamp, 2007) or the insertion of antidrug messages into prime-time programming (Croteau and Hoynes, 2001), all of which indicate government concern about social problems, would be used as a whole-sale description of public relations practice in that country.

In the same vein, the American government's various but subtle attempts at persuasion would also come to represent the breadth of public relations practice in the country. Here we have in mind the close cooperation between the American military and the filming of war scenes in Hollywood movies. The military provide the hardware which makes for greater realism and in return "the Pentagon gets a promotional bonanza that reaches millions ... all of whom see the military in all its glory, with heroic soldiers and awesome weapons on display." (Croteau and Hoynes, 2001, p. 201). The propaganda in CNN and American cultural products, all of which are persuasive in nature, can also be used to characterize the essence and limits of American public relations, if one is to go by Van Leuven and Pratt's logic.

### **Contributions to the Field**

There are numerous contributions by African scholars and practitioners to the field of public relations. Some of the publications are widely available because they are published in the West, and they are available online while others are buried in books and journals which are limited to specific geographical locations. The former include evaluations of public relations practice and political change in South Africa (Holtzhausen, 2005), views of public relations professionals regarding the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations' Law and Its Enforcement (Molleda and Alhasaan, 2006), tracing the roots of public relations in Nigeria (Otubanjo, Amujo, Melewar, 2009), general assessment of public relations practice in Africa (Van Leuven and Pratt, 1996), work-related cultural values and public relations in Ghana (Wu and Baah-Boakye, 2007), the nature and stature of public relations in Africa (Mersham and Skinner, 2009), an overview of public relations practice in Nigeria (Koper, Babaleye and Johansoozi, 2009), descriptions of public relations in Kenya (Mbeke, 2009), Egypt (Keenan, 2009) and an overview of public relations in Africa as a whole.<sup>2</sup> While the latter embraces principles and process of public relations (Idemili, 2009a&b),

public relations in banking (Ogundipe, 1990), at Volkswagen of Nigeria (Utomi, 1990), police public relations (Ervin and Ugwu, 1990), industrial public relations (Jibril, 1990), dealer-distributor relations (Emenyonu, 1990), shareholder relations (Emenyonu, 1990), a handbook of public relations (Skinner, von Essen, Mersham and Motau, 2008), strategic public affairs management (Yusuf, 2001), employing public relations to curb the menace of secret cults (Akande, 2001), manage oil spillage (Enyia, 2001), crisis management (Akpabio, 2008; Odukomaiya, 2005; Igben, 2001), lobbying (Ogunnorin, 2001), public relations and TQM (Ogudoro, 2001), planning for public relations (Akpabio, 2001), public relations performance evaluation (Malam, 2001), community relations (Ekeocha, 2001), public relations and international diplomacy (Owens-Ibie, 2001), education (Salau, 2001), collective bargaining and conflict resolution (Ibrahim, 2001), for sustainable democracy (Abdulrauf, 2001) sustainable development (Enemaku, 2001), media relations (Akpabio, 2005a&b; Ogwezzy, 2005; Onabajo, 2005abcdef&g; Popoola 2005), towards a public relations agenda setting theory (Akpabio, 2005c) and information management (Akpabio, 2005d) as well as writing for public relations.

Elaborating on the nature of the contributions with a bias to those “hidden” in books that are not widely available is appropriate here. Idemili’s (1991) chapter titled “Principles of public relations” gives a succinct summary of the factors that have contributed to the centrality of public relations as a tool of management as well as made the profession indispensable to society. He discusses current definitions after dispensing with the derogatory ones, elaborates on the characteristics of public relations, touches on unwise and improper deployment of public relations, expands the breadth of knowledge needed for cutting-edge practice, emphasize organizing for public relations, lists functions of a public relations department and dissects public relations consultancies. His most important contribution in the chapter seems to be the identification of duties such as the public relations department serving as an information centre and providing speech services which have been neglected in other texts (see Cutlip, Centre and Broom, 2006; Baskin, Aronoff and Lattimore, 1997). The functions he identifies are, of course, not as wide ranging as what is expected of today’s practitioners.

Idemili’s (1991) “Public relations process” identifies the four basic steps – research, planning and programming, action and communication as well as evaluation - which he elaborates on extensively. His

refreshing take on oral communication as an important part of the third step is worth giving some attention to. Perhaps due to his African perspective, he correctly identifies oral communication as critical in the following areas: employee and executive meetings, public address systems, open houses, family nights, visits by members of the dominant coalition to departments, induction programs, employee-management committees, social events, meetings of/with shareholders, consumers, dealers, suppliers, opinion leaders and educators, visits to community institutions, radio broadcasts and participation in community affairs.

Ogundipe (1991) underlines the importance of public relations to the Nigerian banking industry. He undertakes an exploration of the different images that publics have of the industry: The government perceives the industry as interested only in urban centres where public relations firms can increase their profits while neglecting the rural and uneconomic areas – agriculture and industries. The banking public is disgusted by the time wasting, neglect of small savers, lack of information about banking products, bottlenecks in loan approval process as well as frauds and forgeries. Internal publics are unhappy about their compensation package which is not commensurate with the demands of the job and local communities develop apathy if the financial institution is not making efforts to meet felt needs. A cursory glance across the continent will reveal that these issues are still festering. What Ogundipe recommends for solving the problem is “collecting and analyzing information on the changing attitude of key public groups” (Ogundipe, p. 241). In other words, practitioners in the banking industry should engage in boundary spanning and environmental scanning.

Some elements of the co-creational perspective (Botan and Hazleton, 2006) is discernible in Utomi’s discussion of corporate communications. His take is that its focus involves “articulating the corporate essence of an enterprise and interpreting this essence in such a way that the environment is better accommodating the short and long term objectives of the enterprise” (Utomi, p. 245). It is to be accomplished through strategic planning and public relations and the latter’s contribution spans cultivation of goodwill, keeping publics informed, facilitating two-way communication, monitoring the environment and advising management. While his perspective is strong in building relationships with all publics it is short in making publics co-creators of meaning (Botan and Hazleton, 2006).

Ervin and Ugwu (1991) discuss the image of the police which is mired in corruption, bad riot management, extra judicial killings and rising crime waves. Their chapter takes a functionalist approach (Botan and Hazleton, 2006) with calls for better relations with the media as well as the use of press releases, press conferences, organized community events, and advertising. Their viewpoint seems to align with the practice among police public information officers in the United States (Motschall and Liqun, 2002). The same functionalist perspective is apparent from Jibril's (1991) techniques for improving the industrial atmosphere with house journals, corporate brochures, calendars and diaries, and corporate promotional items.

Emenyonu's (1991) dealer-distributor relations emphasizes the importance of dealers, how to assess dealer attitudes, causes of dealer dissatisfaction, planning dealer programmes which embraces dealer education, service, assistance and concessions, facilitation of dealer involvement and responsiveness as well as strengthening communication links. Grunig's two-way symmetrical model is apparent in his comment about fostering dealer involvement in the firm: "soliciting dealer opinion on company proposals and policies can be quite rewarding because dealers and distributors are in a position to collect consumers' feedback to manufacturers for effecting improved quality, packaging or positioning" (Baskin, Aronoff and Lattimore, 1997, p. 273).

Africans scholars have made contributions to a neglected area - investor relations (Laskin, 2009; Botan and Hazleton, 2006). Emenyonu (1991) provides a rationale for management-investor relations: shareholders form the foundation for success, regular information and consultation is a sine qua non and a properly planned program of communication will result in a satisfied core of investors. Where to begin? According to him, a reception program for new shareholders consist of welcome letters and shareholder certificates as well as company profile. Others ways of sustaining and enhancing the relationship is through the Annual General Meetings (AGMs), financial presentations, open houses and home comings, pseudo events as well as shareholder publications - annual report and accounts, shareholder magazines, newsletters and financial fact sheets.

Skinner, von Essen, Mersham and Motau's (2008) contribution to the field go beyond what a traditional public relations text provides to an exploration of other angles that will assist practitioners in the performance of their duties. These areas include intersection of public relations and advertising, as well as selling, effective listening, closed circuit

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television and video, audio-visual media, business correspondence, direct mail marketing, printing and publishing, conferences and seminars, the multicultural context of South Africa as well as protocol and business etiquettes. Salu's (1994) strong point is the numerous examples and pull outs in the text that every public relations professional will find indispensable to effective practice.

Yusuf (2001) expends great efforts drawing the fine line between public relations and public affairs while also admitting areas of overlap. He emphasizes that the latter deals with issues management which embraces identification, analysis, corporate position development and articulation. His position as regards the best approach from the viewpoint of the organization does not indicate whether he favors the symbolic view that entails defending the boundaries of an organization or the operational view of issues management which calls for management to constantly adjust corporate positions to please and appease critics (Heath, 2006).

African public relations professionals and scholars have also contextualized and localized the practice. Akande (2001) tackles the menace of campus cults and calls for public relations techniques aligned to McGregor's carrot and stick approach to solve the problem. Enyia (2001) turns his attention to the misery caused by oil spills and advocates openness and transparency, understanding by the oil-bearing communities and evaluation. Igben (2001) calls for proper positioning of the public relations function amongst other recommendations in Nigerian universities if management is to overcome the perennial crises in these institutions, while Salau (2001) calls for proper placement and professional training if the profession is to be effective in Nigerian higher institutions. Odukamaiya (2005) advocates good government – media relations in the context of fuel price increase crisis in Nigeria. Owens-Ibie's (2005) postulation is diplomacy in Nigeria and diplomacy by Nigeria to manage its pariah image. Strategic public relations is played up as a panacea for industrial disputes in Nigeria (Ibrahim, 2001), strategic public opinion management is proffered as the way forward to sustainable democracy in Nigeria (Abdulrauf, 2001), effective communication within the context of development communication has been put forward to address sustainable development across the continent (Enemaku, 2001). Ways of making public relations relevant to the needs of business, specifically to satisfy and exceed customer expectation (Ogudoro, 2001) as well as engendering favourable policies (Ogunnorin, 2001) have also been advocated.

African scholars have also written extensively on the specific area of media relations. They have examined the objectives (Onabajo, 2005a), evolution (Akpabio, 2005a), theories (Onabajo, 2005b), tools (Popoola, 2005), media for internal and external publics (Onabajo, 2005c&d), research in media relations (Onabajo, 2005e), publicity and media relations (Onabajo, 2005f), media-government relations (Akpabio, 2005a; Ogwezy, 2005) and budgeting for media relations (Onabajo, 2005g).

Efforts have also been expended on theory development. My own recent research has taken a fresh look at the agenda-setting hypothesis and came to the conclusion that the essence of the postulation clearly points to "the activities of public relations practitioners working subtly and sometimes surreptitiously to influence the media agenda" (2005c, p.174). This I call a movement towards public relations' agenda-setting theory though image management, language use and publicity techniques. This finds support in Zoch and Molleda's (2005) views regarding media relations practitioners' role in building the media agenda.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

That there is paucity of literature on public relations practice in Africa is not in doubt and the available effort is tied to books and publications that do not globally showcase African contributions because they are not available on the Net or they are not published by global players with an ubiquitous reach. As this gyroscope study notes, there is real ignorance among Africans about what is talking place regarding public relations scholarship in our various countries<sup>3</sup>. One response has been non Africans rushing in to fill the void. This effort in some instances has revealed paternalistic and ethnocentric scholarship and in others it is self serving. Their superficial overviews are intended to assist foreign companies to do business in Africa. The Eurocentric perspective that shows a concern or overemphasis on such indices as the daily press circulation/1000 population clearly indicates a lack of local knowledge. Any African communication practitioner worth his or her salt knows that using the papers to deliver messages will only reach the urban population; hence the trado-modern concept which gives a double advantage that blunts the weaknesses of the modern and traditional forms of communication (Akpabio, 2003).

Even when there is an apparent cooperation between scholars from Africa and the West one still detects an overwhelming Western perspec-

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tive and bias. Koper, Babaleye and Johansoozi's (2009, p. 236) conclusion that public relations in Nigeria is developing and thus "opportunities now exist for shifting the practice from press agency and public information asymmetric communication models towards more strategic practice" is directly contradicted by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) case study in the addendum to their chapter which reflects symmetric communication. And of course by Idemili (1990) who has underlined the relationship building and maintenance component of the practice.

The import of local knowledge free from the constraints of attempting to arrive at compromises is clear from Mbeke's (2009) contribution from Kenya. He correctly places the beginnings of public relations in ancient times and traces the practice to modern times noting that in spite of certain constraints practitioners now form part of the dominant coalition, and the practice has achieved international recognition. Some grey areas remain just as they are in the West. Holtzhausen (2005) shows the movement from publicity and organizing parties to boundary spanning and environmental scanning which commands the respect of managers in the South African practice environment. All these efforts suggest that Africa is in the mainstream of global public relations practice, but also initiating its own original theoretical approaches.

The way forward is for African academics and practitioners to make their voices heard by showcasing the true face of public relations practice at every forum and at every opportunity. This has been one effort in this direction. Demonstrating a grasp of current knowledge in the field and contextualizing such knowledge to make them relevant to the African environment should be our single-minded pursuit. Otubanjo, Amujo and Melewar's (2009) categorization of public relations in Nigeria into a broadcasting era, a political propaganda era, a public information era and the professionalization era neglects reference to much excellent study even though it does a good job of pushing the African perspective. Holzhausen's (2005) contribution regarding South Africa demonstrates a grasp of the current literature while providing this much needed perspective.

The march of globalization means that no part of the planet is insulated from happenings in our world. Africa has kept pace with global public relations practice through multinational corporations, local affiliates of global public relations consultancies and through the

personal efforts of practitioners and academics. The mix of method that is used is a natural reflection of the conclusion drawn by Grunig that no single method of public relations practice will dominate in all settings (Motschall and Liqun (2002). Thus, to suggest that public relations practice in Africa is in its infancy is inaccurate and does not recognize the investment by professional bodies across the continent in providing continuous professional education to members through PR clinics and their innovations in education. It is a negation of the gains made by practitioners who have achieved recognition for the profession through legislation and by cutting-edge professional practice that has made public relations indispensable in every sector.

Recommended lines of research by African public relations scholars are localizing and contextualizing the profession; testing various theories and postulations such as organization-public relationships, community, co-orientation, accommodation, dialogue, public relations competence, public relations' agenda setting, sense making, technology-image expectancy gap, relationship management, image repair, and developing new theories founded on the African experiences. After all is said and done, we agree with Botan and Hazleton (2006, p. 16) that "scholarly research moves forward by competition between differing perspectives, not by dominance of any one perspective". It is time for the African perspective to take its place in the sun.

### Endnotes

1. Retrieved from [www.bizcommunity.net](http://www.bizcommunity.net) on October 10, 2009
2. [www.gyroscopeconsultancy.com](http://www.gyroscopeconsultancy.com)
3. [www.gyroscopeconsultancy.com](http://www.gyroscopeconsultancy.com)

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# Current research in public relations: A critique and questioning of global trends

By Donn J. Tilson

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## Abstract

The present article offers a critical and strongly questioning analysis of seven major world-wide trends in public relations teaching and research: (1) the questionable ethics of much public relations practice in dealing with the world economic crisis of 2008-2010; (2) the strong shift towards emphasis on the use of the "new media" connected with the Internet in research, teaching and textbooks; (3) the questionable shifts to emphasis on marketing in public relations; (4) the increased questioning of US dominance of public relations theory; (5) the emergence of perspectives from Latin America and Asia, but the continued absence of Africa in these discussions; (6) the increased interest in ethics and corporate social responsibility; and (7) the strong interest in religious perspectives in public relations theory.

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**Key words:** Public relations, public relations research, corporate social responsibility, public relations ethics, religion and communication.

## Introduction:

Global economic unrest. The unraveling of the social fabric. Concerns for the environment. As the world enters the close of the first decade of the twenty-first century, nation-states both developed and developing find themselves caught up in a vortex of problems and issues, many of which are borderless and some seemingly intractable. The public relations profession, much as any other element of society, has been affected by global events and is adapting to new realities. And, its metamorphosis, promising in some respects and troubling in others, is forever changing the world of both practitioner and educator alike.

### Author Biographical note

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In as much as “these are the times that try men’s souls”, a review of the public relations profession is in order. A look at the “global ecology” first will paint the realities that surround the field of public relations followed by an examination of the various ways in which the profession has responded. A critique of the fundamentals that underlie worldviews of public relations – underpinning theories, paradigms, definitions, etc. – will serve to contextualize the discussion. Of particular importance throughout will be the nature and direction of public relations research. Finally, a look “beyond the horizon” to new areas of interest for research and practice will conclude with suggestions for alternative paths to explore.

### **Depression 2.0 – ‘the price of greed’**

*“There must be some way out of here”, said the Joker to the Thief.  
“There’s too much confusion. I can’t get no relief”.  
All Along the Watchtower, Jimi Hendrix*

The global economic meltdown – a tsunami that swamped institutions both public and private around the world – has been called “the price of greed”, a “financial madness [that] overtook not only Wall Street but also Main Street” (Serwer & Sloan, 2008, p. 32). Fueled by the mantras of a philosophy that chanted, “debt would never need to be repaid ... values only rise ... bubbles never burst” (Gibbs, 2009, p. 20) and “Frankenstein” investments, like collateralized debt obligations (CDOs), too complex even for the securities savants who created and traded them to fully understand (Serwer & Sloan, 2008), the bubble finally burst on September 29, 2008, when the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell a record 778 points.

Financial giants like Lehman Brothers imploded, others like Bear Stearns were gobbled up by competitors in sales subsidized by the US government, and still others like American International Group (AIG) were saved from collapse by massive government bailouts, which essentially were nationalizations masquerading as loans. But, as the old saying goes, “When America sneezes, the world catches a cold”. As investors pulled out their money, housing values fell and unemployment grew, world institutions soon realized that it was “no longer an exclusively American crisis”; banks closed for business (and some nation-states like Iceland almost did), growth rates in countries like Japan fell further than in the US, real estate agents in overdeveloped

markets like Spain suddenly were unemployed, and even China was shaken (one-fifth of its currency reserves were invested in Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac mortgage bonds) (Ferguson, 2008).

Emerging economies, perhaps, were impacted the most. A 2009 report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) commented that Africa was “gravely affected” by the downturn with countries suffering from “collapsing commodity prices and a decline in donor funding” and “benefits accumulated over the years ... now [in] risk [of] being eroded”; for example, Angola’s growth turned negative and “South Africa entered its first recession in nearly two decades” (Jacobson, 2009, p. 2C).

Most seriously, the outlook included a danger [that] “countries will fall back into poverty” (ibid). In the Caribbean, tourism, remittances and foreign investment additionally declined, plunging small nation-states like Grenada “into widespread poverty” and threatening negative growth in as many as seven countries, including the Bahamas and Jamaica, according to the International Monetary Fund (Charles, 2009, p. 5A). While those at the epicenter of the financial crisis may have simply been following “Wall Street’s classic business model” (Serwer & Sloan, 2008, p. 37) in “a consumer culture [that] invites us to want more than we can ever have” (Gibbs, 2009, p. 21), in the end, a host of innocents from taxpayers to retirees to marginalized peoples paid the bill for the party they never were invited to.

Among those publically vilified for questionable – and, in some cases, criminal – behavior were Bernie Madoff, who used his investment securities firm as “his personal piggy bank” to defraud 5,000 investors worldwide (including charitable organizations) of \$65 billion in the largest Ponzi scheme in US history (Scinta & Glovin 2009, p. 2C), and AIG – rescued from bankruptcy with a \$170 billion government bailout – which paid hundreds of millions of dollars in bonuses to employees in its financial products unit that sold credit default swaps, “the risky contracts that caused massive losses at the insurer” (AIG staff to get bonuses, 2009, p. 3C). Protests from victims pressured a court-imposed 150-year-jail-sentence for Madoff, even as the media, taxpayers and legislators pounded AIG for actions that led to its financial troubles.

Sadly, however, for the public relations profession, it often shared the spotlight with such unsavory clients and employers – as Lukaszewski (2008, p. 38) observes, “the parade of prosecuted CEOs, CFOs, general counsels and other corporate executives ... include[ed]

some PR executives". Media reports, such as those in *The Huffington Post* criticized AIG executives "for having multiple PR agencies on retainer", even as yet other outlets ran headlines about the company's "Dizzying PR Binge" (Cherenson, 2009, p. 5). While some practitioners half-way defended the company, one in particular contending that "I seriously doubt that AIG is engaging PR firms to soothe the taxpayers' souls, or portray the company as just another innocent victim in the current economic meltdown" (ibid), nonetheless, questions about AIG's use of PR counsel *before* engaging in questionable business practices need to be raised and answered.

As if to firmly contextualize the seeming lack of professional ethics by some practitioners and by others in society-at-large, "former Bush press secretary Scott McClellan confessed the irrelevance of truth to his p.r. strategy" in the waning months of the Bush Administration as financial markets collapsed, voters revolted against a \$700 billion Wall Street bailout program, and "the public's trust ... vanished"; as then-Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson Jr. reflected about the public's rebellious mood, "we just haven't communicated as well as we need to" (Grunwald, 2008, pp. 43-44). What was truly lacking, however, was something more fundamental – as a journalist for *Time* so keenly observed, "Washington is still likely to find a fix for the credit crisis ... but its own credibility crisis might take longer to repair" (ibid).

