

## BUILDING A UNIVERSITY BRAND WITH MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS (MPR)

**Okoh Samuel Ejime**

Department of Mass Communication

Veritas University, Bwari, Abuja

[okohsamuelejime@gmail.com](mailto:okohsamuelejime@gmail.com)

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.24949.65764

### **Abstract**

*University as an institution of higher learning can be nurtured into a powerful brand with different Integrated Marketing Communication Tools and this can be strategically done over the years by deliberately putting in place a plan that should be executed in phases. Public Relations is one of the important tools of Integrated Marketing Communication and from it, the concept of "Marketing Public Relations" [ MPR ] was developed. MPR is a promotional idea that give quality and positive communication support to a product as well as an organisation, and what makes MPR unique, is that it can give this publicity support and push to a brand without any help from advertising. This paper was carried out by consulting articles, books, and works of scholars in different areas of Integrated Marketing Communication.*

**Keywords:** Marketing Public Relations, Public Relations, Marketing Communication, Corporate Social Responsibility CSR

### **Introduction**

Marketing Public Relations can be explained to be the use of two of the most important business functions, marketing and public relations to generate awareness and positive responses to products, services, businesses and organisations. Marketing Public Relations has become relevant due to the increase in different products and services competing in the markets, and the difficulties this creates in reaching customers. Public Relations as a discipline and a profession is liberal because it encourages third party endorsement either directly or indirectly, the indirect aspect of it means that individuals can of their own volition decide to say something good or recommend a product, service and more importantly a University to another person because they derive satisfaction and fulfilment in using the product or passing through such higher institution.

MPR was developed in the 1980's to distinguish and explain the role Public Relations in particular play in contribution plan (Harris & Whalen,2006), Kotler (2003) explained that MPR is very important in product building and development especially in the area of product launch and repositioning a mature product thereby prevent it from decline.

As stated in the definition of MPR, MPR derived its functional strength from the strategic deployment of Public Relations tools which most often are not necessary paid for as against advertising that must be paid for by an identified sponsored.

As a student in a school of communication few years ago i was involved in a group discussion that deliberated on the best brand communication tool between Advertising and Public Relations to aid publicity for a University and institutions of higher learning. In the course of the deliberation, it was agreed that Public Relations is a deliberate and sustained efforts usually initiated by an organisation or an individual in reaching out to a specific target audience in order to get a good image. In as much as this is correct, perception of relevant publics towards organisations and individuals can also be formed by unconscious but sustained efforts of these same organisations. This means that Public Relations is about deliberate efforts, unconscious efforts and the perception of relevant publics towards the two which takes a longer period of time to be accurately measured. Advertising on the other hand is a non-personal exposure of a developed advertisement by an identified advertiser with short time expectation. The group in the course of our discussion agreed that advertisers has control over advertisement placement because they control the input and placement since they pay for it, and as a result, the balanced information required by the public concerning such advertiser and advertised product will never be achieved hence favoured Public Relations as the best brand communication tool of the two to build University as a brand.

### **Theoretical framework**

The role of theory is to specify the relationship between variables with the aim to predict and explain a phenomenon (Fox & Bayat, 2007). In view of this, this work hereby adopts Situation Theory of publics (Grunig J E, 1968) which posited that in communication, there are some group of people that are influential in reaching out to a larger part of the society, and make them behave in a certain way. With situation theory, these group of influencers should be identified and effectively

utilised. In this regard, it is important we consider the different publics of a University and first the internal publics like the staff and the students. Positive Word-of-Mouth information from these stakeholders to the public will help build a university brand. Situation theory refers to some of these influencers as opinion leaders, and they made up the external publics of a University, among them will be parents and policy makers in the education sector. These stakeholders should be reached out to on a regular basis because their activities will either make or destroy a University.