As the effects of the economic crisis deepened and broadened to include the public relations profession, front-page articles in the Public Relations Society of America's monthly periodical, *Public Relations Tactics*, reflected members' realities with headlines like "Moving forward after a job loss" (November 2008), "Graduating into a recession" (April 2009) even as lead articles in the Society's magazine, *The Public Relations Strategist*, called attention to "Communicating the Meltdown" (Fall 2008) and "Protecting Corporate Reputations" (Winter 2009). By the spring of 2009, a PRSA Board of Directors' survey of practitioners revealed some of the effects of corporate retrenching and economic slowdown: some PR agencies are holding their own ... other agencies said business was down by 10 percent, 20 percent, 50 percent or was "horrible" ... the nonprofit sector is struggling ... independent practitioners have been hit hard ... some ... reported they are doing project work only, rather than being on retainer ... students are still flocking to colleges, especially public colleges, but hiring freezes and cost-saving activities are commonplace, according to faculty and higher education PR professionals. (Silverman, 2009, p. 9)

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By August 2009, public relations consultancies were implementing a fundamental restructuring of operations in the wake of corporate downsizing, reduced client budgets, demands for more value and a back-to-basics, integrated approach to campaigning and the “disintegration of multinational firms” (Marks, 2009, p. 12G). Beyond reducing staff salaries, cutting workforce and renegotiating retainer fees, consultancies began integrating advertising and marketing into their public relations activities, searching for less expensive media to deliver messages, and, in some cases, purchasing one-time branch offices of multinational firms that were retrenching – “business Darwinism”, as one agency executive described the new environment (ibid).

### **Social media – blogging, tweeting and even snoozing**

*“Before the end, one began to pray to it; inherited instinct taught the natural expression of man before silent and infinite force”.*

Henry Adams on seeing electric power dynamos at the 1900 Paris Exposition

Amid sobering reports from public relations practitioners, the one area for “optimism” was that consultancies are hiring staff who specialize in “new media”. Clients may not fully understand the technology or consultancies accurately measure its effects, but no one wants to be “left behind” in the rush to embrace the new digital world.

*Time* prominently heralded the arrival of new media with its December 2006/January 2007 issue, naming its annual *Person of the Year* as “You.” With a mirror-like screen superimposed on a photo of a computer terminal, the editors proclaimed on their cover page, “Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world”. Articles ran the gamut from a user’s guide to Web 2.0 to feature profiles of “the stars of the user-powered revolution” to how YouTube has changed the news following an editorial that explained that “individuals are changing the nature of the information age ... [with] user-generated content [that] is transforming art and politics and commerce ... and the way we perceive the world ... a mirror on the cover ... literally reflects the idea” (Stengel, 2007, p. 8).

Now, nearly three years later, it seems that people around the world have indeed “blogged”, “YouTubed” and “text-messaged” themselves into a virtual new universe. *Time* continues to “tweet” its readers to front cover stories about new technologies (Twitter, June 15, 2009) and

their social effects (Iran vs. Iran, June 29, 2009), particularly when protestors of the contested presidential elections in Iran communicated with one another and the world via camcorders, laptops and cell-phones, sending photos, video and voice/text-messages to tell the story that outside media were prohibited from doing.

The media landscape and its usage certainly have radically changed in recent years. USC Annenberg Center research suggests that Internet users believe it to be a more important source of information than television, newspapers and books, and a Virilion/Harris Interactive study found those involved in advocacy spend more time with the Internet than television (Solomon, 2008); a Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism revealed that nearly 40 per cent of Americans consume online news daily (Zuk, 2009b). Other media trends are just as attention-getting:

- (1) some 25 million people watch *American Idol* each week, and Facebook claims some 150 million active accounts with 600,000 new ones opened daily (Zuk, 2009a);
- (2) a Brodeur/Marketwire survey of journalists reports that more than half spend more than an hour daily with online news sources and blogs (Journalists' perceptions, 2008);
- (3) a Technorati survey estimates the Internet "blogging" audience at 188 million, and tracked bloggers in 81 languages and 66 countries (Newsflash: Blogs are big, 2008);
- (4) As of May 2009, twitter, a social networking site, had 14 million users (Cohen, 2009);
- (5) In January 2009, the US Congress made its official YouTube debut with Senate Hub and House Hub where legislators can post their own video clips (Clark, 2009).

Not everyone there has jumped onto the new media bandwagon and some who have jumped on have since jumped off. An Epsilon and GK Roper Public Affairs and Media survey of chief marketing officers indicated that 22 per cent were not too interested "in incorporating the social networking sites [Facebook and MySpace] into their marketing strategies" and 33 per cent were not interested at all (Despite the cultural phenomenon, 2009, p. 4). Print media columnists have shrugged their proverbial shoulders over all the hype about Twitter; as one commented, "I joined Twitter this week ... This is not why I got into journalism. Spewing online quips limited to 140 letters isn't the

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crusade for truth and justice I once envisioned ... [am] about to enjoy a nap. Zzzzz" (Reinhard, 2009, p. 1B). Even PRSA's editor of *Tactics* confessed, "after a wholehearted beginning in the Twittersphere where I dutifully read every tweet that appeared on my feed, my attention wandered – some of the inane observations people shared were getting increasingly annoying" (Elsasser, 2009, p. 3); in May, he reports, Nielsen "reported that 60 percent of people who use Twitter quit after one month. I lasted four months" (ibid).

### **The profession's response to the "new ecology"**

*"We have to play in that sandbox if we're going to do the right thing for our client". CEO Intergrated marketing communication consultancy.  
CEO, integrated marketing communication consultancy.*

Given the worldwide impact of the economic downturn and the fascination with new media, it is not surprising that these have captured the public relations profession's attention. For example, surveys of practitioners in the US and internationally confirm such interest in the "new ecology". A July 2009 PRSA Counselors Academy poll of membership ranked "mastering social media" and "demonstrating return on investment" as the second and third most important issues "to be addressed in helping their clients and advancing the future of the public relations profession over the next two years" (the top issue, "providing authentic, strategic counsel", ranked one-tenth of a point above social media) (Public Relations Society of America, 2009a). In a survey of membership in 16 countries, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management found that "practitioners around the world are focused on using new media more aggressively and on measuring and demonstrating the value of public relations to business leaders"; moreover, "these international priorities ... form the foundation of the Global Alliance's new strategic plan", says GA, inasmuch as "the message is clear" (The Global Alliance, 2009).

Similarly, professional associations, both US-and-non-US-based, have given considerable – some would say inordinate – attention to new media and accountability in trade publications, conference programming and both presented and published research. For example, throughout 2008 and 2009, PRSA has regularly featured new media in full and multiple-page articles in *Tactics* with two issues in particular – October 2008 and November 2009 – dedicated exclusively to Web 2.0

and Technology/Web 2.0 respectively, and, since the beginning of 2008, has offered an expanding array of professional development workshops (on-site, teleseminar and Webinar) on new media, increasing programming from seven to 10 conferences by the Summer/Fall 2009. Over that span of time, such programming has been given top billing on the front page of each issue of PRSA's *Professional Development* catalogue; of the 19 programs featured on the cover pages of its four most recent catalogues, 14 of those given prominence addressed new media topics. And, as the global economy has stalled, "value in public relations" programming has crept in on the front pages with two such conferences – "Blogging ROI for SMEs (Small to Medium Enterprises)" and "How to Deliver ROI for Interactive Communications" – commanding top billing in the Winter 2009 catalogue.

Inversely, as such programming has increased, traditional conferences in areas of Relationship & Reputation and Management & Leadership have declined (from 9 and 3 in Winter 2008 to 5 and 1 in Summer/Fall 2009 respectively); no programs on Management & Leadership received front page billing in the past four issues of the catalogue. Further, the Society's 2008 International Conference in Detroit featured new media in 28 of the 100 professional development sessions even as such keynote speakers as Craig Newmark, founder of Craigslist, a global Internet community bulletin board, commanded general session and luncheon spotlights. The 2009 International Conference – "Delivering Value" – addressed concerns about tighter budgets and greater demands for accountability; a new track of sessions, "The Business Case for Public Relations", ran throughout the conference focusing on "the strategic outcomes of public relations and how it delivers value" (Public Relations Society of America, 2009b, p. 9).

The new ecology also colored the nature of research papers presented in Educators Academy sessions at the international conference. In 2008, one-third of the "top research papers" focused either on new media or accountability, ranging from a review of "PR Effectiveness Research" to "Web 2.0 Acceptance and Use by Public Relations Practitioners". New media research also found its way into a "pedagogy poster" session with such presentations as "Teaching Public Relations 2.0 with Distance Learning 3.3" and "What's Critical About PR and New Media Technologies?" Further, new editions of standard US public relations textbooks have added chapters on new media, and, in some cases, eliminated seemingly important material to make room for the updates; *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics* (Wilcox & Cameron,

9<sup>th</sup> edition) now has a newly revised chapter on “new technologies” that specifically include “the phenomenon” of social media (2009, p. xix), and Bobbitt and Sullivan, in producing an updated edition of their text, *Developing the Public Relations Campaign* (2009, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition) added a chapter on interactive media even as they deleted a chapter on mass communication and campaign theory from the text’s first edition.

Other public relations associations have mirrored PRSA in their professional activities. Founded in 1956, the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), “dedicated to the science beneath the art” and headquartered at the University of Florida, has consistently focused on the research and evaluative dimensions of the profession; its Commission on Public Relations Measurement & Evaluation was formed in 1998 expressly for that purpose. Nevertheless, in 2008, the Institute took a dedicated look at new technology and accountability with a study, “The Increasing Impact of Social Media on Public Relations” even as the Commission produced a new report, “Using Public Research to Drive Business Results” (Institute for Public Relations, 2008).

In March, the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual 2009 International Public Relations Research Conference, hosted and organized by the University of Miami with the support of IPR highlighted new media in 17 of the 104 papers presented mostly by educators and in a spotlight session on ROI; two of the three top papers concerned “adding value to organizations” and the use of online social media by journalists (Institute for Public Relations, 2009a). Three months later, the London-based International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC), “a global trade body and professional institute for agencies and practitioners who provide media evaluation and communication research”, hosted a European Summit on Measurement jointly with IPR in Berlin to “present best practices from business and insights from research on an international level” (International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication, 2009).

As advertised, speakers – both practitioners and educators – during the Summit’s two-day plenary session “address[ed] the rise of social media along with the challenges that communications face in a global downturn” (ibid), with such topics as “Social Media – The Big New Opportunity for Communications”, “Putting Evaluation at the Heart of a Global Business” and “Social Media: Measurement In Practice”. Additionally, presenters conducted pre-plenary session workshops on social media measurement (in English and German), followed by a roundtable “debate” on “Proof of Performance – Measurement in a

Recession". At the Summit, AMEC and IPR reported the results of an international survey of public relations professionals, in which an overwhelming majority (88 per cent) said that "measurement is an integral part of the PR process" and that "measuring ROI ... on communications is ... an achievable goal ... and... would enhance the budgets (and status) of PR practitioners" (Institute for Public Relations, 2009b). The nature and direction of the Summit paralleled those organized by the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) in 2008 and 2009.

The UK-based organization, formed in 1955, explored new media and accountability in various panel discussions at its 2008 World Congress in Beijing; as with AMEC, these sessions – specifically, "New Media and Public Relations Online" and "Measuring the Value of Public Relations" – featured practitioners and educators sharing their work practices and research (International Public Relations Association, 2008); IPRA holds a World Congress every three years to assess the latest standards and techniques of practice. In 2009, IPRA conferences in Sofia and Tehran focused exclusively on new media and measurement respectively. Research presented in Sofia included "Measuring the Value of Public Relations by Social Networks", "Social Media Measurement", and "Internet – Consumer Heaven or Hell?" (International Public Relations Association, 2009b), and in Tehran, "Goal or Own Goal? Can We Measure Public Relations Effectiveness?" and "Questioning our Questions: Refocusing Measurement and Evaluation" (International Public Relations Association, 2009a).

### **A question of trust, independence and multiculturalism**

*'Another challenge for public relations is the growing lack of public trust in companies and government'. Sir Martin Sorrell, founder-chief executive, WPP*

As members of PRSA's National Capital Chapter reviewed various issues of the 2008 US presidential election during a special roundtable discussion featured in the Winter 2009 edition of *Tactics*, primarily focusing on the use of new media in the campaign, one participant voiced an almost-forgotten notion amid all the "buzz" – "the business we're in is about relationships. How we go about that, how we engage in that, and how we actually build and develop those relationships are keys to future success, not just current success" ("There is this sense of uncertainty", 2009, p. 11). It was a sentiment echoed at the close of the

same edition of the magazine by Sir Martin Sorrell, founder and chief executive of WPP, one of the world's leading communications services groups, in reminding the profession that "if there is one defining mood among consumers, voters and investors, it is a lack of trust" (Sir Martin Sorrell, 2009, p. 36). Across the board, various research studies have reported the general decline in confidence:

- (1) Golin Harris' Trusted Media Index reveals Americans "trust the closest information sources – ... direct experience and word-of-mouth – more than sources at a perceived distance, including mainstream media, social networks" (Beringer, 2008, p. 20);
- (2) Edelman's Trust Barometer reports 38 per cent of Americans trust business "to do what is right" and globally 29 per cent trust information from a CEO (pr blotter, 2009, p. 4) even as the percentage of opinion leaders who trust the media "to do what is right" continues to decline in countries including Canada, the UK and the US (Galifianakis, 2008a, p. 4);
- (3) "trust is at the bottom of all financial transactions", according to PRSA's 2008 chair of Financial Communications Professional Interest Section (Elsasser, 2008, p. 7).

Contributing to the decline has been the increased emphasis upon value, turning public relations professionals – practitioners and educators alike – into extensions of the marketing function in institutions. In a white paper, "Top 10 Strategies for Shrinking Communications Budgets", Marketwire advises "PR, IR and marketing pros" who "need to justify every investment to the CFO and prove marketing ROI and accountability to the CEO" to "start transforming your marketing department into a revenue center" with goals that can "measure the success of your PR activities" (Showing your worth, 2009, p. 11).

Confusing, or purposely labeling public relations and marketing as the same function, is insulting enough to the profession and even more so when such reporting is included in a publication such as PRSA's *Tactics*. And, to add insult to injury, a further article later in the year announcing the Society's upcoming International Conference, stressed the sessions' importance for practitioners "at a time when many organizations are cutting back on their marketing expenditures", predicting "public relations will be among marketing's bright spots in 2009" (Delivering Value, 2009, p. 22).

Moreover, such a view of public relations seems to be globally shared as *The Economist* concurred that, “for business, public relations is an increasingly vital marketing tool – especially as traditional forms of advertising struggle to catch consumers’ attention” (ibid). It was perhaps not surprising, then, that much of IPRA’s World Congress in Beijing in 2008 concentrated on panel discussions of “brand globalization”, “Youth and Brands” and accountability as noted earlier as a run-up to the 2009 conference in Sofia, where sessions on measurement dominated. Little wonder also that a 2008 USC Annenberg School for Communication survey of practitioners in 520 US organizations found that “the most common alternative reporting route [for PR professionals] is through the marketing department (23 percent of respondents)” and that such “PR operations ... do not enjoy the internal influence that C-suite reporting PR teams take for granted” (Cobb, 2008a, p. 8).

The same study reported that PR professionals “who are unhappy with their reporting structure typically work under the legal, finance, human resources ... departments” among others, including business or operational units (ibid) and complemented a critique in *Tactics* of Chrysler Corporation’s decision in 2007 to place its public relations function under human resources, a move that followed the departure of the company’s vice president of corporate communications. Described by some as “at least a one-line drop on the organizational chart, going from a peer to a subservient relationship with human resources” (Guiniven, 2008: p. 6), the move was defended by Chrysler’s human resources chief as “part of the culture transformation – and the search for ‘synergies and efficiencies’ ... after Cerberus Capital Management bought 80 percent of Chrysler from its German parent, then known as Daimler-Chrysler” (Cobb, 2008a, p. 7).

Even as public relations disappeared from the boardroom, the company and its two sisters, General Motors and Ford, soon suffered “through PR crises and televised bailout hearings in Washington”, finally emerging “with a guaranteed bailout worth billions of dollars” (Cobb, 2009, p. 10). As an industry insider observed, “they haven’t seen public relations as an entrepreneurial function ... and they haven’t taken advantage of the magic that can be worked with good public relations – to change the nature of their corporations ... public relations has been a protective device” (ibid). As if to illustrate the point, a General Motors regional public relations manager who boasted that “GM attracts the best and brightest PR graduates ... who can demonstrate that they have strategic and critical thinking abilities” admitted that

“public relations is about business and ... a PR strategy ... won't be greeted warmly... if it doesn't offer a good return on investment” (Cobb, 2008b, pp. 14-15). Soon after Bob Lutz, GM's vice chairman for global product development, regaled the general session audience at PRSA's 2008 conference in Detroit with his stories as chief executive blogger for the company, the corporation filed for bankruptcy in May 2009, the largest industrial firm to do so in US history. With \$172.8 billion in debt, GM was put back afloat by the US government and “an expedited, court-supervised process to accelerate the reinvention of our company”, according to GM's president for North America – with “a commitment that we will put the customer first in all that we do”(Clarke, 2009, p. 1).

When public relations is relegated to a support function rather than allowed to play a strategic management role, staff tend to “lack a knowledge base in research, environmental scanning, problem solving, and managing total communications strategies” (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006, p. 99), leaving the institution vulnerable to both internal and external threats; research shows that an estimated 90 per cent of organizational crises “are caused by internal operational problems rather than by unexpected natural disasters” (ibid, p. 130). Simply put, poor issues management by a public relations staff that has low institutional value leads to organizational crises with history – Metropolitan Edison (Three-Mile Island), Enron – confirming the consequences of such structuring even as the opposite approach – ie. Johnson & Johnson (Tylenol crisis) demonstrates the wisdom of other configurations (Wilcox, Ault & Agee, 1989). That some 50 per cent of *Fortune* 500 companies do not have a crisis management plan (ibid) speaks volumes about the corporate mentality toward public relations and social obligations.

More pointedly, conference research continues to focus on institutional crises – research selected for presentation at PRSA's 2008 International Conference Educators Academy session included such papers as “Transforming Crisis into Confidence: Public Relations Professionals' Perceptions of the Effectiveness and Ethicality of Image Repair Strategies” (Top Faculty Paper Award) (PRSA Educators Academy, 2008). Research on crisis management represented more than its share of IPR's 2009 conference, with 12 papers (of a total of 104) addressing various aspects of the issue.

Publishers also seem enamored of the topic – for example, of the 12 public relations texts offered by SAGE in its 2009 *Communication & Media Studies* catalogue, four focus on crisis and issue management. Such tendencies for institutions to misuse public relations coincide with a sea-change in the profession's view of itself. Public relations scholars once considered "the best definition for today's modern practice" to be a "management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000 in Wilcox & Cameron, 2006, p. 5) – Cutlip having long been regarded as a "dean" of such scholarship and his text, *Effective Public Relations*, the gold standard in the field. Newer philosophies, however, de-emphasize the social imperative and take a more client-employer-exclusive notion of the profession.

As Wilcox and Cameron note, "a more assertive definition has emerged over the past decade ... that places the public relations professional first and foremost as an advocate for the employer, or client, but acknowledges the importance of mutual benefit when circumstances allow" (2009, pp. 6-7). Cameron argues instead that public relations should be "the strategic management of competition and conflict for the benefit of one's own organization – and when possible – also for the mutual benefit of the organization and its various stakeholders or publics" (ibid, p. 7).

Such "more assertive" views that turn the focus of public relations inward only serve to reinforce a historic absence of a much needed sense of multiculturalism in the profession. In a world that increasingly has become a global village, public relations attention, and research in particular, has lacked a true global perspective. As Sriramesh and Verèie note, "Although many refereed journals have begun to publish articles on public relations in different parts of the world, there is a scarcity of published literature on international public relations in general and very limited information from Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, in particular" (2003, p. 507).

A review of research papers presented over the years at PRSA's Educators Academy confirms that observation; of the 86 papers posted, only eight are listed under the category of "International Public Relations", and just 19 in total address research in non-US nation-states (PRSA Educators Academy, n.d.). Of these, six concern Latin America (four Brazil, one each Chile and Latin America in general), five Asia (Taiwan and South Korea two each and Japan) and two Africa (South

Africa and Egypt) while Russia, India (two each), and New Zealand, UK (one each) round out the field. While the number of papers on international public relations topics presented at IPR's 2009 conference was far superior – with Latin America and Asia well represented in the mix – only one paper addressed the Arab world, and none focused on Africa.

In the past decade or so, several scholarly texts have attempted to fill the void, notably Culbertson and Chen (1996), Turk and Scanlan (1999, 2004, 2008), Moss and DeSanto (2001), Sriramesh and Verèie (2003), Tilson and Alozie (2004), Parkinson and Ekachai (2006), Newsom (2007), Curtin and Gaither (2007), and most recently, Freitag and Stokes (2009). Most take a case study approach to public relations as practiced in particular nation-states or regionally, with Asia-Australasia represented well in some (Culbertson & Chen, Sriramesh & Verèie, Freitag & Stokes), and Latin America in others (Tilson & Alozie, Turk & Scanlan, 2008).

Research on Africa, however, is generally absent or particularly under-represented with only a few texts including a case study or two on the region (Sriramesh & Verèie, Parkinson & Ekachai); one text, however, does provide extensive treatment of the continent with seven chapters (Tilson & Alozie) – and is the first comprehensive discussion of public relations in emerging democracies – while another includes case briefs of entries in the 2007 PRISM Awards of the Public Relations Institute of South Africa (Turk & Scanlan, 2008). Similarly, full discussion of the Middle East is lacking in most texts with only a few including a case study or two on the region (Culbertson & Chen, Sriramesh & Verèie, Parkinson & Ekachai, Turk & Scanlan, 2004). Further, with only a few exceptions (Tilson & Alozie, Sriramesh & Verèie), none explore the full socio-cultural-political-economic dimensions essential to an understanding of the environment that confronts and influences professional practice in nation-states and across regions.

### **Toward a new direction – alternative views, voices and research**

*“If you’re a bulky person and you go buy a Barbie-like dress just because it’s fashionable to be a Barbie, you won’t have the opportunity of wearing that dress. The dress would not be relevant to your reality, because your reality is simply too large” ’.*

Francis Nyamnjoh, Council for the Development of Social Science Research.

Just as with dresses, hats and other articles of clothing, one size does not fit all. The same holds true where definitions, paradigms, theories, models and realities are concerned as Nyamnjoh (Wasserman, 2009) observes from his former post as head of publications for CODESRIA in Dakar, Senegal as regards Western liberal models of journalism. The same may be said about various Western views that have dominated discourse on public relations in academic circles and practice. Such views, however, are increasingly being questioned as new perspectives emerge.

Historically, the US has shaped world perceptions of public relations as well as practice, education and research. US educators, in promoting public relations as a “management science” that “could deliver “strategic” communicators worthy of boardroom status ... in the UK, there was a discernable shift from PR’s more intuitive roots, expressed variously as “an art and a science” ... [and a] “public service” as well as toward a preference for quantitative research, which, while useful, “can only provide partial truths” that only qualitative approaches can supplement with “multiple truths, alternative visions and critical perspectives” (L’Etang, 2008, p. 249). Similarly, Tsetsura and Kruckeberg observe that “Russian public relations is heavily based on U.S. research, scholarship, and knowledge ... Russian public relations theory depend[s] heavily on U.S. theory” (2004, p. 178). Latin American researchers acknowledge allegiance to “U.S. leadership in public relations practices and scholarship” (Molleda & Ferguson, p. 329), particularly among Inter-American Confederation of Public Relations (CONFIARP) members. As such, then, “the dominant paradigm has focused on functional issues such as effectiveness, excellence, methods, evaluation, professionalism, PR roles and status”, with journals in the field – the *Journal of Communication Management* and the *Journal of Corporate Communication* in the UK, for example – reflecting that bias inasmuch as they “appear to connote functionalism” (L’Etang, 2008, p.

10, 250). Given a “management science” view, it is only natural for educators and practitioners to follow one another into the new ecology of social media and accountability with workshops and research that reflect a client-employer-exclusive-focus.

Moreover, US researchers have been largely responsible for developing the theoretical framework for the field (Pieczka, 1996, 2006), with some academics, such as Grunig and Hunt, attaining “almost iconic status”, with their texts having “a structuring influence in the field”, particularly in “the proselytizing of the rather heavenly ‘symmetrical communication’ model as part of their ‘four models’ of public relations practice” (L’Etang, 2008, p. 249) even as others have formulated – and published – related concepts ranging from “boundary spanning” to “systems theory”. This framework not only collectively constitutes the “bulk of the work published” in the field but skews worldviews to the point that “many non-US texts present a model of public relations development and typology based on US history and culture as though the American experience can sensibly describe and explain events in non-US settings” (ibid. p. 11). US dominance of published research, a reflection of the global Western footprint on scholarly dialogue generally, also may be a consequence of broader and deeper dynamics. As Nyamnjoh notes concerning the decidedly Western tilt of mass communication research and publication – “those decisions have very little to do with science, but more with the politics of scholarly production ... knowledge produced in the South might not always make its way to publication or public debate for various reasons – economic, political or otherwise” (Wasserman, 2009: 286).

Other voices, however, have begun to question traditional views of public relations and have advanced competing notions. Various definitions of the field, for example, now stand in clear opposition to more assertive, client-employer-focused perspectives. Since first emerging in the 1960s, the Latin American School of Public Relations, which “focuses on the interests of the community”, is gaining currency (Molleda & Ferguson, 2004, p. 329) with international congresses, such as those organized in Lima, Peru, by the University of San Martin de Porres in 2006 and 2008 including presentations on social responsibility (Tilson, 2006b).

That view, which at its core professes that “the profession’s ultimate purpose is to promote social progress and well-being, to protect human rights, and to meet people’s essential needs” (Molleda & Ferguson, p. 330), has been echoed in definitions formulated by various bodies from

the World Assembly of Public Relations— endorsed by 34 national public relations organizations as “a practice ... which serve[s] both the organization’s and the public’s interest” (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006, p. 7) – to the Middle East Public Relations Association, which considers public relations a “discipline that looks after reputation with the aim of earning understanding and support” (Curtin & Gaither, 2007, p. 4). Supporting those sentiments, Russian scholars, in developing “a competing philosophy” to US and European perspectives on public relations, argue that it is “an ideology of creating reputation, responsibility, and trust, rather than simply a method of gaining immediate profits” (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2004, p. 180). Professionals in South Africa contend that “fundamental to public relations ... is the establishment of mutual understanding between the organization on one hand and the various publics and general community on the other ... a conscious effort to provide information and create goodwill” (de Beer & Mer sham, 2004, p. 326).

Yet others have criticized “the historical foundations of PR’s theoretical models” as a “progressivist thesis ... a triumphalist story – ie. that public relations began ‘asymmetrically’ and ‘one-way’, in lies, flimflam and manipulation, but was eventually saved by its reformation into a practice based on science, negotiation and ethics” rooted in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century America (Brown, 2003: 230). The “historically precarious theory” of Grunig and Hunt ignores a discipline “deeply rooted in the rhetoric of antiquity”, rushing past such figures as St. Paul, whose public relations practice was not only ethical but unequalled in skill, and other early “practitioners” from non-Western cultures (ibid). To illustrate the growing disfavor in which the “four models” theory finds itself, some public relations texts – *Developing the Public Relations Campaign* (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2009), for example – have eliminated its discussion from subsequent editions. Yet others have found significant flaws in the list of generic principles “that could be used to set up global public relations practices” (Sriramesh & Verèie, 2003, p. 2) identified in research conducted by Grunig first in the US, Canada and the UK and subsequently in Slovenia; Slovenian professionals suggested adding a principle that had been notably absent on the list – “ethics ... as a necessary component of excellent public relations” (Grunig, Grunig & Verèie, 2004, p. 155).

Additionally, among the circle of *critical paradigm* voices are those who subscribe to a new model of international public relations practice “that embraces the interrelationships of culture, identity, and power”,

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and, which stands opposite “most Western approaches to ... practice ... built on a linear communication model ... of clear ... beginning and end points” (Curtin & Gaither, 2007, p. 204). In rejecting Marston’s traditional RACE acronym (Research, Action and Planning, Communication and Evaluation), adherents offer a *cultural-economic model* that “shifts the emphasis from the structures [of communicative enterprises such as public relations] themselves to the relationships between them and the meanings generated by and through these relationships” (ibid: 206). In such a view, the “creation of meaning [is] not ... an absolute created by producers and conveyed to audiences ... but a contested process among producers and consumers” with “culture at the heart of practice”, allowing for a “balance [of] the ethnocentric and polycentric approaches to practice” (ibid, p. 206-207). Underlying the model is a rejection of perspectives that “equate public relations success with contributions to the organizational bottom line” embedded within neoliberal political- economic thought (ibid, p. 205).

For those drawn to alternative perspectives of public relations, two areas for future research are promising. The first, corporate social responsibility (CSR), harkens back to earlier research (Bearden, 1981; Dennis, 1981-82; Sethi, 1982; Tilson & Vance, 1985; Mescon & Tilson, 1987) on US corporate philanthropy. Most recently, though, given the extent of corporate bad behavior amid the global financial meltdown, greater public demands for social responsibility and a growing interest in community-mindedness are refocusing attention on CSR. As Sorrell observes, “companies are under pressure as never before to explain their corporate social responsibility policy. They can expect short shrift if they fail to live up to those expectations” (2009, p. 38). In a study of public attitudes toward CSR practices, Wang and Anderson noted that “more corporations are becoming aware of the importance of CSR and actively engage in CSR practices such as corporate philanthropy” (2008, p. 1). Other research confirms that “corporate citizenship, governance and workplace practices account for more than 40 per cent of a company’s reputation” (The Boston College Center, 2008, p. 4) while other studies show a growing percentage of consumers in various nation-states (Brazil, India, Italy, etc.) more involved in “good causes” than two years ago (Galifianakis, 2008b, p. 4).

Anecdotal evidence suggests a greater interest in social responsibility and nonprofit organizations among university students in the US (Gladstone, 2008) even as higher education responds with CSR-related coursework and degree programs. For example, in the fall of 2009, St.

John's University in New York City launched a Master of Science in International Communication that includes required and elective courses on "a global engagement of contemporary and ongoing issues involving advocacy and human rights" (St. John's University, 2009). Yet other universities, such as the University of Leicester in England, are including units on public relations and CSR in their distance learning Master's degree program in Media and Communications (Tilson, 2009).

CSR also is beginning to populate conference programming as the keynote address of Harold Burson, founder and chair of Burson-Marsteller – "Corporations, Social Responsibility and Public Relations" – papers on CSR are included in PRSA's Educators Academy cumulative online listing of research presented at past conferences, its 2008 International Conference featured two presentations on service learning among the 12 selected for the Pedagogy Poster session, indicating student and faculty interest in community projects. Additionally, seven research papers on CSR were among those presented at IPR's 2009 conference. Such Master's and doctoral research is being conducted by "Globals" – a demographic in the US referred to as the "Millennials" that spans the generation born from 1982 to 2000, which surveys indicate are "the most civic-minded since the generation of the 1930s and 1940s" (Stone, 2009, p. 1E). Such young adults "because of the Internet ... the growth of study-abroad programs and ethnic diversity ... are closely attached to the world and want to make it a better place" (ibid, p. 2E). Published research attests to the "Globals" interest in social issues, ie. studies of CSR as a public relations strategy (Bauer, 2008) and government health education programs in Egypt (Abdulla, 2004).

### **Religion and public relations**

Another area of research that has been relatively unexplored but is now gaining more attention is the nexus of religion and public relations. Traditionally, most US public relations associations have largely ignored religion. For example, PRSA offers membership in various Professional Interest Sections but does not have a section on religion and has only more recently addressed religion in its programming, with a panel discussion on the impact of faith on global issues at the United Nations in January 2005 and a teleseminar on religious diversity and community relations in June 2005, both moderated by this author. The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

(AEJMC) Public Relations Division, the largest body of public relations educators in the world, has yet to include religion in its conference proceedings. The New York-based Religion Communicators Council – “an international interfaith association of religion communicators ... in print and electronic communication, marketing and in public relations” – however, regularly includes programming on religion and public relations at national conferences (Religion Communicators Council, 2009).

Religion and public relations also has been under-researched. A review of refereed faculty and student research at AEJMC Public Relations Division conferences from 1997 to 2008 failed to find any papers on religion and public relations. In a study of abstracts or articles published in the profession’s leading journals—*Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, and its predecessor, *Public Relations Research Annual*—from their inceptions through the year 2000, no identification of religion as a research topic was made per se, with only a 1992 public relations and religion themed issue of *Public Relations Review* reported (Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, & Jones, 2003); only three of the articles, however, focused on public relations and religion. The BledCom Symposia, which convenes public relations educators and practitioners annually in Slovenia, awarded its Special Prize for best new research this past July – sponsored with the Institute for Public Relations – to German researchers for their work on culture and public relations; however, in proposing an analytical platform for understanding corporate communication, no mention was made of the role of religion in society (Sievert & Porter, 2009).

Some research has begun to surface, including the first-ever analysis of religious tourism and public relations (Tilson, 2001) and of a religious public relations campaign (Tilson & Chao, 2002). Other studies include church public relations practices in 10<sup>th</sup> century England (Watson, 2007), medieval promotional campaigning and Glastonbury Abbey (Croft, Hartland & Skinner, 2008), religious public relations campaigning and tourism in Spain (Tilson, 2005, 2006a), public relations and Hindu communities in the US (Tilson & Venkateswaran, 2006) and public relations and religious diversity in the US (Tilson & Venkateswaran, 2004). Further, a special issue in early 2010 of *Fieldwork in Religion* (University of Lancaster, England), edited by Tilson and L’Etang, will include research on religion, public relations and culture.

If religion occupies as central a role in society as it would seem, public relations professionals should be as attentive to the role that faith traditions play in forming the cultural environment of communities as they are to language, customs, cultural distance, and other behavioral aspects as have advertising and marketing professionals (Mueller, 1996). Coup de Frejac has urged public relations practitioners to “adapt’ to publics who don’t speak your language, who don’t think the same way you do, who have different religions” (1999, p. 6). Sjöberg states even more emphatically that “in the present state of global unrest and low business credibility, all public relations professionals must – more than ever ... – learn about, understand and respect other cultures” (2002, p. 1). A key to focusing more attention on religion from a public relations perspective may lie in broadening traditional definitions of diversity to include faith traditions and their underlying principles and in gaining a greater appreciation of the nature and use of communication within such faith traditions. For example, the generic principles characterizing “excellent public relations applicable across cultures and political/economic systems” as posited by the International Association of Business Communicators Research Foundation includes “*Diversity Embodied in All Roles*” but defines such diversity as “both men and women in all roles, as well as practitioners of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds” (Verèie et al., 1996, P. 39) to the exclusion of religion.

Hon and Brunner (2000) observe that public relations research on diversity has been limited to race and gender; a fuller view of diversity, they note, should encompass the definition offered by Bhawuk and Triandis (1996) – “difference in ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, age, national origin, and cultural and personal perspectives” (cited in *ibid*: 312). In the wake of economic crises and loss of public trust, the public relations profession must rise to assert itself as an independent voice and a good steward of society. As employers and clients rush to embrace new media, value or the latest trend, accompanied by public relations practitioners, educators and associations reluctant to be left behind, the profession must decide to lead practice rather than follow it. While a degree of client-employer attentiveness is necessary, the inordinate attention given technology and accountability should be questioned by those who not only value public relations as independent counsel but who have concern for the public interest. As journalists decry the negative impact of social media on the quality of news and the gradual disappearance of

a free press as a “watchdog” of government and business, it is incumbent upon public relations professionals to step forward as the voices for authenticity, ethical conduct and social responsibility their field deserves and the social order needs.

The profession also must fully embrace multiculturalism if it truly is to have a global vision. Alternative voices must be heard and traditional views of theory and practice expanded. National and pan-regional associations – Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa, Federation of African Public Relations Association, the Institute of Public Relations (Ghana), the Public Relations Institute for South Africa, the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore, Institute of Public Relations Malaysia, and the Inter-American Confederation of Public Relations among others – can assist in supporting research and programming in this regard even as various publications, including this one, provide a further platform for scholarly dialogue. Collectively, we can find “some way out of here” toward communities that are civil, ethical and equitable for all peoples. Such a path will not only best serve the public relations profession and its employers globally but also the common good.

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# Do public relations in Africa use research? A comparison of public and private organizations in Ghana

By Kwesi Aggrey

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## Abstract

Research in public relations is not only for determining the theoretical boundaries of the discipline, but also for helping practitioners design and evaluate effective public relations strategies. Most scholars (Grunig, 1992; Cutlip et al, 2006; Austin and Pinkleton, 2001) allude to this fact. Cutlip et al (2006) and Lindenmann (2003) also emphasise a clear line of distinction between public relations as practiced in the government/public sector and the business/private sector. Private and public enterprises in Ghana are known to be quite different in the orientation of their organization and management, and these differences are likely also to influence their public relations practice as a whole and their use of research.

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**Key words:** public relations in Ghana, use of research in public relations, public relations in government, public relations in Africa, history of public relations in Ghana.

## Introduction:

The concept “research” is one that has frightened away many public relations practitioners for quite some time in the history of the development of the discipline as a profession. Theaker (2001) notes that until the early 1990s little more than a “gut-feeling” was considered an acceptable gauge of whether a public relations campaign had succeeded or not. People relied on their experience to tell what would work in a particular situation. For example, a study by Dr. Lloyd Kirban and his colleagues in 1983 found that more than half the practitioners expressed fear of their effectiveness being measured. Similarly, Pavlik (1987) noted that attempts at measuring the effectiveness of

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public relations over the years had proven quite elusive. In spite of these traditions in the practice of public relations, the Ketchum survey of 1988 was quite optimistic and had predicted that public relations research would grow in the 1990s.

Today, many public relations scholars place high premium on the use of research. Scholars such as Grunig (1992), Austin and Pinkleton (2001) and many others have made significant input on the subject. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2006), for example, stress that without research practitioners are limited to asserting that they know intuitively the effectiveness of their work. Only with valid research can they present and advocate proposals supported by evidence and theory. In his contribution to the research debate, Walter Lindenmann (2003) notes that research is the key to any successful public relations, communication and/or marketing effort. Not only in the business world but also in the non-profit and government sectors research is important. This apparently is making reference to an existing fact, that public relations is practiced both in the business and private sector as well as the government and non-profit world. Research efforts must be viewed as equally important in both the public and the private sector.

Many in public relations practice assume that the private sector, motivated by profit, is more concerned with research. The study on which this article is based therefore postulated that private sector enterprises in Ghana employ much more research in their public relations work than their counterparts in the public sector. It also thought that there would be a different goal orientation for the two sectors, namely a consensus goal orientation for the private enterprises and persuasion goal orientation for the public enterprises.

### **Early Development of Public Relations in Ghana**

It is difficult to pinpoint when the practice of public relations started in Ghana. Gyan (1991) notes that attempts at precisely locating when public relations commenced are often met with frustrations probably because of the initial lack of appreciation and even knowledge of the field. She argues that the beginnings of public relations in Ghana cannot be divorced from the country's colonial history, as virtually all key positions during that period were occupied by expatriates. This probably was because many Ghanaians had not acquired sufficient education and training at the time to qualify them for such positions, as suggested by Nukunya (1992). The expatriate-led civil service, accord-

ing to Gyan began to change , however, soon after independence as it began to employ Ghanaians as principal secretaries in the ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs).

The multi-national enterprises followed suit, and soon most companies found it necessary to have Ghanaians as go-betweens to link them with people in authority and in the ministries. Gyan thus emphasizes that it was the quest for a communications bridge between the big multi-nationals and the public and government agencies that brought about public relations practice in Ghana. Before this time, however, public relations in the MDAs, according to Gyan (1991), was carried out by the Information Services Department (ISD). The ISD recruited public relations practitioners mainly from the Ghana Institute of Journalism and some press houses, and gave them further training. Public relations then was invariably equated to journalism and understood as media relations only. Gyan argues that "it was thus the period when public relations' fluid functions and octopus nature of its responsibilities was either unknown or ignored"(1991, p. 25).

#### **The Place of Public Relations in Government/Public Sector vis-à-vis Business/Private Sector:**

Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) indicate that public relations in any organization dependent on profit must be cost-effective and part of the formula for successful competition. They argue that the profit imperative of business in the private sector makes the public relations work extremely demanding. Public relations in the private sector faces the challenge of global competition and the potential clash of cultures. For this reason these scholars (Cutlip et al, 2006) maintain that the public relations function in the private sector is subject to continuing evaluation with the ultimate aim of achieving the goals and objectives of management. Public relations in the business sector emphasizes sustained relationship with all relevant stakeholders and, as well, assists in the marketing function to attract and keep customers for the profit goal of the business. Thus, the competitive nature of business in the private sector makes for variety in the role and stature of public relations. Its place in the organization is often determined by top management's concept of its function.

It is argued that the same cannot be said of public relations in the government/public sector As Cutlip and his colleagues (2006) note, the overall goals of public relations in the public sector have at least three things in common: 1) informing constituents about the activities of a

government/public agency; 2) ensuring active cooperation in development programs as well as compliance with regulatory programs; 3) fostering citizens' support for established policies and programs. These goals are premised on two fundamental reasons, namely, that a democratic government must report its activities to its citizens; and that effective government administration requires active citizen participation and support. But in spite of these reasons, Brian McNair (1996) argues that much of public relations in the government/public sector remains hidden from public view. He notes:

... aware that information and access to it is a power resource, governments have become enthusiastic custodians of a vast machinery for suppressing, censoring, and at times falsifying information which, it might be thought, the citizenry of a democratic state has a right to receive in a relatively unadulterated form (McNair, 1996, p. 39).

The implication here is that information management in the public/government sector is not necessarily based on the principle of mutuality, where the concerns of stakeholders are taken into consideration but the expediency of the organization's goals is what matters. Thus Cutlip et al (2006) conclude that often government public relations programs deal with one-way communication directed to constituents. In Ghana, a policy document issued by the Information Services Department (I.S.D) of the Ministry of Information and National Orientation<sup>1</sup>, provides that it is the duty of the practitioner to present the Ministry's policies to the public and seek to ensure that they are understood; and that, no matter the opposition, the practitioners' attitude must be one of firm support and helpful explanation of the ministerial line.