### **Brand Endorsement with Public Relations**

Under Marketing Public Relations [MPR], information is forwarded to the public through Public Relations, and the final publication is done in form on news, photonews, and features which is put in the media with a by- line. In publicity by-line is known as third party endorsement. This concept can be used to market a tangible product, service and also a University. The neutral presentation through by-line no doubt brings better credibility to the message in terms of acceptance to the public. In other words, it is established that the credibility (Marketing) Public Relations bring to bear in building a brand made it an effective but subtle brand communication tool. Brand endorsement involves different forms of treatment, some of which are, using a celebrity to present a product to the public, a medical Doctor to unveil a medical product and a successful student to endorse his school and faculty.

Universities all over the world are assessed based on research, facilities, academic standard and community service. Finally, these criteria and others will be driven by the perception of the general public, especially the core target audience of a particular university / Universities in order to yield positive result. Let us look at how this work for the good of a university, juxtaposing how the positive image of a university help her academic staff especially renowned Scholars and vice versa with few examples.

Lagos Business School LBS is a faculty in Pan-Atlantic University Lagos. There are two highly respected personalities namely Prof Pat Utomi and Dr Christopher Kolade that are associated with Pan-Atlantic University, the owner of LBS. Prof Utomi has done very well for himself over the years, first as a special adviser to President Shehu Shagari at a very young age and has continue to contribute greatly to quality social / political economic discourse over the years. I remembered in the 90's when Prof Pat Utomi and associates established

Platinum Bank, many young people especially those within the banking industry wanted to work with Platinum Bank because of the positive influence has over them, as many of these young people see him as mentor. Dr Christopher Kolade a boardroom guru and Nigerian former high commissioner to UK whose working experience transverse his sojourn as DG. Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, to MD of Cadbury Nigerian Plc and Director in many blue chip companies across Nigeria.

These two personalities are known in the society for their positive development contributions to the nation through the various media publicity tools which falls under the Media and Public Relations exposure to the general publics, and not through advertising. Prof Pat Utomi and Dr Christopher Kolade are associated with the Pan-Atlantic University, Dr Bala Usman with ABU, Prof Jelili Omotola UNILAG and Prof Jubril Aminu University of Maiduguri and because of this, their names and personalities has brought good image to the University and vice visor.

Universities in Nigeria and at the international level are known and recognised for excellence in different areas and that is why Harvard University, Oxford University and others are rated among the best on a yearly basis. University of Lagos is recognised in the field of Engineering from the time of Prof Awojobi while ABU is known for training artists in the area of painting, sculpture and drawing. Pan-Atlantic University Lagos " School Of Media and Communication" is one of the best in the country in the area of Media, Communication, Film and Marketing communication studies. There are syndicate rooms in Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos sponsored by different multinational organisations and other successful organisations. These rooms are well equipped and arranged with quality chairs and materials for good learning experience for students. Sponsorship involvement of these organisations include branding the syndicate hall/rooms with the organisation's logo and colours that when you enter them you will feel the presence of these organisations. The University also has Nollywood film centre, to track and document the activities within the Nigeria film industry. The advantage if these developments for Pan-Atlantic University is that it brings good image to the institution and the organisations that associate with her.

In Europe and USA, grade Some organisations especially banks do donate branded books to highly rated university libraries and with time, research has shown that when some of the students that have benefited from reading these

books become independent and working, think first of banking with the banks that provided these books when they were in school

### **Deployment of Public Relations Tools for Marketing Purpose**

The best way to explain Marketing Public Relations MPR efforts in nurturing a University into a quality brand can be effectively done by comparing first how Public Relations works, side by side with how advertising works. It is important we put this in the right perspective so that the roles each play in pushing a brand will be clear. One of the major roles of advertising is to develop a persuasive message that is the outcome of brain storming efforts by a creative team of a Copy writer, graphic artist and production expert. This creative team then package the advertisement into a material with time / duration which will be handed over to the media planning unit for media exposure in relevant media organisations.

### **The major differences between Advertising and Public Relations**

**TAB 1.1**

<b>ADVERTISING</b>	<b>PUBLIC RELATIONS</b>
Advertiser must be known	Third Party Endorsement
Advertisement must be paid for	Public Relations not paid for
Advertiser has full control over advertisement exposure	Media house / beat reporter has control over publicity

Advertising runs its full circle with the term known as Advertising Tripod, the three elements that made up the advertising tripod are: a] The Advertiser b] Advertising Agency and c] Media organisation.