The document concedes, however, that the practitioner's job is often quite difficult as s/he has to work to advance the aims of a party in power without necessarily displaying any partisanship. Perhaps it is for this reason that Garnett (1992) asserts that because government decisions and actions often affect more people and with greater consequences, communicating in government tends to be more important and often more difficult than communicating in business. Some, such as Osborne and Gaebler (1992), advocate a new approach to the process of public relations in government relations with the public. They suggest that activities in government business must be carried out as in competitive business. Their reason is that today people who deal with government expect to be valued as customers and treated as such.

### **Data Collection methodology**

A survey method was used to conduct the study, with a 22-item self-responded questionnaire used in collecting the data. The instrument was pre-tested at the University of Education, Winneba [a public agency,] and Greenland Hotel [a private enterprise]) to test its reliability. The study's population was narrowed down to public relations units/ departments in public and private enterprises in Accra only. Accra was chosen because, as the national capital, virtually all organizations, both public and private, have either a headquarters or a branch there. Although a survey design was used for the study, the two categories of organizations involved in the study, namely the Association of Ghana Industries (AGI), and Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) featured in Ghana's 2007 budget statement were purposively selected. The AGI was chosen because it is the largest of the trade associations in the private sector. The MDAs were selected because they represent the core of subventioned organizations in Ghana. Forty-seven out of a total of 59 practitioners (in organizations) responded to the questionnaires administered. This included 30 respondents in the public sector and 17 respondents in the private sector.

### **Findings**

#### **Perceptions of the functions of public relations**

Although a much larger report based on the data was compiled, given the limits of a journal article, only a few of the key findings of the study have been discussed in this article. The focus is on organizations' (practitioners) views about public relations and using research in public relations. Various scholars and practitioners have varying opinions about the persuasive image-building function of public relations. For example Herman and Chomsky (1988) have argued that public relations and the mass media in general are tools used by governments and corporations in the manufacture of consent. Others, such as Grunig and his colleagues (1992), suggest that dialogue is the best model. For this reason respondents were asked to provide their views on a likert scale on the assertion that PR is about building and maintaining beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (a more dialogical approach). In the public sector, there were 29 (96.7 per cent) respondents who "strongly agreed" and 1 (3.3 per cent) who simply "agreed". The situation was not different in the private sector, as 16 (94.1 per cent) indicated "strongly agree," and only one respondent indicated an "agree" response to the statement.

**Whether public relations requires research or does not:**

The IPRA (1994) Gold Paper No. 11 bemoaned the lack of research by practitioners in the U.K. The paper indicates that practitioners surveyed in the IPRA Gold Paper No. 11, among others, used “intuition and professional judgement” in the evaluation of programs. To find out what the perception was in Ghana, respondents were asked to indicate their views on the suggestion that public relations work does not require research. The response pattern was quite interesting. In the public sector, 28 (93.3 per cent) practitioners indicated that public relations requires research. One (3.3 per cent) said it did not require research, while there was also another 3.3 per cent “no response”. A similar pattern of response is repeated in the private sector where 14 (82 per cent) of the respondents indicated that public relations requires research, and only 3 (18 per cent) indicated it did not require research. Not surprisingly, therefore, all 47 respondents in the study also indicated their support for another suggestion that research be made an integral part of any public relations activity. In the public sector 25 (83.3 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed with the idea that research be made an integral part of public relations, while 5 (16.7 per cent) of them simply agreed to the suggestion. Responses from the private sector however varied slightly. Here, 10 (58 per cent) strongly agreed, while 7 (41.2 per cent) also responded in the “agree” category.

**Rating of organization’s use of research:**

Since one of the objectives of the study was to find out whether or not research informs public relations practice in Ghana, respondents were asked to indicate their views on how they rate the use of research in their organizations. The responses are shown in the tables below:

**Table 1a: How respondents in the public sector rate the use of PR research.**

<b>Rate of Research Usage</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very high	7	23.3
High	8	26.7
Moderate	13	43.3
Low	2	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As shown in Table 1a above, as many as 50 per cent respondents in the public sector indicated they relied either “very highly” or “highly” on the use of research. Forty-three per cent indicated “moderate” use of research, while 7 per cent of the respondents indicated “low use of research”. Unlike the public sector, the response rate in the private sector, as shown in Table 1b below, showed 35.3 per cent of respondents indicating “high” reliance on research. Following with 23.5 per cent apiece were respondents who indicated “very high” and another 23.5 per cent indicated “moderate” reliance on research, while nearly 18 per cent of the respondents indicated “low” use of research.

**Table 1b: How respondents in the private sector rate the use of PR research.**

Rate of Research Usage	Frequency	Percent
Very high	4	23.5
High	6	35.3
Moderate	4	23.5
Low	3	17.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Dominant research activities that characterize practitioners’ work:**

The study sought to find out which activities practitioners specifically selected for research in their public relations work. A variety of activities/methods were listed in the questionnaire enabling respondents to rank the activities in order of the amount of research each activity involved.

The ranking of the importance of activities that engage research was measured by the SPSS calculation of the mean ranking by all of the respondents in the sample for each of the items such as “media content analysis” presented in the questionnaire. The calculation measured the ranking with a score between “1” and “2”. Thus, the higher the average ranking, the closer to “1” in the calculation. The mean of individual rankings are as shown in the Tables 2a and 2b below:

In the public sector, as shown in Table 2a, the rankings showed that “media content analysis” was the research activity that most frequently engaged the attention of practitioners. It had a mean ranking value of 1.20, and was followed by “news clipping/clip files” with 1.30. The next were “interviews,” “field reports,” and “surveys” with values of 1.40, 1.43, and 1.47 respectively in that order. The rest have negligible values, with the least value of 1.93 taken by “experiments”.

**Table 2a: Rankings of activities that engage the research attention of respondents' most in the public sector**

Research Activity	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Media content analyses	30	1	2	1.20	0.41
News clippings/clip files	30	1	2	1.30	0.47
Interviews	30	1	2	1.40	0.50
Field reports	30	1	2	1.43	0.50
Surveys	30	1	2	1.47	0.51
Professional/expert contacts	30	1	2	1.53	0.51
Internet and library searches	30	1	2	1.60	0.50
Focus group discussions	30	1	2	1.63	0.49
Experiments	30	1	2	1.93	0.25

On the other hand, the private sector ranked “news clippings/clip files” and “surveys” as the most popular research activities that engage the attention of practitioners. As shown in Table 2b below, these activities share the same mean and standard deviation values of 1.41 and 0.51 apiece. The others, as indicated in Table 2b, also engage their attention, but not as strongly as the top two. Here again, “experiments” occupies the very bottom of the table with a mean value of 1.94.

**Table 2b: Rankings of research activities that engage attention of respondents in private sector**

Research Activity	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
News clipping/clip files	17	1	2	1.41	0.51
Surveys	17	1	2	1.41	0.51
Interviews	17	1	2	1.53	0.51
Field report	17	1	2	1.53	0.51
media content analyses	17	1	2	1.59	0.51
Internet and library searches	17	1	2	1.65	0.49
Professional/expert contacts	17	1	2	1.71	0.47
Focus group discussion	17	1	2	1.76	0.44
Experiments	17	1	2	1.94	0.24

**Public relations activities that engage practitioners' attention most**

Related to the research variables that engaged respondents' attention were also the specific public relations activities that respondents dedicated most research efforts to. In the public sector, the priority areas of research were quite scattered. Media relations and issues management

ranked highest with 18.6 per cent saying these attracted most time and attention. Public issues campaigns is most important for only 12.9 per cent and internal communication is very important for only 11.4 per cent. Surprisingly, activities such as corporate-community relations and consumer relations are not attracting much time and attention in the public sector. Government offices do not seem to be conscious of the need to build better relations with the public.

**Table 3a Public Sector: Areas of public relations research attracting most time and attention**

<b>Type of Public Relations Research</b>	<b>Percentage who say this research activity attracts most time and attention</b>
Media relations research	18.6 %
Issues management research	18.6 %
Public issues campaigns and debates	12.9 %
Internal communication	11.4 %
Corporate-community relations	10.0 %
Speech writing	8.60 %
Events management	8.60 %
Consumer relations	7.00 %
Investor relations	4.30 %

In the private sector, consumer relations was ranked highest with a mean value of 24.2 per cent, while corporate-community relations followed up closely with a value of 18.2 per cent. Interestingly, media relations occupied the third position and shared this position with internal communication and investor relations with mean values of 12.1 per cent each. The other activities that followed with values less than 10 per cent were speech writing and events management, with 6.1 per cent each. This is followed by public issues campaign and debates, crises and issues management, fundraising with 3.0 per cent each. Obviously, in the private sector, building good relations with the public is much more important.

**Table 3b Private Sector: Areas of public relations research attracting most time and attention**

<b>Type of Public relations Research</b>	<b>Percentage who say this research activity attracts most time and attention</b>
Media relations research	12.1%
Issues management research	3.0 %
Public issues campaigns and debates	3.0 %
Internal communication	12.1 %
Corporate-community relations	18.2 %
Speech writing	6.1 %
Events management	6.1 %
Consumer relations	24.2 %
Investor relations	12.1 %
Fundraising	3.0 %

**Do agencies do their own research or do they seek the assistance of outside consultancies**

Kwansah-Aidoo and Aggrey (2008) note that the two main issues of importance in the debate about the role of research in public relations are: (1) who actually conducts the research and their location in the organization, and (2) the stage of the public relations process at which research is carried out.

With regard to the issue of who conducts the research, in the public sector, 21 (70 per cent) respondents said they used both in-house and consultancy research services. A quarter (23.3 per cent), however, relied on in-house research services only, while only one respondent depended on consultancy, and yet another said "none of them".

In the private sector, a greater percentage 10 (58.8 per cent) said they relied on both in-house and consultancy research services. The rest, 41.2 per cent, said they used in-house research only.

The main difference is the tendency of the private sector to carry out its own research rather than depend on consultancy services.

**Table 4a Public Sector: Who conducts the research**

<b>What agency conducts the research</b>	<b>Percentage who say this agency the research</b>
Both in-house and consultancy	70.0 %
In-house only	23.3 %
In-house only	6.7 %

**Table 4b Private Sector: Who conducts the research**

<b>What agency conducts the research</b>	<b>Percentage who say this agency the research</b>
Both in-house and consultancy	58.8 %
In-house only	41.2 %

**At what phase of public relations is research done**

On the question of the phase of the public relations process at which research is carried out, a little more than half, 16 (53.3 per cent) respondents in the public sector said their research took place at all three phases of the public relations process. About one-third, 11 (36.7 per cent) said theirs mostly occurred at the planning phase, while two (6.7 per cent) respondents had theirs mostly at the implementation phase, and the remainder, 3.3 per cent indicated the evaluation phase.

The situation in the private sector was quite different, as slightly more than half, nine (52.9 per cent) respondents, indicate that their research takes place mostly at the planning phase and not at "all phases" while about a third of respondents, five (29.4 per cent), said theirs take place at all the phases. The rest of the percentage distribution was as follows: two (11.8 per cent) respondents chose the evaluation phase while the remaining, 5.9 per cent chose the implementation phase.

In both public and private sector public relations, the emphasis is on the planning phase. Surprisingly, there is little emphasis on evaluation.

**Table 5a Public Sector: At what stage of the public relations process is research carried out**

Stages of public relations process at which research is carried out	Percentage who say research is carried out at a given stage
Planning stage	36.7 %
Implementation stage	6.7 %
Evaluation stage	3.3 %
During all three stages	53.3 %

**Table 5b Private Sector: At what stage of the public relations process is research carried out**

Stages of public relations process at which research is carried out	Percentage who say research is carried out at a given stage
Planning stage	52.9 per cent
Implementation stage	5.9 per cent
Evaluation stage	11.8 per cent
During all three stages	29.4 per cent

**State of budgetary allocation for research:**

A study in the U.K by the International Public Relations Association (1994) found that 75 per cent of public relations practitioners spent less than five per cent of their total budget on evaluation. In this study, therefore, we speculated that a similar or only slightly improved situation would prevail in Ghana. Respondents were thus asked to indicate whether lack of sufficient budgetary allocation was a factor in the low level of research in their organizations. As is indicated in Tables 6a and 6b below, both sectors feel that insufficient budgetary allocation is a major factor in the lack of research in their agencies.

In the public sector the feeling that low budgetary support causes low levels of research is particularly strong with 26 (86.7 per cent) respondents affirming this. Only three in the public sector (10 per cent) disagreed with the assertion that low budgetary support is a significant factor in the low levels of research.

Responses in the private sector, however, were more divided in

**Table 6a public sector: Low budgetary allocation as a factor in research emphasis**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly agree	13	43.3
Agree	13	43.3
Strongly Disagree	1	3.3
Disagree	2	6.7
Do not know	1	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 6b private sector: Low budgetary allocation as a factor in research emphasis**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly agree	4	23.5
Agree	4	23.5
Strongly Disagree	1	5.9
Disagree	7	41.2
Do not know	1	5.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100.0</b>

on the view that low budgetary support influences the low level of research. Some eight (47 per cent) agreed that low budget is a factor while another eight (47 per cent) disagree that low budgetary support is the major factor in the lack of research activity. In the case of the private sector, it is not clear, if lack of budget is not a major factor, just what are the major factors influencing emphasis on research. The only clue is that, in general, the private sector is more convinced that they should be doing research and that it should be done in-house as part of their regular activities.

#### **Organizations' (practitioners) goal of public relations research**

According to Grunig (1992), the activities of organizations are strongly influenced by the worldview that defines the goals of these

activities. He argues that two main worldviews tend to characterize public relations practice, namely, the asymmetrical and symmetrical worldviews. In the asymmetrical worldview, organizations attempt to change the behavior of their publics without any attempt at changing their own behavior. In the symmetrical worldview, organizations operate on the principle that they get what they want when they give up what they want, that is, that they accept the influence of their publics. Based on these assumptions, the study sought to elicit respondents' views on their organizations' goal of research.

As Table 7a indicates, in the public sector, slightly more than half of respondents (56.6 per cent) indicated that their goal of research was building mutual understanding between the organization and its publics. More than a quarter (26.7 per cent) also said their goal of research was to help their publics to understand their organizations better. The rest, slightly less than a quarter (16.7%) also said their public relations research was aimed at enhancing the credibility of their organizations

**Table 7a Public Sector: Goals of the research**

<b>Goals of the research</b>	<b>Percentage who say they do research for a given goal</b>
Building mutual understanding between the organization and the public	56.6 per cent
Help their publics understand Their organizations better	26.7 per cent
Enhancing the credibility Of their organization	16.7 per cent

In the private sector the emphasis on a symmetrical world view and goals is even stronger. A larger majority, 13 of 17 (76.4 per cent), indicated their goal as building mutual understanding between their organisations and its publics. Of the remaining respondents, two (11.8 per cent) said their goal was helping their publics to understand the organization better, while the other two (11.8 per cent) indicated "enhancing the credibility of the organization" as the goal of their

**Table 7b Private Sector: Goals of the research**

<b>Goals of the research</b>	<b>Percentage who say they do research for a given goal</b>
Building mutual understanding between the organization and the public	76.6 per cent
Help their publics understand their organizations better	11.8 per cent
Enhancing the credibility of their organization	11.8 per cent

research. This supports the view that private sector organizations are more concerned about the services to their publics.

#### **Discussion of the significance of the findings**

Generally, findings in this study do not support the view that public relations practitioners in private enterprises in Ghana employ more research in their public relations work than their counterparts in the public sector. In the first place, there is no evidence of major difference in the way practitioners in the two sectors recognize the need for research in public relations. As their responses show, over 90 per cent in each sector indicate that the image-building function of public relations requires research. Over 80 per cent in each sector strongly agree that the nature of public relations requires research. The trend is further supported by respondents' call for research being made an integral part of any public relations activity. All respondents indicated support for this suggestion. Perhaps the only difference was the percentage difference between the "strongly agree" and "agree" responses in the two sectors. The margin was much wider in the public sector (83.3 and 41.2 per cent). Interestingly, these outcomes appear to be at variance with what was cited in the IPRA (1994) Gold Paper survey in the U.K. The possible explanation is that there is a different socio-cultural environment of public relations in Ghana.

The findings also show that the rate of research usage in the two sectors is relatively high, on the average, as indicated in Tables 1a and 1b above. The cumulative percentage of "very high", "high" and

“moderate” responses for the two sectors were 93 per cent for the public sector and 81 percent for the private sector. Much less clear, however, is the rationale for a rather high level of use of research. In some of the discussions of the reasons for research discovered in this study but not presented in full here, the rationale for doing research appears rather general and unrelated to the actual uses of research, especially in the responses of the public sector. It is not clear to many practitioners just what are the benefits and advantages of research. For example, there were responses such as “research gives clues to solutions,” “research measures target objectives,” “research helps build organizations,” among others. This response pattern corroborates DeFleur and Dennis’ (1998) assertion that the motivations of proprietary public relations research and the reasons for usage by people in the field are often difficult to ascertain.

There was, however, a marked difference between the two sectors on the issue of public relations activities that engage practitioners’ research attention most. In the public sector, media relations and crises and issues management were jointly ranked highest and were followed by public issues campaign and debates. In contrast, the highest ranked activity in the private sector is consumer relations, which is one of the least ranked in the public sector. This is followed by corporate-community relations. What could possibly account for the difference? Perhaps it might be explained by the following factors:

- (1) Since nearly half of the organizations sampled in the private sector were manufacturing firms which produce tangible products, it is reasonable to speculate that the nature of their work requires that they have frequent interaction with consumers of their products and gain familiarity with the dynamics of the market. Hence consumer relations are more important in the private sector.
- (2) It can also be reasoned – though cautiously – that once there is a high performance of research in the areas of consumer relations and corporate-community relations, other things being equal, the private sector would experience fewer crises and would have to expend less effort managing such crises.
- (3) On the contrary, organizations sampled in the public sector indicated provision of public service policy as the purpose of their organizations. Such a service invariably affects a broad spectrum of the Ghanaian population; and perhaps

the most feasible way for dispensing information regarding such a service and receiving feed back is through the media (Garnett 1992, Ward, 2003). This may explain the importance of media relations in the public sector.

- (4) Also, dealing with relatively larger publics, as the public sector does, organizations are certainly more likely to encounter misunderstanding and crises than with smaller publics such as consumers of a particular line of products as in the private sector. This may account for the importance of crises and issues management in the public sector.

The respondents in the public and private sectors indicate quite different research methods and research emphases. The public sector prefers media content analysis while for the private sector surveys and news clippings/clip files are more important. This ties in well with the views of Brian McNair (1996) and Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2006). McNair alludes to information management as the major preoccupation of public relations practitioners in the government/public sector. Perhaps it is because practitioners in this sector are perpetually engaged in finding out how government messages have fared in the media and what the citizens' reactions that caused media content analysis to be ranked so high. On the other hand, Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) have indicated that the profit imperative of business in the private sector requires public relations to focus on clients/customer behavior, and market trends. This pattern of organizational behavior lends itself to survey studies as indicated by Babbie (1992). He notes that, "surveys are... excellent vehicles for measuring attitudes and orientations in a large population." Hence the probable reason for being ranked as such in the private sector (Babbie, 1992, p. 262.)

The response pattern regarding organizations' goal of research shows that more respondents in the private sector, 76.4 per cent, than in the public sector, 56.6 per cent, carry out their research based on the principle of mutuality. That is, the goal of their research is to build mutual understanding between the organizations and their publics. Nonetheless, the trend in the goal of research is the same in the two sectors given the fact that, in each sector, respondents who indicated support for "building mutual understanding between our organization and our publics" were more than those who chose the other options. What this suggests is that in both sectors, the majority of practitioners develop their research strategies with a symmetrical mindset of facilitating negotiation and compromise with their publics.

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Grunig (1992) notes that high performing organizations tend to stay close to their customers, employees, and other strategic constituencies. Perhaps the issue of concern here is that nearly 43 percent of respondents in the public sector chose options that are synonymous with asymmetrical models. In spite of the many "beautiful" things that Miller (1978) has said about the asymmetrical model, Grunig is of the view that the model steers practitioners towards unethical and socially irresponsible public relations.

Another point of divergence was respondents' views about the stage of the public relations process where they carried out their research. In the private sector close to 53 percent indicate that their research takes place mostly at the planning phase of the process, as against 70 per cent in the public sector who did theirs at "all phases" of the process. Perhaps the obvious question that one should ask with regard to the trend in the private sector is why there is so little emphasis on research in the implementation and evaluation phases? The lack of emphasis on evaluation can be worrisome in view of the fact that public relations research should focus on the entire process as suggested by Lindenmann (2003.) Aronoff and Baskin (1983, p. 179) support the same view when they said, "...the research function overlaps the planning, action and evaluation functions. It is an interdependent process that once set in motion, has no beginning or end." Even in the public sector, the 30 per cent who chose options other than "all phases" implies a challenge to improve the public relations profession and to improve education for good public relations.

The response pattern on the issue of low corporate budgetary support as the reason for low research in public relations is also worth commenting on. In the public sector, there was overwhelming support, 87 per cent, for the view that low budget accounts for limited research. In the private sector, however, the opinion was divided with equal percentages in favor and against the view that low budget explains low research. The difference in opinion in the private sector on one hand confirms Tymson and Lazar's (2006) observation that cost and lack of knowledge in how to conduct research are inhibiting factors in the use of research in public relations. On the other hand, one can also speculate that the profit imperative of business in the private sector, as Cutlip and his colleagues argue (2006), encourages some private sector organizations to integrate the required inputs for research, including sufficient budgetary allocation, into public relations planning.

In the public sector, where demands on government/state resources are quite high, it may be more difficult to support requests for budget allocations for research. There may also be a lack of planning and clarity in the public relations strategy of the public sector. On the one hand the public sector may be convinced that research is important and there was a relatively high level of the use of research, but the conviction that research is necessary is not clear enough to motivate efforts to obtain the budgetary allowance necessary for it.

In general, in both public and private sectors, the contradictions in the responses suggest that public relations practice in Ghana needs to clarify its strategies and the rationale for research.

### **Conclusion**

The present study has been exploratory, one of the first of its type in Ghana and in Africa in general. The study opens up many questions that need to be more thoroughly investigated. In spite of the exploratory and provisional nature of the data presented here, the findings lead to the conclusions that no significant difference exists between public enterprises and the private enterprises in the use of research in their public relations practice. Findings also do not support the hypothesis that the goal of public relations research in the private sector is consensus building as against persuasion in the public sector. The findings do show that the dominant research method employed in each sector differs. Media content analysis is more important in the public sector and surveys and news clippings/clip files are more important in the private sector.

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1. Source: A dissertation submitted to the School of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, by K. Aggrey in 2008.

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# The role of conspicuous consumption and advertising in upward social mobility in Uganda.

By John B. Munyambibi Tumisiime

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## Abstract

Many studies have shown that people seeking upward social mobility use conspicuous consumption to communicate an image of attractive social identity to significant others. This study of the life histories of twenty middle-class youth in Kampala, Uganda, who are active in cycling and soccer sports clubs, shows that they do choose clothing, equipment and other forms of consumption to gain social acceptance. Conspicuous consumption, however, forms part of other strategies of upward mobility such as education and personal discipline. Middle-class youth in Kampala admit to being influenced by advertising in their consumption, but most learn to resist advertising to fit their financial resources. Media use, however, is important for getting the social knowledge and skills necessary for upward social mobility.

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**Key words:** Conspicuous consumption, social identity, upward social mobility, advertising, Uganda, sports clubs in Uganda, media use for social competence.

## Introduction:

As Europeans occupied Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth century they brought with them a system of social status and socio-economic power. For the Europeans this was the gift of civilization. For Africans this was a new context of struggle to create a situation of well-being for their families and communities. Africans were brought into this system of status and power mainly through the educational system established during the colonial period and expanded after independence. Survival and well-being also meant getting positions in the colonial governmental system of indirect rule or getting jobs in the colonial administrative and development organizations. It also meant

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learning to sell products or labor in an open market. With independence the colonial masters have been replaced by an African governing elite with modernizing values, but generally the system of status and power has continued.

The logic underlying this system of status and power was that human life could be improved by superior technical capacity, professional training, and by organizational and communication coordination. But the most visible symbols of this capacity are the forms of consumption—using material things to gain competence and consolidate status and power. The people perceived the power and capacity of the colonial occupiers in terms of the housing and conveniences they used, their food and drink, the quality of their clothing, the automobiles and transportation at their disposal and especially their use of media. It was evident to all that those who had higher social status and greater authority and political-economic power also had more items of consumption and better “quality” items of consumption. Invariably, the higher the status, for example, the better the quality and location of the housing.

In the British colonial occupation of Africa, Uganda was considered the “pearl of Africa”, a promising model of what could be achieved in Africa. The British found the people of the future Uganda remarkably open and accepting of the British culture, the British educational system, the British economic production and status system (Mamdani, 1976; Ssekamwa, 1997). It was not by chance, for example, that the British located in Kampala one of its premier institutions of learning, Makerere University College, the only tertiary level educational institution in East Africa in the late colonial period. Not surprisingly, the British style of life, consumption and upward mobility became particularly important for the people of Uganda (Kabwegyere, 1974, 1995).

### **Conspicuous consumption as communicative symbols**

The items of consumption such as a good automobile or all of the means of rapid communication—satellite dishes, powerful computers, the latest Blackberry—are utilitarian “tools” for gaining access to information about how the system is working, but they are also communicative symbols of capacity and political-economic power. Just to see a person wearing a particular kind of clothing tells me much about their social status, authority and technical capacities without my having to inquire directly. If one knows the symbolic value of these items, one can acquire them to tell others who I think I am, how I would like

others to treat me and what I can do for them. The relationship can be a profitable communicative means for all parties. Every material possession and tool a person may have is a communicative symbol that is conditioning the reaction of others to me.

Underlying this approach to explaining conspicuous consumption is role-identity theory, especially as that has been developed by Stryker (1968, 1980, 1987; Stryker & Serpe, 1982) and Burke (1991; Stets & Burke, 2000). This theory views individuals as making choices, but that, at the same time, being constrained by the social structure and situational interaction in which they are acting. According to Stryker (1968), these roles are given by the social structure, although there is a constant process of social "structuration", that is, creating new patterns of social action by interacting individuals (Giddens, 1986). Within the role lie the meanings and expressions associated with the role itself and its performance (Stets & Burke, 2000). A "meaning" is defined as the understanding of what something "is for" and how it relates to all other objects in a culture. The clothing that a cyclist wears is to tell others how his or her social status is related to the whole socio-political-economic system of a nation. These meanings are the content of the identity and serve as a standard or reference for a person, defining "who I am", what to expect of myself and how I expect others to respond to me. Individual actors tend to choose behaviors that are consistent with the meanings in their identity standards (Burke, 1991). To predict how a person will behave in a structure of upward mobility such as that found in Uganda we need to discover how that person defines and reveals in discourse his or her identity (Burke, 1980; Burke & Tully, 1977).

Marketing and advertising researchers have discovered a correspondence between social identities and particular material products. The particular meanings that are associated with the consumption or "using up" of material products such as clothing, transportation or housing are transferred to the social identity. I am, in a social context, what I consume. The correspondence between a product and the identity depends on the symbolic and action relevance of the object. A study of Shavitt and Nelson (2000) showed that symbolic relevance exists when it reinforces an important element of that identity. For example, an attitude toward a sports shoe is relevant to the consumer's sport identity if he or she perceives that an aspect of the shoe reflects certain values and capacities of the person adopting that identity.

Youth in particular develop relationships with sports (for example, soccer or cycling) and with material items such as the quality of sports equipment both to shape their expressed identity and also to gain the esteem from others that their sports clubs and teams can provide. I define myself as better if the quality of my equipment is considered better by others.

Material objects of consumption become particularly important in contexts of relatively fluid social structure, especially when new societies such as found in Africa are taking shape. People communicate who they are, what they want to achieve or can achieve or what they will do for others largely through items of material consumption. Thorsten Veblen (1912), in his classic study, brought out the “conspicuous”, intended communicative value of consumption. This has been further developed by Bourdieu (1984) in his analysis of the use of commodities for social distinction. T. Burke, in his study, *Lifebuoy men, lux women: commodification, consumption and cleanliness in modern Zimbabwe* (1996), has shown well how consumption is used in modernizing African societies to communicate upward mobile identity.

Consumption, the “using up” of material items for my purposes, has various communicative qualities. First of all, to have these items communicates a sense of personal empowerment—the feeling that I can achieve particular goals in a given context. To have and use them correctly also communicates to others economic, cultural and especially social power. It says that I am a member of a group that has this power and can achieve things. This makes me useful to others and will give me stronger bargaining power in dealing with others. Thirdly, using consumables conspicuously tells others that I am part of a particular communal group that has certain values, loyalties, funds of knowledge, history, and personal connections. People can trust me because my symbolic tastes and consumption tell them that I share their values and I am one of them. Fourthly, consumption communicates a person’s aspirations, what one would like to accomplish in life. One consumes in a way that is not simply enjoying the present, but in a way that mobilizes for the future. For example, short-run hedonistic consumption is often focused on immediate pleasures whereas consumption which gains skills for a higher status in the future looks beyond the enjoyment of the present.

### **Upward social mobility in Uganda**

Education is of absolute centrality in the status and income structure in Uganda as in other parts of Africa because the industrial production and social service opportunities are so limited. The missionaries approached the people through schools. The recruitment of lower-level staff in the colonial government was also carried out mainly through the schools. Later, the independence governments measured their success largely through attempts to make primary and, to some extent, secondary education universally available. Progress in health, productivity, involvement in the formal economic sector and democratic participation is seen as related to the levels of education. In African culture level of education becomes a key factor in access to life opportunities, and it is taken for granted that the higher the level of education the higher the level of upward social mobility. Closely related to education is the good fortune of having a close personal "mentor" that provides informal, "empowering" educational guidance on how to "get into" the system and grasp the opportunities to work one's way up.

A second factor is occupation and income. Because of the low level of industrial development in Africa, occupations are found largely in provision of services such as health, education, and government. The higher the level in the administration of these services, usually the higher the status and the income.

A third factor in upward mobility is rural or urban residence and the size of the urban context in which one lives. The lowest level of status and income is semi-subsistence "peasant" farming. Since the colonial occupation placed its seat of government in the dominant city, residence in the city and in sections of the city that approximate the highest levels of westernization as that has been introduced in the particular country is regarded as the highest status.

A fourth factor is the degree of access to involvement with the industrialized countries in terms of education, access to information sources, use of products from the industrialized countries, visiting and residence, and other acquaintance with the industrialized world.

A fifth factor is degree of access to political-economic power and the resources of that power through clientelistic systems of neopatrimonial government. The closer one can get to the top of favorable access to clientelistic systems, the more likely that one's upward mobility will be favored.

Finally, the earlier in the colonial occupation of the region that a particular family gained access to any of the above factors, the greater the

resources of the person for upward mobility today. Acutally “moving up” depends on being able to communicate to the gatekeepers of upward mobility that one is capable of functioning well in the next rung up the ladder, and this capacity to communicate depends on the understanding of consumption as a symbol of agreement with the values of the culture of upward mobility. One must communicate that one is willing to play the game and accept the values of the contemporary socio-political-economic system of Africa.

All of these factors are present to the person who has skill in upward mobility.

### **The role of media and specifically advertising in upward mobility**

The mass media have learned to attract audiences by telling stories, whether this be news, music, drama or documentary. Stories are largely about the success of heroes in difficult circumstances, the narratives of upward mobility in a context which has importance for a larger society.

An advertisement is the attempt to link a product with success in life, and, as much as is valid, as a cause of that success. Every advert tells a story of success even when it is a matter of a few seconds.

### **How to study the role of consumer symbolism: The importance of sports clubs in upward mobility in Uganda**

A problem in studying the role of the symbolic aspects of consumption in upward mobility and the influence of the media and specifically advertising in this is that the inspiration toward upward mobility is an enormously diffuse experience. Hundreds of forms of consumer symbolism may be influencing aspirations in the life of a person. For various reasons, sports clubs offer a particularly focused context comprehending nearly all of the major factors in consuming for upward mobility in a way that involves media and advertising. This is particularly true in Uganda. The British liked to say that the success of the empire was rooted in the playing fields of rugby and other sports. There, young men (and later young women) learned the physical and mental mobilization, organizational coordination and teamwork communication, competitive combat, how to make the breaks that would turn the fortunes of the game - and, not least, how to use the uniforms and other paraphernalia of the sport to gain maximum acceptance in the team. Sports clubs are of particular importance in the social life of Uganda, and for this reason the research was focused on two types of

sports clubs, cycling and soccer.

A wide variety of sports were introduced in Uganda initially for colonial administrators, their families and missionaries--soccer, netball, cricket, lawn tennis, golf, boxing, badminton, etc. Soccer was introduced in 1897 and spread in all schools, becoming a sport for all (Ssekamwa, 1997). In 1924 secondary schools were opened for sons of senior chiefs, and sports such as lawn tennis, rugby, golf and hockey became part of the life of these schools. After independence the governments strongly supported the development of sports. Both Idi Amin (1971-1979) and Museveni promoted sports and played soccer publicly. Cycling was started as a public sport by Indians, but was taken over by Ugandans after the expulsion of Indians in 1972.

Participation in sports is closely associated with membership and organization of sports clubs. Private clubs charge fees and have facilities for training, sports equipment available for members and, in some cases, libraries with sports magazines, newspapers and books, television sets linked to satellites, DVDs on sports, and snack shops where members meet to share experiences, watch media and make friendly contacts. Some private clubs are quite exclusive with high fees, admitting only those who have the right kind of social background and "social etiquette". Other private clubs are more open to all comers, but have less facilities and training support. One also finds club-like sports organizations within most schools and in many neighborhoods. More recently, "soccer academies" for children have opened.

A second type of sports clubs in Kampala are the professional sports organizations intended to develop sports talent for professional sports teams and promote district, regional and national tournaments.

### **The methodology of the study**

Since upward mobility deals with the mobilization, plans and aspirations of a lifetime, the data were gathered in life-history interviews with a selection of twenty young men and women, ten from cycling clubs and ten from soccer clubs. The interviews, lasting approximately one to two hours, in a private relaxing context (often in the homes so that one could also observe the residences) first allowed the respondent to talk freely about life and experiences in general and about the experiences of the sports club. This allowed the respondents to structure the interview according to their perception and world view. When the respondent had exhausted the free description, aspects of the narrative dealing with the following were probed more deeply:

- (1) The background of the grandparent and parent generations;
- (2) The status of the subject at the moment in terms of involvement with the sports club, education, work and sources of income.
- (3) Detailed description of the “consumption” connected with the sports clubs, especially the type of equipment description focused on the *meaning* of the consumption process, that is, the “why” of the action and how this related to the broader life aspirations. Usually the “why” came out in the free description and the probe only enlarged on themes the respondents had already mentioned.
- (4) The social communicative context of the consuming behavior, that is, who they were trying to communicate with, why they were using a particular kind of consumption and why this consumption was important.
- (5) The use of media and the attitude toward and use of advertising.
- (6) Finally, the interview introduced a discussion of the life plans and aspirations of the respondent. In this context the respondent was asked about the possibility of some service in the area of rural or urban poverty, which is considered the major social problem of Uganda - to see if their plans for upward mobility includes anything in public service.

The sampling was purposive using a “snowball method” in order to include in the twenty respondents men and women and people of different social status, from quite poor to some coming from very rich and powerful family backgrounds.

## **Findings**

### **Who gets into what sports club in Kampala**

There are a wide range of sports clubs in Kampala according to the type of sport and the socio-economic status of the members. Most members begin to get involved at a very young age, frequently as young as seven or eight years, and they are assisted by their parents or by coaches in the schools. The socio-economic status of the parents is a determining factor in what sports club young people enter, and the present socio-economic status of the parents depends largely on advantages that the grandparent generation had back in the colonial period.

There is a clear divide between those whose parents had the opportunity for higher education and those who did not have this.

### Entry into *higher status* sports clubs.

#### **Arthur. It helps if one's father has a championship cycling club**

Arthur, born in 1980, is a student of economics at Makerere University. His father Paddy, graduated from the same university, owns a lucrative transport company in Kampala and is the director of a professional cyclist club that owns a racing team. Paddy's father was a junior officer in the colonial administration and had studied public administration at the University of London with the sponsorship of the colonial government. Arthur's mother is also a graduate of Makerere University in commerce, and her father was a primary school teacher in the colonial government in central Uganda. The family lives in a prestigious suburb of Kampala where many senior government officials, top business executives and managers of parastatals have their homes.

Arthur began cycling at 10 years old when his father bought him his first top quality racing bicycle, and he took part in his first cycling competition at 12 with his father as trainer and sponsor. Arthur is now part of his father's cycling club, one of the biggest and most successful in Uganda. Arthur takes part in training exercises at least five times a week and has now won four national championships. Arthur loves the challenge of cycling, and it is clearly part of his upward mobility.

I like the thrill, that part between life and death. I get pleasure and joy from it. The sport has also made me gain some fame. Many people have heard about me, others have read about me and many more have seen me on television. When I go to some office and tell the receptionist that Arthur \_\_\_\_\_ wishes to see him, I am often made to jump the queue. Some of these friends own sports shops. When I go to buy some sports items, they sometimes give me discounts, and even credit when I don't have money. There are times when I am invited to important functions as one of the main guests just because I am a sportsman.

#### ***Jessy, introduced to cycling by high status parents***

Jessy, a first year student in dental surgery at Makerere University, was introduced to cycling when she was six by the children who live next door in the exclusive suburb of Namirembe in Kampala. Her father, also a graduate of Makerere, is a senior government official in Uganda's Ministry of Finance and Economic planning. His father,

Jessy's paternal grandfather was the first born of a chief who had long collaborated with the colonial government and received hundreds of hectares of land from the colonial administration. This son got a degree in education from the University of London. Jessy's maternal grandfather was also the son of a chief and was awarded a scholarship from the colonial government to study agronomy in London. Jessy's family owns considerable property in Kampala. Jessy explained how she got involved in cycling.

Cycling is an expensive sport. When I learned to ride a bicycle, my father bought me mine as a birthday present...As we grew older, our parents bought us bigger bikes. . The next step was to enroll us in a cycling club in town which had a cycling pitch and other cycling facilities, including a pitch for physical exercises and a swimming pool. Cycling is my hobby . . .but it makes me happy. It makes me interact with people and has enabled me to make friends some of whom have played a big role in my academic success.

**Andy, learned about cycling from a classmate in a private school.**

Andy, a student of commerce at the Uganda College of Business Studies, says his interest in cycling started in primary school. Andy's father is a PhD graduate of the University of Delhi in India on a state scholarship and is currently a lecturer in the Faculty of Social Sciences at Makerere University. Andy's paternal grandfather was an inspector of schools in the colonial government and, after independence, was awarded a scholarship to study education in Britain. He returned to become chief inspector of schools. Andy's mother is a senior official of the ruling party of Uganda. The family lives in the Mayenga suburb of Kampala which gives them access to the private school where Andy was enrolled.

I remember one day one older boy joined the school in the upper classes. His means of transport was his sports bicycle when he rode to school everyday. That boy was smart, sports-like. The fashion of his school uniform was impressive and different from ours . . . In a short time he became famous in the school. One day . . . he told me he was enrolled in a cycling club and that every evening he went there to practice racing. That evening I told my father about the club and three months later I was enrolled. The club sold me a new bicycle which I would use only when I went for practices.. Since then my interest and participation in the sport have grown steadily year after year.

**Megi, Her mother bought her the first bike in third primary.**

Megi is a second year student of mechanical engineering at Kyambogo technical institute and one of the very few women who have pursued this course. Her father is a medical doctor working in a state hospital but owns a private clinic in Kampala. He graduated in medicine from Makerere and then did a specialization in gynaecology in Munich. Megi's paternal grandfather was a medical assistant in the last days of colonial rule. Megi's mother is also a medical doctor and also a graduate of Makerere University. Megi's maternal grandmother was a nursing graduate, from a poor family but helped by Catholic missionaries. The family home is in Ggaba suburb of Kampala, surrounded by a manicured garden, and the family owns three other homes there. They own a minibus operating as a taxi, and two upscale leisure cars.

When I was a small girl I was introduced to three games: cycling, badminton and soccer. I was good in all, but I chose to stick to cycling because it was less overcrowded and all my friends were interested in that. I learned how to cycle from my nursery teacher whose son was a classmate. He was brought to school in a car and with him his bicycle. My mother bought me my first bicycle when I was in the third year of primary school at the age of eight. My father was a member of a golf club. Every evening my friends and I used his membership card to ride into the golf pitch before golf players arrived. When I perfected my cycling skills, my father enrolled me at the female wing of Makerere cycling club. At the club I was introduced to the better female cyclists.

**Entry into *lower status* sports clubs**

**Jennifer, a poor girl who tried and fell back to her poverty**

Jennifer is a second year student of education at a teachers college and is a soccer player. Teaching is not a highly paid profession in Kampala and tends to attract students from lower-status backgrounds. Jennifer's father, Ntale, sells second-hand clothes in Shauri Yako open market in Kampala. His father was a peasant farmer, and Ntale managed to get some primary school education only through a missionary of the White Fathers. Jennifer's mother, also the daughter of a peasant farmer, repairs clothes and has only a primary school education with the help of Catholic nuns. Jennifer was introduced to soccer when she was in primary school where the games master was a woman.

She was a soccer player and managed to convince the headmistress to permit me to create a soccer team for girls. Because I started school a little older (she did not have the money to start with her age group), I was among the first pupils to be enrolled in the female team. . . The team became the talk in the area and received the support of parents and the school staff. The school organized matches with girl's schools that offered soccer for girls. When I joined college, there was only a male soccer team. Through the female lecturers, seven of us managed to form a woman's soccer club. . . In just 12 months the club organized inter-hall competitions and matches with other higher institutions of learning.

Jennifer has had to struggle with what little money her parents can give her to get the soccer shoes and uniform. "With shoes, for example, I attack other players with less fear than I would if I played with bare feet". But it is a struggle for her to continue with soccer. Jennifer revealed that, at her college, sports items were used by students as symbols of financial status. Soccer colleagues bought expensive items to give the impression that they come from well-to-do families. Individuals who possessed second-hand items showed their humble backgrounds. The passion to show a higher status triggered competition.

I tried to be like the Muyenga girls (the wealthy suburb where Andy above lives). When they bought new items I would use my savings to buy a similar item and even a better one. Sometimes I borrowed money to purchase sports and other wears to show that I was also capable. But after a few months I couldn't manage the consistency. The Muyenga girls come from wealthy families. They receive huge allowances regularly from their parents; and some had good part-time jobs. They bought new items every two months. With my little allowances and my small part-time salary, I could realistically afford a commodity of class every six months. In the end I accepted my poverty and said bye-bye to competition, and returned to my usual life.