Advertising is defined as a non-personal presentation of goods and idea by the identified owner of these goods and idea. Meaning that for advertising to take place, there must be an idea, product or service to be presented to the public. The owner and manufacturer of the product is known as Advertiser, and

advertisement must have the name of the advertiser. With product advertising, the name, features and benefits of the product to customers and prospects must be packaged into a TV, Radio, Print and other selected media formats before exposure in the appropriate media. Exposure in this case is based on the media habit of the target audience. All advertisements are paid for by the sponsors also known as the advertisers, advertisers have full control over advertisement production and placement because they pay the bills.

Next is the advertising agency whose creative team has the responsibility to plan and develop advertisement material based on the “ advertisement brief” from the client. The media team of the advertising agency develop media plan for the exposure of the finished creative material in selected media platforms. Media organisations provide the platform through which advertisements are exposed to the right audience.

The work of Public Relations on the other hand is to educate and inform the general public especially to further narrowed down audience into smaller groups which are known and refers to as the core target audience, so as to reach them in a subtle way known as “ Third Party Endorsement”. Since Public Relations is not paid for, media organisations have more control over publicity exposure than client when it comes to media relations compared to advertising in which the client has 100% control.

Cost of advertising is always more expensive because advertising budget is prepared based on rate cards from media organisations, although rate differs because it is based on the advertisement size for the print media, and commercial length for electronic media. Public Relations is however far more economical because cost is not necessary attached to publicity. It is established that not all organisations especially universities that use advertising, but they all use Public Relations in one form or the other. The main reason many organisations especially universities use PR is because it has credibility since it is believable.

PR covers all the activities of a university which is both internal and external, the internal aspect is propelled by newsletter, notice board and suggestion box. The external aspect is executed through corporate social responsibility CSR, letters to the public and relationship with relevant regulatory body like National Universities Commission [NUC]. Proper management of internal publics in the case of a university is very important, because every internal public must own the institution as his property and most also imbibe in the ideology that if the university fail he fails hence has no choice but to promote the university through personal effort as brand ambassador to the university, monitor other universities

good efforts and report back to his own organisation for improvement and above all respect his University's structure of passing information to the identified publics. These of course will not happen by accident but by the concerted efforts of the University through training and grooming all internal publics which in this case are teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as students. As a build up to the rudiment of nurturing and marketing a university into an established brand with public relations which is usually combined under Integrated Marketing Communication [ IMC ] in brand managements, training efforts by the university for staff in this regards should be made public through selected media that appeal to the institutions publics.

### **Marketing Public Relations Tools That Can Be Used to Market and Nurture University into A Brand**

**TAB 1.2**

<b>TOOLS</b>	<b>DEPLOYMENT</b>
Photonews	This captures event in pictures, usually it is accompanied with captions which describes an event. The unique thing about photonews is that it gives you the pictorial and full information about an events with limited space.
Corporate Social Responsibility	Corporate Social Responsibility, has to do with an organisation giving back to the society in which it carries out her business. CSR as it came to be known today started about a century and half ago when successful business leaders started donating money and materials to help the less privileged in the society. According to experts in the study of CSR, many if these wealthy entrepreneurs goes into philanthropy to help, but later discovered that these good deeds

	<p>generate goodwill and growth for their businesses. After a brief study by experts in this area, it was concluded that CSR is a concept built on social activities and business development. We have seen situations in which universities employ indigenes of the localities in which they are located, build Police Stations in these communities and also give scholarship to students from these communities to study at these universities.</p>
<p>Press tour</p>	<p>Universities can invite journalists to tour new facilities within the campus, especially new structures and laboratories that will further enhance learning within a university community. This initiative will enable the media create awareness for the university to the right audience</p>
<p>Co-branding event</p>	<p>Co-branding is about collaborating with another organisation on relevant events that appeal to a particular university's publics. Banking and Finance department of a university can collaborate with a notable Bank for example on a workshop with the theme "Professionalism in Banking and Financial Industry". This collaboration can be done once in a year with deliberate efforts by organisers to make sure that it is adequately covered by the media and exposed to the public, especially</p>