***Alex, who buys second-hand cycling equipment in the open-air market***

Alex is a second-year student of business administration at the Uganda Islamic University. His father, now deceased, ran a small roadside shop, and his mother struggles to educate her children through secondary school. Alex' mother is the daughter of a peasant farmer whose secondary school education was paid by missionaries, but became a primary school teacher when she failed the secondary school examination. Alex was attracted to cycling by friends, and his mother managed to buy him a semi-sports bicycle.

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He joined a private cycling club and is paid a small compensation when he wins a race. "So, cycling is also sort of a job for me". Alex buys most of his cycling equipment—jerseys, T-shirts, goggles, helmets, gloves, sports shorts—in the open air markets where he can get foreign-made second-hand equipment of good quality, but at low prices.

My only challenge is my club and team mates. Most of them come from rich families. Their fathers are directors of companies and their mothers are running good businesses in town. They have access to money, and they use it to buy expensive high-class sports clothes and shoes. Then they come around to recommend the same items to us using sweat, with persuasive language. When I had just joined the club, I used to buy some of the items they had recommended, but after some time I gave up because my income was low and inconsistent. I couldn't afford (it). I noticed the boys wanted me to be like them, and if I couldn't I would have to leave their group. They knew that by virtue of my family background, there were certain things I couldn't afford. The most surprising thing was that despite their knowledge of my family's financial status, none of them was ready to offer me one pair of shoes as a gift.

## 2. The symbolic meaning of consumption

All of members of the sports clubs are much aware of the symbolic, communicative power of the equipment they buy and show off in public. Arthur, the young economics major we met above, whose father is the owner of a major cycling club and a transport company, is proud of the fact that he has the best of equipment:

From what I have observed many are impressed by my performance and by my attire. . . when I win a race I am often surrounded by fans and friends who come to hug, to congratulate me and to compliment me. . . Sometimes I am excited to see fans and fellow cyclists taking interest in my sports wear. They admire and make good comments about my sports shoes, my bicycle, my jersey, everything. Some would like to know where I bought the shoes, how much I paid for it, how I feel when I wear it and so on. Their interest gives me satisfaction and makes me proud of being a cyclist. I am satisfied by my performance and by my sports possessions. I know that my attire is for my safety; therefore, I wear it from head to toe. Sometimes, of course, I put it on for a show, just to impress onlookers.

Certainly, a central part of Arthur's upward mobility is the ability to understand how others are perceiving the identity he is trying to create.

***Cecelia: My sports equipment tells people I am higher class.***

Cecelia, a second year economics student at Makerere University, is a member of the Nsambya Females Cycling Club. Her father is a prominent lawyer in Kampala and her mother, also a cyclist, graduated in medicine, works as a medical doctor in a private Catholic hospital in Kampala. Cecelia's paternal grandfather was a sub-county chief in colonial days. Cecilia's maternal grandfather was a medical assistant in a Catholic health centre in the colonial era. Cecilia buys all her sports material from specialized sports shops and shopping malls. She prefers goods imported from Europe because they demonstrate high-class status.

These (sports equipment) are expensive materials compared to the second-hand stuff sold in the open markets. It's usually people of class who can afford these objects. When I wear mine people quickly realize that this is a person of high class taste. At the club my wear sometimes attracts the attention of girls who want to know how much I paid for my shoes, my sports jacket and my bicycle and from which shop. They come and say, "Hey, you look nice in that jacket", and I reply, "Thank you". That makes me feel good and appreciated by others. . .I became convinced that my sports wear made an impression on people and that they made me look pretty. Now, I love to see people look at me with admiration and complimenting my physical appearance. . . When people appreciate me, I feel encouraged to buy more of what they would like to see me wear.

***Jessy: Imported goods add to one's appearance of high-class taste***

Jessy, whom we met above, with a father in a high government position, sees her sports wear as important to maintain her social status.

Materials sold in sports shops are imported. . .they are attractive goods . . .They add to one's social status...It is mainly sportsmen and women who earn well here in Uganda who purchase them. When I put on mine, I, in a way, make those around me feel that I belong to a higher class. You must have seen how girls were dressed when you came to class. Rarely do they wear second-hand materials. Each of us wants others to know that she has a strong financial background, a family that can afford...we compete for the latest just to attract the attention and to show that we are "there".

***Megi, "my mother taught me to use high class things"***

Virtually, all of the young people interviewed indicated that their parents, themselves upwardly mobile, developed their values of conspicuous consumption. Megi, whose parents as we saw above are higher-status medical doctors in Kampala explained this:

(My mother) used to buy me good clothes and good everything because she, too, liked things of high class. She bought expensive clothes, expensive shoes, expensive wrist watches, expensive earrings and went expensive hairdressers. She always reminds me to be conscious of what people might say about me. She says to avoid negative evaluation, bad comments, disrespect and ridicule. I must dress decently like a person of high tastes and high class.

***Robert, of poor background, finds "class" in his sports club equipment***

Robert, as we saw above, is from a poor family, and his mother is struggling with her shop to educate her children through secondary school. Robert buys his personal equipment second hand in the open air markets. But soccer equipment is less expensive and he can give a good impression with second-hand equipment.

When I was in primary school my friends and I played soccer bare-footed because we had no money to buy shoes. . . (But in the club) we believe in identification. During the game players and even spectators need to identify who belongs to which team. The player will know who belongs to his team from the uniform. The jersey serves that purpose. The type of jersey a team wears plays also a psychological role in the game. When a team enters the stadium wearing sophisticated dress and modern shoes, it sends waves of fear to the opponent, and if they are not able to recover quickly from the shock, they start the match at a disadvantage. The shoes, jerseys, shorts, and shield guards make the player smart and help to attract the public to give him support during the match.

Although Robert comes from a poorer background he is also upwardly mobile. Since he cannot rely on family identification to project an image, he must rely on the image of the club to boost his personal social identity.

***Hussein, poor but proud to be a coach and a member of a club***

Hussein is currently a student of catering at the Vocational Training Institute, Nakawa. Both his mother and father were children of peasant farmers. His father ran a motor bike taxi until he could set up a

little store. After his father died, his mother became a petty trader selling food stuffs in Wandgeya open market. The family rents an old, broken down three-room house in a Kampala slum called Natete. Hussein was taught to play soccer by his father and after his father died his friends formed a local soccer team playing in the empty lots.

Later Hussein played with his secondary school team. When he was faced with dropping out of school for lack of money to pay school fees, the school gave him a bursary because of his contribution to the school in sports. Later he was invited to join a third division soccer club, Lugogo Football Club, sponsored by the association of taxi drivers in Kampala. Then he was appointed coach of the club's junior team, now a source of income. But his poverty limits what equipment he can buy.

I rarely buy my sports materials from sports shops because their prices are very high. When I need some item, I go to Owino (open air) market and buy it. In that market there are a variety of second hand items imported from abroad. They call them second hand, but in reality they look good and sometimes last longer than the sports materials manufactured here.

Hussein's poverty is a disadvantage in gaining access to better social circles.

My sports colleagues put pressure on me to be like them in their lifestyle. They want to show off and feel that everybody should look like them. They insist on uniformity of appearance, that is, they want us to buy and wear similar things, competing to show who has more money than others. Most of these boys come from rich families. In the beginning I tried to be like them by buying some of the sports wear they had recommended. After a few months, I reflected on my financial status and came to my senses. They and I belong to different social worlds. Eventually I dropped out of the group, and only retained the relationship in the soccer pitch. . . I also desire to have new shoes, new jerseys and new of everything, but this, too, remains a dream until my financial position improves. . . In the end there is little money for my sports needs. In spite of that I am proud of being a soccer player, of being a coach and of being a member of my soccer club.

Without the support of family wealth, Hussein must base his personal identity and the image he projects on a collective identity with the sport, with his club and the team he coaches.

### 3. Sports clubs as a place to find friends who will support upward mobility

It is often said that upward social mobility in Africa depends more on “who” you know than “what” you know. The economy of affection, the clientelistic systems and the arbitrary, neopatrimonial structure of power demands building social bonds with people who are “important”. The sports context and sports clubs are a primary avenue of communication for building such social bonds of affection.

#### ***Herbert, son of a wealthy importer of Japanese cars, makes social contacts in his soccer club***

Herbert, a student of business administration at the Uganda College of Business Studies, finds soccer an enjoyable hobby, but it is also a stepping stone to his ambition of becoming a successful businessman like his father. Herbert’s father, Paul, the son of a Catholic catechist of humble peasant farming background, graduated with a BA in political science from Makerere University. Paul’s secondary education was paid for by the White Father missionary group. Herbert’s mother, graduated from Makerere with a BA in education is now the head of a private secondary school in a Kampala suburb. She is the daughter of teachers in a mission school. The family now owns an expensive home in an exclusive suburb and other homes in other suburbs, most rented to a transnational business company. One of the major attractions for the ambitions of Herbert are the social contacts to realize his dream of successful business.

Soccer has enabled me to make more friends than before. It is a game which unites people. It has also raised my fame. In my former schools I was known to almost all the students. . . The advantage of being popular is that there will always be someone to help in case of problems. Sometimes, I enjoy privileges that I wouldn’t have enjoyed if I were not popular. Take, for example, our dining hall. The rule is that all have to line up to be served. But I rarely go in the queue. Students let me pass without me asking for privilege.

Herbert hopes that the connections he is making as a soccer player will lend a hand in his pursuit of his ideal of becoming a successful and wealthy businessman. For example, he hopes that his friends and his parent’s friends in high circles would give him the political and finan-

cial support to enter business without going through corrupt bureaucratic procedures.

***Lino, widening contacts among various ethnic groups***

Lino, a soccer player, is a second-year student at the School of Law Development. His father, Joshua, graduated in law at Makerere University, and currently has a good private law practice in Kampala. Joshua's father was a junior agricultural officer in the colonial government. Lino's mother, Anita, is a graduate of veterinary medicine at Makerere University, and now an official of the Ministry of Agriculture and owns a dairy farm outside of Kampala. Anita's father was a junior officer in the colonial government. Soccer for Lino is a hobby, but it also widens his circle of friends.

The sport has enabled me to make friends from a spectrum of ethnic groups. In the process I have learned much about these groups, what we have in common, the differences, and especially the attitudes different ethnic groups have towards one another.

Lino thinks that the contacts he is making now will be helpful in his ambition to become a judge.

After my current studies, I would like to work for a few years as a magistrate and then join university to study law, after which I would join the bar as a private practitioner to gather experience as I gradually penetrate state judicial circles. It is not easy to win the confidence of the state to appoint you a judge, but I hope through the help of my own friends and my parents' friends I can make it. In this country, one's studies are not enough. One needs someone in higher circles to give him a push.

***Cecilia: Cycling is a place to learn teamwork and making social contacts***

Cecilia, whom we met above, is a second-year student in development studies at Makerere University and the daughter of a prominent lawyer in Kampala. Cecilia has found in her cycling club the place for cultivating her skills of social relations.

It is good to be part of the larger group. Their presence gives me protection and confidence to continue with the sport. Whenever we meet at the club, it is really a social encounter. We talk about everything we plan, what to do should one of win a race; we show each

other what we bought recently and share information about new arrivals in the sports shops. Among us, some are better than others. Those who are less competent learn by consulting and by observing those who are more competent. In this manner we motivate each other to work harder and to remain tied to the sport and to the club.

Cecelia hopes that her sports talent and involvement will help her to know many people and help realize her goal of becoming a development worker. She wants to learn how to help people set economic goals and work hard to realize them.

***Andy: Making friends who will be helpful for you in the future***

Andy's well-off family has enabled him to move into a very prominent cycling club.

Another benefit (of cycling) is that it has enabled me to interact with many people and to make more friends than I had before. The sport is mainly for people of high class because of the financial costs required to purchase the essential equipment and other materials. Therefore, most of the girls and boys you have seen here are sons and daughters of people who are financially strong. Riding with them has enabled me to open contacts and to make friendships not only with the boys and the girls, but also with their parents. Parents accompany their children and we mix with them. These contacts have produced fruitful results in that sometimes we organize parties on Christmas, New Year's Day and Independence Day and on special occasions such as birthdays. We enjoy ourselves. Our families have come to know each other through us. You never know. These contacts may turn out to be more helpful in the future when I begin to live my own life.

***Salim: A poor boy makes friends in sports club for job contacts***

For virtually all of the poorer members of sports clubs, sports are an important source of economic help. Many get bursaries on the basis of their talents. Some become paid members of clubs or coaches. For virtually all, the clubs might have been quite snobbish, but all learned to deal with socially and economically better off people. Salim's father is a street sweeper and his mother works as a cook in a hospital. Salim must struggle to make a living, pay his school fees at a teacher training college and buy the needed soccer equipment. When asked what benefits he got from playing soccer, he stressed the economic opportunities.

I feel I am in a position to refer to my soccer skills and experience as an added advantage when opportunities for jobs arise. In addition

soccer has enabled me to make friends at school and beyond. . . My soccer friends have been helpful in my academic and economic struggle. The part-time teaching job that I have, I got it through connections made by a soccer friend whose father is a headmaster. . I did high school studies on a bursary awarded to me because of my active participation in soccer, and when I joined college the state offered me full sponsorship because of my merits in the game.

#### **4. Sports: A school of discipline for upward mobility**

Virtually all the members of the sports clubs interviewed emphasized that it required a great deal of personal physical and mental discipline, but that this would be a helpful preparation for the demanding world of professional practice that they were preparing for. All those interviewed, both those from poor and wealthier background, were in some form of professional education, even if this were more technical. The involvement with sports was often in the context of their professional or technical schools, and seen as complimentary to the academic training.

#### ***Robert: Sport will help me become an electrical engineer***

Robert, as we have seen, comes from a relatively poor family—his mother is a small shop owner and his father is deceased—but he has managed to become a student of electrical engineering at the Uganda Technical Institute. Robert emphasized that playing soccer calls for much responsibility.

The player must participate in training exercises so as to be physically fit for the game and to improve his skills. The exercises include jogging and running. The person must have discipline. This means he must have patience, ready to listen to the coach, the captain and to his fellow players. He must be ready to learn and take orders.

#### **5. Learning to make and spend money carefully**

All those interviewed, whether from poor or better-off families, spoke about a culture of careful spending in their families and in their lives. Careful use of equipment—buy only what you will use well, working part time and not depending on parents alone, finding out the best way to use money from friends—all this is central to the upward mobility of this broad middle class. None of those in the clubs came from a lower economic level that did not have a steady income and none came from a cosmopolitan wealthy class that had money to throw

away. It is unlikely that young people with accomplished wealth would want to submit themselves to the discipline of sports. All were of an upwardly mobile group of people.

***Bob: Learning to spend money responsibly***

Nearly all those interviewed spoke of the socialization by parents in the careful mobilization of funds for upward mobility. Bob's father and mother both have good jobs with lucrative incomes, but they practice a kind of Protestant ethic.

My mother always insisted on knowing how I had spent my money. I was expected to keep a record of what I bought and how much I had spent on an item. There were times when I was extravagant, and this gave her the opportunity either to quarrel or to reduce the allowance or to suspend it for some days. So, I grew up conscious that I had to be cautious of the way I spent my little money. I still get some money from parents, although now I don't have to give an account of how I spend it. But I learned the lesson. Before I make a purchase I take my time; I examine everything: price, quality and the origin of the commodity. Whenever necessary, I bargain with the sellers for a discount.

***Herbert: Family training in running a business***

Herbert comes from a well-off family, but his family has oriented him to manage a business well. His father, as we noted above, has a business importing Japanese cars, and Herbert is preparing for a business career. His parents trained him to consume responsibly. His mother controlled his purchases and advised him to verify prices and product quality before he purchased.

In my childhood I was reprimanded many times for breaking plates, glasses and other household things. My mother used to keep a record of everything I had broken and when I broke another thing she would read me the list to make me feel guilty. She also asked receipts of my purchases, and often warned me against buying objects that were not necessary. Herbert's father obtained a tender to run a canteen at the Uganda College of Business, and then turned it over to Herbert to manage with the initial capital and the obligation to make sure the canteen had a profit.

**6. Media provides role models and skills information**

The media are an important part of the lives of young people in upward mobility because they see the path of mobility largely in the media. The media are especially important for those who are in the

sports clubs in part to follow carefully their sports role models and in part to publicize their own sports accomplishments.

***Arthur: Becoming a media star***

Arthur's father, as we noted above, has one of the most successful cycling clubs in Uganda, and Arthur has won four national championships. The media are an important part of Arthur's success in cycling in Uganda. Arthur's family owns a satellite dish which enables him to follow cycling all over the world. The family also owns a DVD and VCR player. He also constantly follows cycling and other sports events on local television and in local newspapers.

The foreign media, mostly television and video have introduced me to international cycling stars like Armstrong from the United States, Ulrich from Germany, Cipollini from Italy and many others. It is very interesting to see how these guys manoeuvre their bicycles in different environments; let's say when it is raining, when climbing hills, when descending slopes. I learn from their skills and try to improve on mine. Some times they are interviewed on media. I watch how they respond to questions, how they present themselves to journalists and the carefulness with which they respond to the questions. All these help me to improve on my public presentation.

Knowing how to present himself in the media is very important for Arthur.

The media have made a (major) contribution to my sports career. When I win a race or perform well, the local media, especially newspapers such as *The Monitor* or the *New Vision*, publicize me. They write nice articles about me and sometimes interview me. In the holiday sports season my photos often appear in these newspapers and on local television. This is very important for me because it adds to my fame. It makes publicity for me and creates friends for me in important circles. It motivates me to like the sport, to improve my performance and it gives me the satisfaction of having contributed to the sport in my country. Economically, it puts me in a better position to negotiate and convince sponsors that they would not be throwing away their money if they invested in me.

***Robert: Poverty limits access to media***

Robert gets little or no money from his parents and only a small allowance from his sports club. His work as a correspondent with a newspaper in Kampala brings in only enough money to pay his school fees. But he borrows sports videos and they explain many cycling

tactics. He also reads cycling magazines when he can find them. But now he is too busy to get access to much media.

***Alex: His sports club has a satellite dish to gain access to foreign channels.***

Alex has few resources, but like many poorer sports enthusiasts, he profits by the facilities at the club where he belongs.

The club owns a satellite dish which permits access to television channels in France, Britain, Italy, Germany and the United States. In addition, some European television channels like France International and Deutchwelle are received here directly without the aid of satellite dishes and decoders. I watch their programs on cycling tours, and improve on my cycling knowledge and skills. For example, one thing I have learned and mastered is to save energy in the course of the race without losing track of the leading group and then to bring out everything in the last kilometers before the conclusion of the race. I learned the strategy by watching cyclists on TV. I tried it two times in a race without success. The third time it worked and I won the race.

## **7. Advertising as a guide to consumption and consumption symbols**

One of the central questions in this study is to assess the degree to which advertising influences a consumption-oriented identity. As is apparent, those involved in competitive sports have developed a strong sense of striving that accentuates a developed sense of personal identity and mobilization of their personalities around an achieved identity. Most advertising is aimed at this kind of public. The interviews revealed that part of the developed sense of personal identity is resistance to any form of manipulation. Yet having the right kind of equipment and creating an image is so important for those in sports that they must pay attention to advertising. This seems to be especially true of sports enthusiasts in countries such as Uganda which are somewhat at the margins of the latest trends and newest forms of equipment. This creates a kind of ambivalence toward advertising that influences the symbolic interpretation of consumption of these avid sports people.

***Arthur: Advertising influences much of what I purchase***

Arthur, as we have seen, has a very strong and independent, self-confident personality, but he is very ambivalent toward advertising. As the following statement indicates, he makes advertising serve his purposes:

The type of adverts that catch my eyes are those that speak about sports equipment, lubricants for bicycles, special tyres, sports clothes, good prices. Those others like furniture, plates and chairs don't catch my eyes. Some adverts drive the point home, and those are the ones that influenced me to buy one or two things. I am not advert-dependent, but I must confess that 40 per cent of what I have bought is through advert influence.

Part of the problem for Arthur is that he is considered a leader in his sports club and he is under pressure to always have the right equipment.

Actually, friends make a big part of this sport. . . But if you are not careful friends can drag you into things you would not like. For example, in my team there are four good guys, Paddy, Andy, Figo and Jimmy, who always buy sports T-shirts and boots and knee caps and other things at first sight. They come to persuade me and others to buy them also. Those boys are crazy. They are known and friendly to most of the owners of sports stores in town. . . If I prefer something else, different from what they say, they say, "No, no, this is out of place, this is not for your class. In the past I used to bow to their wishes and take their advice, but today I don't.

***Robert: Poverty dampens the response to adverts***

Robert, as we have seen, comes from a poor family. Initially, the adverts were important for him and he went on buying sprees. But he was soon out of money.

To be sincere, my interest in sports goods has dwindled because I cannot afford them. My income is limited. My parents are mere teachers with a family to support. They live from hand to mouth. In this period adverts matter less to me because I strictly control my expenditure and buy only when it is necessary.

***Cecilia: Coming from a wealthier family gives her access to media***

Cecilia admits that she is influenced by adverts, but, like most of those interviewed, gradually has learned to have less confidence in what they say because adverts exaggerate the effectiveness of products.

At certain seasons when sports activities are about to start or at their peak, adverts become too many and too insistent trying to convince sportsmen/women to purchase sports-related commodities. They use sports stars to woo people. In my case, I take my time, and buy only when I am sure the product is the type I need. I don't believe material commodities are capable of making miracles attributed to them by adverts. I saw an advert where a

lady was very happy because she had bought and drunk a bottle of mineral water. I drink that water every day, but I don't feel like that. One of my friends at the club bought a shoe for jogging after an advert convinced her that it was for all seasons. When she used it three or four times in the wet season, its sole broke off. Therefore, one has to be careful about being cheated by advertised products .

***Jessy: Becoming aware that she is too easily persuaded by adverts***

Jessy is a first year student at Makerere University and still quite young in comparison with others interviewed. She is still gaining more conscious control of her own identity and values in the face of pressures from peers and from adverts. She is becoming aware that adverts manipulate people to buy things they don't need, and confessed that sometimes she unconsciously became a victim of advertising.

I know that adverts portray some goods as having the power to produce good results in the shortest time possible. Although I am conscious of that, I find myself duped into believing in the power attributed to some commodities. There are times when I feel helpless in front of an advertised sports good. I feel the urge to purchase it; sometimes I have, and when I did I never stopped buying until I had no more money to spend. To me adverts are sometimes like a drug that addicts me to purchase.

Yet, for Jessy, purchasing gives satisfaction and makes her happy.

**8. Life career plans as objectives of upward mobility**

A final question in the interviews focused on the plans for the future. Virtually all of the respondents selected for their interest in sports had relatively clear, coherent and seemingly workable plans for a life career. Virtually all were in some form of tertiary-level professional or vocational school that was a preparation for a life career. This group of respondents is typically "middle class", whose life chances are already much better than the vast majority of Africans who do not finish secondary school and are part of the peasant farmer and unskilled laborer "lower class". Particularly interesting are those from poorer backgrounds who, in spite of the limited resources for education, are able to spot economic opportunities in the society around them. They seem to have gathered enough information about how these economic opportunities function so as to "work their way into them".

***Jennifer's plans to open a nursery school***

Jennifer, we recall, is the young student in Kayambogo Teachers College who aspired to get into a higher status soccer club and then had to "fall back" because she could not maintain the style of consumption of the girls in that club. Her father's income from selling second-hand clothes in the open market did not give her much support. Yet she has clear plans for the future.

After completing my present studies, I will teach for two years or more years as I look for friends or partners who can start a private nursery school with me. I want to be my own employer. . . The standard of learning in state-sponsored schools has dropped since the introduction of free primary education eight years ago. Private schools have now emerged to fill the gap. Many parents who can afford and who have big plans for their children now take advantage of private schools where teachers are more motivated by good pay, and where they are not overloaded with work. A private nursery school brings in a lot of money if its management is able to convince parents that children will get the right education, security and care.

In a context of very uncertain job opportunities, Jennifer has scanned well the need for services in society and new opportunities that public policies are creating. She is able to connect her background in teaching with these new economic opportunities as "her own employer". She also sees that management ability is the key to the opportunity and her upward mobility depends on it.

***Brian, a street boy who aspires to be a soccer star***

Brian lives with his mother and two sisters in a slum overcrowded with dirty ramshackle buildings, but he has managed to get to the final year of secondary school and plays soccer with his school's first eleven team. Sponsors, seeing that he is a good player, have helped him with school fees. Much of the secret of Brian's success is the discipline of training. "I take part in training regularly. . .the training enables me to develop the physical fitness required for the game." When asked about his plans for the future, the influence of the media became clear.

I wish to be a professional player like Ronaldo, the Brazilian strike who plays for Real Madrid in Spain. I admire him because, first, his life is similar to mine. He was a street boy. From the street he

became a millionaire through the maximum exploitation of his soccer talent. Second, he is an excellent player who has built fame from personal struggle. He has struggled to be what he is. Thirdly, I admire him because he is a millionaire. He is paid well. I don't dream to make as much money as he has, but if I could earn well also in future I would be happy.

Brian knows well, however, that he can become a soccer star only if he gets more formal education. "These days someone needs to have completed at least high school to compete with players of talent for admission into professional clubs." Brian has also scanned the horizon for life opportunities and sees the conditions for upward mobility as good if he succeeds in sports.

***Salim, trying to escape the poverty of the teaching profession***

Salim lives with his parents and two brothers and sisters in a Kampala slum known as Kasubi, but he has managed to finish the second year at the Ggaba Teachers Training College. Salim has used good second-hand equipment, and he has made many connections through his soccer friends. He is training to be a secondary school teacher, but his hope lies in his abilities in soccer.

Most of the secondary school teachers I have known are poor. They are stuck without any advancement in life, and living from hand to mouth because they are paid little. After college I will teach for one or two years as I make connections to enter into the sports industry. I wish to take a course in soccer coaching or refereeing. Coaches and referees earn substantially better than teachers especially when they build a reputation of good arbitrating. The career of referee is limited by age. Through connections in the sports industry I can join the association of referees first, and then later join the association of coaches.

What Salim fears most is being posted to a secondary school in the interior where he would lose contact with the sports industry. But he has scanned well the opportunities for him and the relation between his soccer talent and his upward mobility. The measure of success in all of these plans for the future will be the size of income. Arthur summed it up, "Sports managers are tycoons. They make big money".

No respondent mentioned service to society, defense of human rights, eradicating poverty, or national development goals as a personal life goal. The most feared thing in life is poverty. Having money will be the means to have a comfortable living in pleasant surroundings with the typical middle class facilities.

### **Conclusions:**

#### **Is conspicuous consumption related to upward mobility?**

A central question in this study has been whether conspicuous consumption is a major communicative instrument to persuade those in positions of economic and political decision making to open doors to upward mobility. Sports clubs in Kampala are a good test case because success depends on individual mobilization of identity in terms of skills, personal discipline, having the right clothing and equipment, making the right friends and using the sports-related media well.

In life histories of twenty participants in sports clubs, all were aware that conspicuous (communicative) consumption is a factor in opening doors to opportunity, but it is only part of other factors that are more important. The most important factor in the highly competitive business culture of Kampala is performance in providing services. Jennifer thinks that her nursery school will be successful if she can provide the education, security and care parents are looking for. Arthur, with the material wealth of his family behind him, thinks he can manage a club to win championships. "When a club wins a championship, it gets a big cheque". All of them were getting professional or vocational education to improve performance, but the most important factor is the personal mobilization, discipline and hard work in finishing best.

A second important factor is making the right contacts. Arthur summed it up when he said, "The fame I have acquired in the last years has helped me to make important connections with people who matter and I think in the future, with a push from my father, they may lend me a hand to realize my dream". The personal contacts imply many things: knowledge by powerful others that you are competent, an emotional bond of friendship cemented by personal favors, opening to a world of many other contacts, the willingness to share knowledge that may be of crucial importance. The symbols of conspicuous consumption may be the initial opening of the door, but the economy of affection will consolidate the relationship. The platform for making the right contacts is one's family background, but the life stories show that even those who come from poverty and low social status can move themselves into a good position if they are competent.

Third in the line of importance, from these accounts, is the personal discipline and mobilization of one's personality and the development of courage to focus efforts on winning in a competitive situation. This includes the careful use of items of consumption, the careful use

of money, the ability to resist impulsive spending under the influence of advertising.

A fourth factor, knowing how to project an image to others and to oneself through display in consumption is important, especially, in getting acceptance to the right social circles. Knowing how to dress smart, selecting the best quality equipment, awareness of the latest styles all communicate competence and effectiveness. But most could easily see the superficiality of image creation for the sake of the image.

A fifth factor is knowing how to use the media both for getting information useful for aspirations, but also projecting one's own image. Success depends on providing the kind of services that people are looking for at any moment, continually scanning the trends in society. This is up-to-date information that can only be gotten through the media. The media also provides role models, information on how champions succeed, who are the champions of the moment and how they got to be champions.

To summarize, one must be competent to achieve upward mobility, but one must know how others perceive competence in order to communicate this to them, and one must be able to mobilize the communicative symbols of competence, much of which is very careful "conspicuous consumption".

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# The continued dominance of international news agencies in Nigerian newspapers: Comparing news coverage of the 2008 elections in America and in Ghana

By Ralph Akinfeleye, Ifeoma T. Amobi,  
Innocent E. Okoye, and Oloruntola Sunday.

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## Abstract

This article provides evidence that the dominance of international news-flows by nations of the North continues in spite of policy proposals for a New World Information and Communication Order. Efforts to increase flow of information between African nations and between Africa and other emerging democracies have so far had limited success. Evidence confirming this conclusion is drawn from the case study by the authors comparing the frequency of newspaper coverage of the 2008 American elections and the coverage of the Ghanaian elections in three major newspapers in Nigeria. The study found that of the total number of news items on the two elections in the newspapers, 92.27 per cent dealt with the elections of the USA while only 7.72 per cent dealt with the elections of the neighboring country of Ghana. The authors conclude that this confirms Galtung's structural imperialism thesis and the argument that the international news agencies such as Reuters, Associated Press, Agence France Presse and the satellite TV news networks continue to control international news flow.

**Key words:** international news flow, new world information and communication order, election reporting, Galtung's thesis of structural imperialism

## Introduction:

All empires - the Persian, Greek, Roman and British empires - have used available communication channels represented by communication

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technologies to emphasize their existence, strengthen their power and religion, achieve their administrative goals and increase power over time and space (Thussu, 2006, p. 1). The economic and cultural empires of the countries of the North today are no exception.

The accumulating research on the international flow of information has substantiated clearly that news flows and news agencies are at the heart of contemporary empires.

These studies have confirmed some of the following findings:

- (1) International news is Western-centric, since the Western news agencies and wire services are the major sources of news even in the less developed countries.
- (2) Coverage of the South that does exist focuses on negative or bad news - catastrophes, violence and corruption rather than the significant progress developing nations are making since independence.
- (3) International news covers elites superficially rather than efforts of ordinary citizens.
- (4) The emphasis of international news is on events, rather than on factors leading to and causing events.

This repeated pattern has meant that most major news channels across the regions of the world are dominated by the continual newsmakers of the US and Western Europe while the Third World is covered only when there are "hot spots" and crises. The South does not learn much about other regions of the South, but is bombarded by information from the First World. Hess observes that in charting the shape of the world as it appears in the American press, the rule of thumb has been that attention is paid in direct proportion to a country's closeness to New York City. Citing Adams' study of the coverage of natural disasters, he observes that the globe is prioritized so that the death of one Western European equaled three Eastern Europeans, equaled nine Latin Americans, equaled eleven Middle Easterners and equaled twelve Asians (1996, p. 37).

It was Galtung, however, in his 1971 article, "A Structural Theory of Imperialism", who attempts to *explain* the inequality within and between nations and the continued resistance to attempts to change this inequality. In his analysis, he develops a center-periphery model in which the world's nations are divided into two parts and classified as the center or dominant communities of the Northern Hemisphere and

the periphery or dependent nations of the Southern hemisphere. This structure is a major factor in the existing global inequalities and provides a hypothesis regarding news flows which can be summarized in the following terms:

- (1) There is a preponderance of "Center" news events reported in the world media systems.
- (2) The news gathering institutions in nations of the South are formed in the image of the North and do not respond to the communication needs of developing countries.
- (3) "Center" news occupies a larger proportion of the foreign news content in the media of "Periphery" nations than "Periphery" news occupies in the "Center" nations.
- (4) There is a feudal interaction structure whereby the dominated nations in the Periphery are kept apart, with little communication among themselves.
- (5) Consequently, there is relatively little or no flow of news among "Periphery" nations, especially across colonial-based bloc borders. (Mowlana, 1986, p. 24)

In the quest to correct these imbalances, there began in the 1960s and 1970s a series of debates, resolutions, meetings and manifestos calling for a new international information and communication order. The forum for much of the debate and proposals for a new order was within the organization of the developing "non-aligned" nations, with Tunisia's Minister of Information, Mustapha Masmoudi as the lead advocate. UNESCO also provided a forum for research and discussion. The proposals condemned the unidirectional flow of news in favor of the developed world adding that even when developing world coverage exists, it does not present the enormous strides developing nations are making in education, health services and opportunities for investment. Often developed nations do not allow developing nations the freedom to communicate from their own cultural perspective. Their demand was simple – a free and equitable balance in the flow and content of information, a right to national self-determination of domestic communication policies and, at the international level, a two-way information flow reflecting more accurately the aspirations and activities of less developed countries. In 1979 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) set up a 16-man commission headed by Sean MacBride, founding member and international chairman of Transparency International, to study these communication problems.

In 1980, the commission came up with a report titled “Many Voices, One World” containing 82 recommendations. They called for a “New World Information and Communication Order”, and their final conclusion stated that the existing order of information flow was far from satisfactory. The report called for the plurality of sources and conduits of information, the elimination of negative effects of certain monopolies, the democratization of communication and augmentation of national media to circumvent dependence on external sources. These propositions which were seen by the West as a “Soviet-inspired Third World design” aimed at attacking the freedom of the press and their business interests in the developing world, culminated in the withdrawal from UNESCO of the US, UK, and Singapore in 1984 and 1985. The proposal for the NWICO emerged, but stillborn.

Dahir (2009) wonders if the African story would be told differently if the recommendations had been implemented. He laments the use of programs such as “Inside Africa” on CNN and the “Africa Journal” of Reuters to portray the image of Africa from a Western perspective. The Nigerian journalist, Pascal Eze calls this the “PIDIC Perspective”: poverty, instability, disease, illiteracy, and corruption.

In spite of the defeat of the NWICO proposal, there have been many efforts to introduce balance and a more free flow of information. One of the noteworthy attempts has been the establishment of regional news agencies to promote South-South news flows and introduce a “South” perspective in the news. One example of this is the Pan African News Agency (PANA). There have also been efforts to allow journalists, especially editors of developing countries, some degree of control over editorial contents. But this study argues that these efforts have not so far restored the balance in international news flows.

### **The central problem according to the present analysis**

Globalization, along with many significant political and technological innovations has brought great changes since the NWICO was first proposed some thirty years ago. There are new forces for nationalism, new road maps, new struggles for development and democracy, new concerns for human rights and protection of the environment. Broadcast signals are becoming more available to more and more of the world’s population. There are innovative news gathering techniques,

making possible more rapid distribution of live television news. There are new corporate players such as CNN, BBC World Services television and Al Jazeera news. The international news gathering agencies of the South are also providing different dimensions to the news flows. This study seeks to discover if the news flow problems of the 1970s and 1980s have been remedied or if the problem continues as before.

### **The objectives in this study of news flows in Nigerian newspapers**

The primary objectives of this study include the following:

- (1) To find evidence of whether the structure of news flows has changed since the 1980s, or whether the same problems persist.
- (2) To use the comparison of news coverage of the American presidential elections and the Ghanaian presidential elections, both at relatively the same period in 2008, as a methodological test case of news flows.
- (3) To test the validity of Galtung's theory of structural imperialism as an explanation of the current process of news flows.
- (4) To renew the research and theoretical discussion of the issues in the New World Information and Communication Order and to seek solutions for these persisting problems.

### **The development of theories of North-South news flows**

The evidence of lack of balance and equity in international news flows has been building up in research since the early 1970s.

Hicks and Avishag (1974) in a content analysis of three Israeli and one American newspaper found that the American newspaper, the *Times Picayune*, published more news involving the US than it did news not involving the US. They found that all papers reported more elite-oriented news than news which respond to interests of the general public. The study also found some support for the argument that news flow between big and small nations tends to be one-way.

In a content analysis of four geographically dispersed prestige dailies in the US, Semel (1976) compared the foreign news attention patterns of the papers - *The New York Times* (east), *Miami Herald* (south), *Chicago Tribune* (midwest) and *Los Angeles Times* (west). He found evidence of geographical influence in the foreign attention pattern of the papers. The study also revealed that the papers paid attention only to events in world capitals, elite individuals, elite groups and governmental agencies. Highly industrialized and economically advanced countries were well-covered by the four newspapers, but the develop

ing world was not well covered.

Pratt's 1974 study of six Nigerian newspapers attempted to determine their foreign news content in relation to their local news content. The study found that for every foreign story in the press there were slightly more than three local stories, with the papers paying noticeable attention to Africa and Middle East. This is in contrast to Nwuneli's study in 1971 on the coverage of the Guinea invasion by Nigerian newspapers, which found that although the stories of the invasion reached Nigeria about one hour after the invasion started, Nigerian newspapers did not report the event until the third day and when they did it was played down considerably (Cited in Sobowale, 1987, p. 55).

Sobowale (1987) found, in a study of "the image of the world through the eyes of five Nigerian newspapers from 1980-1985", that Nigerian newspapers do not cover the world adequately. Only 10.5 per cent of their total news stories were dedicated to foreign news. He found that these contained more news about the developed countries than the Third World countries. Moreover, the few stories on Third World countries paid little attention to Africa (Sobowale, 1987, p. 62).

Mowlana notes that several research efforts have tested Galtung's hypothesis, including Buitjtenhuijs and Baesjou who examined news flow across bloc borders in Africa. They found that there is a dominance of "center" news agencies in the news of the two African countries served by the newspapers examined. Similarly, McKenzie and Overton, in their 1981 content analysis study of mass media in Australia, upheld Galtung's hypothesis, concluding that the pattern of international news flow to and from Australia remained largely colonial, with traditional news sources prevailing (1986, p. 24).

Interpreting Galtung's second hypothesis, Mowlana (1986, p.25) agrees that news flow is vertical from developed countries of the Northern Hemisphere to the less developed countries of the Southern Hemisphere, with supplemental horizontal flows within the North and a lesser volume of supplemental flow within the South. He also notes that while there is a considerable quantity of news flow South to North, it tends to be significantly less in volume in comparison with the flow from the North to South.

McQuail (2005, p. 254) also supports the Galtung thesis, showing that certain larger, more central countries such as the United States and the larger countries of Western Europe (France, Britain, Italy, Germany, Spain), originate news and other media content and distribute to their media 'satellites' in tow.

While acknowledging regional and language-based patterns of exchange, McQuail identifies the predominant feature of this model as limited flow of information among peripheral countries themselves. He views this situation as imperialism which he defines as a special type of dominance of one collectivity, usually a nation, over another and characterized by two mechanisms: firstly, the pattern of vertical interaction in which the dominating nation enriches itself more as a result of the interaction process than the dominated nation, particularly the neo-colonialist forms with its spin-off effects in the developed nations when they exchange manufactured goods for raw materials from the underdeveloped nations; secondly, the feudal interaction structure whereby the dominated nations in the periphery are kept apart, with little communication and trade among themselves.

Similarly, Alleyne argues that the quantity and quality of news flowing from the richer countries of the North to South, greatly exceeds the quantity and quality going in the other direction. "While there are high quantitative and qualitative news flows between the richer countries, the reverse is the case with the poorer nations, as the 'Big Five' international news agencies, the elite newspapers and magazines of North America and Europe and the global TV networks such as CNN, have the vast majority of their foreign news bureaus concentrated in the major capitals of the world - London, New York, Paris, Washington, Brussels, Tokyo and Hong Kong." These bureaus daily disseminate millions of words, still and moving pictures and sounds, to their head offices where they are processed as newscasts and radio reports. He concludes that unless there is a major or natural disaster occurring in the less-developed countries, these regions hardly get covered and even when they do the reports are often of low quality. For instance, the reports may come in words only without still or moving pictures. He also notes that that South-South flow is peculiar because of its higher propensity not to flow directly, since most of the bureaus are located in the North and news about Africa, for example, may have to go through London or New York.

To address this imbalance, the Non-Alligned Movement and UNESCO encouraged alternative initiatives, especially the institution of regional news agencies such as the Pan African News Agency (PANA), the Caribbean News Agency (CANA), and the Non-Alligned News Agency Pool (NANAP). These agencies were established to give journalists in these regions more editorial control over news from their regions and abroad.

Unfortunately none of these organizations has had the resources to set up their own bureaus in far away capitals or to find ways to balance the North-South and South-South flows. (Alleyne, 1997, p. 13).

Agreeing with Alleyne, Ejime, (2009), a correspondent with PANA, observes that sustaining the agency had become nearly impossible as other African countries, with the exception of Nigeria, were unable to pay their bills and, by 1991, the agency was on the brink of collapse. UNESCO once again intervened with a recovery plan, part of which is the intention to privatize PANA, allocating 25 percent to African investors. This plan has, however, yielded little or no results as only very few investors have indicated interest and though the agency is still in operation, it is unable to function optimally. In another study conducted by Elliot Parker (1996) on global news flow, results revealed that many of the patterns discovered in the seventies and eighties still persisted in the nineties. Most international news originates from the developed world, particularly the United States. He concludes that as a group, Western countries are featured the most in the world news media.

### **New Technologies and the structure of global news flow**

New technologies have produced significant changes in the character of global news flows, especially with the coming of global satellite television networks and interactive multimedia systems. The old structure had provided governments and domestic media organizations with opportunities to censor, edit or control flows of news into their countries or region. Wire copy could be edited and even when news was provided in video form, it came in the form of video cassette or feeds for rebroadcast. With the advent of global television networks, the adding of sounds and pictures improved the quality of news. The qualitative nature was also made better by the fact that breaking news events such as the release of Mandela from jail, the 9/11 terrorists attacks, the students' demonstration in Tiananmen Square could be relayed live, uncensored and seemingly unmediated by prejudiced opinions of reporters and even governments. The live television camera appeared to be a global mirror, an objective tool for the collection and dissemination of the potentially volatile information called news.