	the core target audience of the concern University and the financial clan.
<b>TOOL</b>	<b>DEPLOYMENT</b>
Advertorial	<p>This is an editorial that comes in form of advertisement. Advertorial is a packaged information about a product, service or corporate organisation but published especially in the print media as an advertisement. Advertorial input comes directly from the client and packaged as directed by the same client, compare to direct advertising which the advertising agency developed after a brain storming session as a result of brief from client.</p> <p>Product and service advertisement of the same size with advertorial cost far less the advertorial.</p>
<b>Interviews</b>	<p>This is planned and executed by organisations for the purpose of putting into the public domain an important information that if the public is aware, will be of advantage to the concern organisations. A University that is about to establish a faculty of Law which is in high demand, can organise a structured interview for the Vice Chancellor and appointed Dean of the proposed Law Faculty to talk to selected media organisations. Also, interviews can be organised at intervals for prominent faculty members of a</p>

	university to talk about positive developments in the university that will be of interest to the publics and stakeholders in the education sector.
<b>News Mention</b>	News mention is processing important information about a university into a newsworthy formant, so that the public will receive it as news. Example of this will be graduation ceremony, introducing new department, showcasing achievements in research scientific breakthrough.
<b>TV and Radio Programme Sponsorship</b>	Having sponsored programmes on Television and Radio on weekly basis is good because it enables you have a channel through which you expose information about your university. Electronic Programme sponsorship can be done in two ways; you can develop your own programme with your content or find an existing relevant programmes you can buy into in order to put your worthy activities / developments in public domain. Universities can effectively integrate this with their other online channels activities especially school website by making it interactive all the time.

The above MPR tools have been strategically used by well recognised universities in different parts of the world, with good positioning of themselves by incorporating their school values, symbols like logo and colour into these tools deployments, which when wrap together becomes Corporate Identity.

### **University as a Fast Moving Consumer Goods**

Just like products and services can be nurtured into FAST MOVING CONSUMER GOODS [FCMG] by consistent quality positioning through MPR, universities can also attain the level of FMCG. Some Universities like Harvard and Oxford have already attained this height at the global level, in Nigeria few universities have also done very well in this regard, what is FAST MOVING CONSUMER GOODS [FCMG], and also what is POSITIONING.

**Fast moving consumer goods [FMCG]** are products and services that are in high demand and experience huge turnover rate, tangible goods that fall within this category are Toilet soaps, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, mobile Phones etc. while services under this category will be banking services, airline services on viable routes and dry cleaning services. Universities managements across the world and in Nigeria have continue to make concerted efforts in the areas of good image building through publicity, good locations have also been used by some to turn their institutions into a FMCG. Good examples will be Oxford and Harvard Universities, and some well-established universities in Nigeria where the demand to enrol at these universities far outweigh supply especially with some programmes. Universities of Abuja Law PhD programme for example is in high demand but the School can only. The programme is oversubscribed, that some qualified candidates have applied to enrol for the programme for years now without success.

**Positioning:** according to Berkowitz, Kerin, Rudelius "Product positioning refers to the place an offering occupies in the consumer's mind on important attributes relative to competitive offerings" (Marketing, Times Mirror Mosby Publishing Co., 1986). Ayer's Dictionary of Advertising Terms defined positioning as " Art and science of fitting the product or service to one or more segments of the Broad market in such a way as to it meaningfully apart from competition " what these definitions are saying is that effective positioning of a product is when owner of a product enshrine her products in the sub-consciousness of customers with continuous exposure of such product's attributes and benefits with marketing communication efforts over a period of time. Ries and Trout (1981) see positioning as the ability of a brand to command position in consumer's mind, this they strongly believe can be pushed by different communication efforts.

This idea and definition of positioning can be taken by a university as an institution and can used to set a university apart in order to have advantage over

others. As a result of quality positioning, some Universities have attracted technical and academic request from smaller institutions so that the excellence attached to the recognised universities will rub-off the institutions that seek this request.