Exploiting the profitability of financial news and utilizing new technologies, a new dimension to the provision of international newscame in the 1990s with the Bloomberg network providing about

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30,000 subscribers around the world via interactive multimedia computer terminals, quotes on stocks, currencies, commodities, bonds and other securities as well as breaking business news. The information flowed in numbers, words, pictures and sounds and most of the world's central banks were subscribers (Alleyne, 1997, p. 11).

However, Alleyne argues that the evolution in technologies which has transformed global news distribution from the international wire services to global satellite networks and interactive multimedia systems, have only increased the quantity and quality of information flows, but has failed to subvert the basic hierarchical structure of those flows. He notes that the new financial information networks have merely mirrored the patterns of world trade and investment flows, and these are still concentrated in the richer countries of North America, Europe and Japan. It is tempting to assume that more efficient international communication has produced globalization, but this is incorrect. Alleyne shows that what is more precise is that there is an uneven globalization (1997). Indeed some scholars view globalization as a new form of cultural domination through international communication.

Mowlana (1997) argues that there is a gap between the industrially developed and developing countries in the way they are able to create, process, and apply the needed information for economic, political and cultural development. He argues that, while technological developments such as convergence between telecommunication and computing strengthen a trend in the industrialized countries, the increasing needs and determination of developing countries to provide telecommunications in support of their national and international policies remain basic. Research supports the fact that the growth of technology is not necessarily increasing the access of all peoples to information, nationally or internationally, as there is a disparity between the poor and the rich. At the same time competition within and between the industrialized countries in the area of implementation and services is growing (Mowlana, 1997) and driving further increases in efficiency and capacity to perform informational tasks in the communication systems of industrialized nations.

### **Methodology**

Virtually all of the major studies of news flows have used as the central method content analysis. This study follows this tradition in its

use of content analysis. In this regard, what accounts for the significance of content analysis as a research method is its usefulness and requirement for a systematic and objective analysis of messages produced by mass media. It is this requirement that makes it possible for different persons, using common objective criteria, to observe the same content and to arrive at the same conclusions. As regards current disagreements in world forums over the nature of communication content in the international news media system, especially as they relate to the developing countries, such conflicting conclusions are not without foundation. Some would contend that coverage of the developing world is objective, balanced and responding to news interests in the nations of the South world. As these disagreements over communication content persist, interested parties are turning more and more to new, more controlled, methods of content analysis. It is here that the present study had to exert great care.

Concerning mass media content at the international level, the questions are primarily those relating to the amount and nature i.e. the quantity and quality of coverage given to the less developed countries. In preparation for this study, the authors carried out a thorough review of the recent debates regarding content analysis, and also reviewed the use of the method in the numerous news flow studies cited above.

It is against this backdrop that content analysis as a method of research finds relevance in this study which compared the content of newspapers in their coverage of the 2008 US and Ghana presidential elections in three Nigerian newspapers in terms of three variables: frequency, prominence and sources of news.

The study was premised on the assumption that if journalists, news editors and news agencies are concerned that the developing countries get little or no attention in the media, then they would give more attention to Third World events in the content. They would give more priority and prominence to news stories from and about the developed nations.

Based on these assumptions, the following research questions were formulated:

- RQ1** What is the frequency of coverage given to the US presidential election in Nigerian newspapers compared with the coverage of the Ghana election happening at roughly the same time?
- RQ2** What is the degree of prominence of the location in the newspapers of the US presidential elections in comparison with the Ghana elections?

**RQ3** To what extent did Nigerian newspapers depend on foreign sources as against local sources for news about the US and Ghana presidential elections?

**RQ4** Do findings validate or invalidate Galtung's structural imperialism theory?

To answer these questions, three Nigerian daily national newspapers, *Punch*, *Guardian* and *The Nation* were selected based on their wide reach and readership popularity. A period of four months, October, November, December and January were also chosen. The justification for this is that while the US presidential elections were held in November 2008, the Ghana presidential elections were held in December 2008. Thus, the content analysis covered at least four months, three months before and one month after the elections of both the US presidential elections and the Ghana presidential elections. All the 123 editions of each newspaper for the four-month period were selected for analysis, making a total of 369 editions of the three newspapers for the four-month period. M'Bayo (2010) states that a content analyst must consider three requirements in the development of content categories : (1) categories must accurately fit the needs of the study (2) they must be exhaustive relative to the study, and (3) they must be mutually exclusive. With this in mind, five different sets of categories for observation were developed, namely, straight news, features, editorials, cartoons and photographs.

The coding team included one masters student, one 500 level student, one 400 level and two 300 level students of the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. Where a particular content did not fit neatly into a content category, inter-coding consensus was tested by correlational methods. The "prominence", was defined in terms of the placement of the story in the newspaper, "frequency" was defined by the number of news reports about the events and "news source" defined by the byline on the story.

### **Results and Analysis**

The data analysis for this study was based on the 1100 news items on the US and Ghana presidential elections as reported by *Punch*, *Guardian* and *The Nation* newspapers between October 2008 and January 2009. These news items were analyzed using simple percentage and frequency tables to answer the four research questions stated above.

**RQ1.** *What is the frequency of coverage given to the US presidential elections in comparison with that given to the Ghana presidential elections by Nigerian newspapers?*

Table 1 indicates how many news items were carried on both the US and Ghana presidential elections by the three newspapers, while Table 2 shows how many news items were carried on both elections by each of the papers. The total news items on both the US and Ghana presidential elections is 1100 representing 100 per cent. Of these, 1015 items representing 92.27 per cent of the total news reports were on the US presidential elections, while 85 or 7.72 per cent of the total news items.

**Table 1: Frequency of coverage of the US and Ghana elections by the three Nigerian newspapers**

Election coverage	Frequency	Percentage
USA Elections	1015	92.27
Ghana Elections	85	7.72
Total	1100	100%

**Table 2: Showing Frequency of coverage of the US and Ghana elections by each of the three Nigerian newspapers**

Election coverage	Guardian %	Punch %	The Nation %
USA Elections	424(90.99%)	293(94.52%)	298(91.98%)
Ghana Elections	42(9.01%)	17(5.48%)	26(8.02%)
Total	100%	100%	100%
n	466	310	324

were on the Ghana presidential elections. When analyzed individually, the *Guardian* recorded the highest number of news reports with 424 news items on the US elections and only 42 news items on the Ghana elections.

While *The Nation* came a distant second with 298 reports representing 91.98 per cent on the US elections and only 26 or 8.02 per cent on the Ghana elections. *Punch* came third with a total of 293 representing 94.5 per cent of the reports on the US elections and a small 17 or 5.48 per cent on the Ghana elections.

**RQ2.** *What is the degree of prominence accorded the news items on the US presidential elections as compared with that given to the Ghana presidential elections?*

**Table 3: Showing a comparison of the degree of prominence given to the US and Ghana presidential elections by the three Nigerian newspapers**

Prominence	USA	Ghana	Total
Front Page News/Photo	314(31.8%)	23(20.5.8%)	337(30.6%)
Back page news/photo/editorial	175(17.7%)	14(12.5%)	189(17.2%)
Inside page news/photo	499(50.5%)	75(67%)	574(52.2%)
Total	100%	100%	100%
n	988	112	1100

Table 3 shows the degree of prominence given to the news items by the three Nigerian newspapers. The data displayed in Table 4 shows the degree of prominence using the placement of news items by each of the newspapers. Of the 988 news items on the US elections carried by the three newspapers, 314 representing 31.8 per cent were placed on the front page, while of the 112 news items on the Ghana elections only 23 representing 20.58 per cent were placed on the front page. Thus, of the 1100 news items carried on the two elections by the three newspapers, 337 representing 30.6 per cent were carried on the front page, 189 representing 17.2 per cent were carried on the back page and 574 representing 52.2 per cent were carried on the inside pages.

As will become apparent, the newspapers tended to give much more prominence to the American elections compared to the relative prominence given to the Ghana elections.

**Table 4: Comparing the degree of prominence given to the US and Ghana presidential elections**

Election coverage	Front page news items	Back page news items
US	314(93.2%)	175(92.6%)
Ghana	23 (6.8%)	14(7.4%)
Total	100%	100%
n	337	189

Comparing the degree of prominence given to the coverage of both elections as determined by the number of front page placements given to the news items, the US presidential elections got 93.2 per cent prominence as against 6.8 per cent prominence given to the Ghana presidential elections. Again, of the 189 news items that got placement on the back page, 175 representing 92.6 per cent were on the US presidential elections, while 14 news items representing 7.4 per cent were on the Ghana presidential elections.

**Table 5: Showing the degree of prominence given to the coverage of the US presidential elections by each of the three Nigerian newspapers**

Prominence	Guardian	Punch	The Nation	Total
Front Page News/Photo	151(37.4%)	96(32.8%)	67(23.1%)	314(31.8%)
Back page news/photo/editorial	80(19.8%)	23(7.8%)	72(24.7%)	175(17.7%)
Inside page news/photo	173(42.8%)	174(59.4%)	152(52.2%)	499(50.5%)
Total	100%	100%	100%	(100%)
n	404	293	291	988

**Table 6: Showing the degree of prominence given to the coverage of the Ghana presidential elections by each of the three Nigerian newspapers**

Prominence	Guardian	Punch	The Nation	Total
Front Page News/Photo	12(19.35%)	0	11(33.33%)	23(20.5.8%)
Back page news/photo	5(8.1%)	2(11.8%)	7(21.21%)	14(12.5%)
Inside page news/photo	45(72.55%)	15(88.2%)	15(45.46%)	75(67%)
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
n	62	17	33	112

Tables 5 and 6 show the degree of prominence given to the coverage of both elections by the individual newspapers. In Table 5, of the 404 news items carried by the *Guardian* newspaper on the US elections, 151 representing 37.4 per cent appeared on the front page, 80 representing 19.8 per cent on the back page and 173 representing 42.8 per cent appeared on the inside pages. Further, 12 representing 19.4 per cent of the 62 news items on the Ghana elections appeared on the front page, 5 representing 8.1 per cent on the back page and 45 representing 72.6 per cent appeared on the inside pages. For the *Punch* newspaper, out of its 293 news items 96 representing 32.8 per cent appeared on the front page, 23 representing 7.8 per cent on the back page and 174 representing 59.4 per cent appeared on the inside pages. There were no front page news reports on the Ghana elections.

However, two news items representing 11.8 per cent appeared on the back page and 15 representing 88.2 per cent appeared on the inside pages. *The Nation* newspaper carried a total number of 291 news items on the US elections, out of which 67 representing 23.1 per cent appeared on the front page, 72 news items representing 24.7 per cent appeared on the back page, while 152 representing 52.2 per cent appeared on the inside pages. For the degree of prominence given to the coverage of the Ghana elections by *The Nation* newspaper, out of the 33 news items carried, 11 representing 33.33 per cent appeared on

the front page, 7 representing 21.21 per cent appeared on the back page and 15 news items representing 45.46 per cent were carried on the inside pages.

**RQ3.** *To what extent did Nigerian newspapers depend on foreign sources as against local sources for news about the US and Ghana presidential elections?*

**Table 7: Comparing the sources of news items of the three Nigerian newspapers**

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Source	Frequency	Percentage
Local source	250	22.73
Foreign source	850	77.27
Total	1100	100%

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Data on Table 7 shows that of the 1100 news items, 850 were from foreign sources, mostly international news agencies such as Reuters, AP, and AFP, while 250 were from local sources. Table 8 analyzes the sources used by the individual newspapers and shows that of the 466 news items carried by the *Guardian*, 340 representing 72.96 per cent were from foreign sources, while 126 representing 27.04 per cent were from local sources. For *Punch* newspaper, 234 news items representing 75.5 per cent out of a total of 310 were from foreign sources while 76 representing 24.5 per cent were from local sources. Similarly 276 representing 85.19 per cent of the 324 news items carried by *The Nation* newspaper were from foreign sources as against 48 representing 14.81 per cent from local sources.

**Table 8: Comparing the sources of news items of each of the three Nigerian newspapers**

Source	Guardian %	Punch	The Nation %	Total
Local sources	126(27.04%)	76(24.5%)	48(14.81%)	250(22.73%)
Foreign sources	340(72.96%)	234(75.5%)	276(85.19%)	850(77.27%)
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
n	466	310	324	1100

**RQ4.** *Do findings validate or invalidate Galtung's structural imperialism theory?*

The data in all the frequency tables 1-6 were used to answer the questions posed in Galtung's hypotheses 3 and 4, while tables 7 and 8 are used to answer questions posed by hypotheses 5 as well as 4.

**Discussion/ Interpretation**

To determine the structure of global news flow, let us consider the following findings:

**Frequency**

- (1) 1100 news items were carried on both elections
- (2) 1015 representing 92.27 per cent of these were on the US presidential elections.
- (3) Only 85 representing 7.72 per cent were on the Ghana presidential elections.
- (4) Each of the three newspapers studied gave more coverage to the US elections as follows:
  - a). Comparatively, the *Guardian* gave 90.99 per cent coverage to the US elections as against 9.01 per cent coverage given to the Ghana elections.
  - b). *Punch* gave 94.52 per cent coverage as against 5.48 percent given to Ghana presidential elections.
  - e). *The Nation* gave 91.98 per cent coverage and only 8.02 per cent coverage to the Ghana presidential elections.

The frequency of coverage of both the US and Ghana presidential elections is largely skewed in favor of the US. The above findings, therefore, while showing a preponderance of "Center news in the foreign news content of the media of a periphery nation" as is postulated in Galtung's third hypothesis, also clearly demonstrates that the South does not learn much about other regions of the South, but receives far more materials about the First World, especially the United States and Britain. It also agrees with Zuckerman's submission that media attention has a strong correlation with economic factors, especially to a nation's wealth as measured by gross domestic product (2003). Consequently these findings also support Galtung's fourth hypothesis which states that "there is a feudal interaction structure whereby the dominated nations in the periphery are kept apart with little communication among themselves".

#### **Prominence**

- (1) Of the 1100 news items, 337 got front page placement. 317 representing 93.2 per cent of these news items were on the US presidential elections.
- (2) Only 23 representing 6.8 per cent were on the Ghana presidential elections.
- (3) The *Guardian* placed 151 representing 92.6 per cent news items on the US elections on its front page as against the placement of 12 representing 7.4 per cent news items on the Ghana presidential elections.
- (4) *Punch* placed 96 representing 100 per cent news items on the US elections on its front page, while none of its news items on the Ghana presidential elections got front page placement.
- (5) For *The Nation*, 67 representing 85.9 per cent news items were on the US elections, and 11 representing 14.1 per cent news items were on the Ghana presidential elections.

The degree of prominence given to the coverage of the US presidential election over the coverage of the Ghana presidential election is not only a strong indication of the lopsided nature of the global news structure but also mirrors the global political and economic structure. This perhaps agrees with Hess' view that in charting the shape of the world as it appears in the American press, the rule of thumb has been that attention is paid in direct proportion to a country's closeness to New York City, adding that the globe is prioritized so that the death

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of one Western European equaled three Eastern Europeans, equaled nine Latin Americans, equaled eleven Middle Easterners and equaled twelve Asians (1996, p. 37). Thus, one US election is perhaps worth more than all the national elections in the continent of Africa, when added up.

### Sources

- (1) Of the 1100 news items carried by the three newspapers on both elections, 850 representing 77.27 per cent were from foreign sources, while 250 representing 22.73 per cent originated from local sources.
- (2) For the *Guardian*, 72.96 per cent of the news items originated from foreign sources and 27.04 per cent from local sources.
- (3) Punch got 75.55 of its news items on both elections from foreign sources and 24.45 per cent from local sources.
- (4) Similarly, *The Nation* got 77.27 per cent of its news items on both elections from foreign sources as against 22.73 per cent from local sources.

The findings of this study show that the major suppliers of news still remain the international news agencies of Reuters, AP, and AFP and the global satellite TV news networks with occasional stories from the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN). This supports Galtung's second hypothesis which states that "news flow is vertical from developed countries of the Northern hemisphere to the less developed countries of the Southern hemisphere" with a substantially lesser volume of supplemental flow within the South. This also confirms the findings of Parker's 1996 study which revealed that most international news originates from the developed world, particularly the US. It also supports Boyd-Barrett's position that developing countries are overly dependent on Western-based media to articulate and disseminate information, even about the developing world itself (Boyd-Barrett, 2003, p. 35).

### Scope and Limitations of study

This study covered only the print media in Nigeria and consequently limits generalization. Due to time constraints, researchers were unable to carry out hypothesis testing and to also expand their study in the context of Galtung's hypotheses 1 and 2 which state that:

1. There is a preponderance of "Center" news events reported in the world press systems and,
2. There is a much larger discrepancy in the news exchange ratios of "Center" and "Periphery" nations than in the exchange ratios of "Center" nations.

As a result of similar constraints, the researchers were also unable to study magazines, the electronic media and the Internet. However, since this is an ongoing study, these limitations will be addressed in subsequent studies.

### **Conclusion**

The premise of the present paper is the South's argument alleging unidirectional information flow and that communication today has become an exchange between unequal partners in favor of the more powerful, richer and better equipped North (Masmoudi, 1979; UNESCO, 1980, p. 34). Furthermore, attempts by world bodies such as UNESCO to correct the imbalance have been resisted by the nations of the North with their political power. This paper has studied the current structure of global news flow to determine if such a structure still remains largely lopsided.

The reporting of the 2008 presidential elections provides an ideal test case in that the 2008 elections in Ghana were considered a model that all Africans should know more about. Thus, the researcher compared the coverage of the 2008 US and Ghanaian presidential elections by three of the leading and largest circulation Nigerian national daily newspapers - *Punch*, *Guardian* and *The Nation*. The content analysis approach, featuring a set of formal characteristics of frequency, prominence, and sources, were employed to generate data.

The findings suggest that if there is a "new", emerging news geography it has not been revealed in this study. Rather, it shows that "Center" news occupies a larger proportion of the foreign news content in the media of "periphery" nations than the developed countries and that the major suppliers of news still remain the international news agencies and the global satellite news networks. Similarly, results show that even though the new information and communication technologies have made broadcast signals more available, they have not threatened the hierarchical structure of those flows which still appear largely unequal. Regional news agencies such as PANA which were established to give an alternative news flow and give journalists greater

editorial control have not remedied the situation, while NAN, which would have bridged the gap, is unable to maintain bureaus outside Nigeria.

Similarly, findings support Galtung's hypotheses 3, 4, & 5 which state that:

- (1) "Center" news occupies a larger proportion of the foreign news content in the media of "Periphery" nations than "Periphery" news occupies.
- (2) There is a feudal interaction structure whereby the dominated nations in the periphery are kept apart, with little communication among themselves.
- (3) Consequently, there is relatively little or no flow of news among "Periphery" nations, especially across colonial-based block borders.

### **Recommendations**

Although many suggestions as to how to address the imbalance in global news flow have been put forward in the past, these authors argue that not enough has been done and therefore recommend the following:

- (1) Leaders of developing nations should place high on their agenda, the need to develop communication policies that will make them part of the global information society and ensure that these policies are implemented and, more importantly, sustained.
- (2) Journalists of the developing countries should cultivate what Merrill terms "Third World self-assurance" (2008, p. 182) rather than accuse developed countries of communications imperialism when they are equally guilty of playing down serious developmental news in favor of the more sensational and materially gratifying ones.
- (3) African nations must as a matter of urgency resuscitate and sustain PANA and set up bureaus in important world centers, as a means of providing contra flow to the major Western agencies news flows. This will also give journalists in Africa more editorial control over news from their region and abroad and hopefully balance the lopsided North-South and deficient South-South flows.

- (4) Developed world media, while not compromising press freedom, must be fair, balanced and objective in their representation of developing world.

Similarly, findings support Galtung's hypotheses 3, 4, & 5 which state that:

- (1) "Center" news occupies a larger proportion of the foreign news. News flows are failing to report the progress and achievements of developing nations as much as they report their failures and catastrophes. For instance programs such as CNN "Inside Africa" which mirrors Africa to the rest of the world should apply some degree of restraint in portraying the developing world only as corrupt, backward and never-do-well. While this is misrepresentative, it is also unethical and, although developing countries have their own fair share of setbacks, they are making significant progress in health, education and other areas.
- (2) There should be a rebirth and sustenance of the discourse on the stillborn New World Information and Communication Order, especially by scholars in developing nations as this will stimulate and maintain international attention. It is recommended that this discourse take place at three levels; national, continental and international and should focus on the areas of procurement, assembly and manufacturing.
- (3) Leaders of developing nations should invest in human capital, particularly in the area of information and communication for development and not simply communication about development (Akinfeleye, 2010, p. 187). They must also recognize the power of information in sustaining democracy, accountability, transparency and good governance.
- (4) In agreement with Alozie (2010, p. 49), developing countries should invest heavily in communication infrastructures as this will serve as a vehicle to catapult them into the future, by promoting openness, access, networking and problem solving that transform societies and bring people together.
- (5) Developing countries should invest more on ICTs and capacity building in the information and communication sector, by integrating communication training in line with the relevant aspects of the UNESCO model of journalism training. Without the development of human capacity to use information

services and professionals to create and maintain the facilities, the African information sector will remain constrained (Alozie, 2010, p. 57).

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