### **University Name as A Brand**

Many Nigerian universities over the years have attained recognition as a result of quality academic standards, strategic publicity deployment and exploits of their products. As a result of consistency **in** maintaining this, these universities target audience and the larger society have come to know, recognised and identify them even without their full names. Apart from the short names that the society have come to know these Universities with, the greeting terms of their products are also known and linked to these universities. This did not happen by accident, but by the direct and indirect efforts of these universities as well as that of their products in projecting the image of these institutions

### **Unilag:**

When you say Unilag, many across the country and beyond narrow it down to mean university of Lagos. Also, old and new students of the university refer to themselves as "Great Akokites" this term have been used as a form of greetings over the years, that the society have come to identify the term with the students and University of Lagos

### **Great Ife.**

This is the term used for University of Ife and Nigerians know this as the same thing as University of Ife.

### **ABU:**

Stands for Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

### **UNN:**

Stands for University of Nigeria, Nsukka old and new students of this University refer to themselves as 'Lions'

### **UI:**

This means University of Ibadan.

The above terms and abbreviations has become the brand identity of the above universities in Nigeria. Kapferer (1997) and Macrae (1996) defined brand identity as what a brand stands for, according to them, brand identity must come before brand image because it is this identity that will transform into the image the brand wants the public to internalise as her soul.

### **Building a University brand with community effort**

University community members like academic, non-academic staff and other stakeholders has a role to play in building a quality university brand. According to Ken Pasternak of Marshall Strategy, brand building comes from within meaning that the brand community members must not only believe in it, but support it all the time. Great brands are those whose mission's statement people want to be part of because the brand positioning inspire them. According to Pasternak, "Universities are large, complex communities that each person needs to understand, believe in, and want to support the university culture in his or her own way for it to be successful. When brand is community driven, it goes from promise to reality"

Since University activities are service oriented, university as a Brand should offer relationship benefits and create accessibility (Morel, Preisler, and Nystrom 2002). Based on this advice, Kimberly Judson advised that universities should developed branding strategies that typically focus on differentiating her services from others through all their communication efforts.

### **Conclusion**

Building a university brand with Marketing Public Relations MPR, helps to give credibility to University efforts that are directed towards achieving positive image and brand building goals because it is mainly done through a third party endorsement as compared to advertising efforts that stipulated that advertiser must be known.

### **References**

- Adams, C A. (2002). 'Internal Organisational Factors Influencing Corporate Social and Ethical Reporting: Beyond Current Theorising; Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal, 15(2):223-50
- Baskin, J. (2006). 'Corporate Responsibility in Emerging Markets' Journal of Corporate Citizenship, 24

- Bernstein, D (1984) *Company Image and Reality: A critique of corporate communications*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, London
- Boone, L E & Kurtz, D L, (1999). *Contemporary Marketing*. Orlando: T Dryden Press
- Brody, E W. (1994). PR is to experience what marketing is to expectations. *Public Relations quarterly* 39(2) spring: 20-22
- Crawford, Merie C., *New Products Management* (Irwin, 1987), pp 146-148
- Dolphin, R R. & Fan, Y. (2000). Is Corporate Communication a strategic function? *Management decision*
- Dutton, JE, Dukerich, J.M. and Harguail, C.,(1994) organisational image and member identification, *Administration Science Quarterly* 39, 239-63
- Ferguson, S D. (1999). *Communication Planning: An Integrated Approach*. Thousand Oaks Calif: Sage Production
- Grunig, L. A. *Environmental Activism Revisited: The Changing Nature of Communication through Organizational Public Relations, Special Interest Groups and the Mass Media*. Monographs in Environmental Education and Environmental Studies, 2016, from
- Harris T L. (1993) How MPR adds value to Integrated Marketing Communications. *Public Relations quarterly*, summer 12-18
- Kitchen. P.J (1996). *Public Relations in the promotional mix: A three phase analysis marketing intelligence and planning*.
- Kitchen P.J. (1999). *Marketing Communication: Principles and Practice*. London: International Thomson Business Press
- Kitchen P J & Proctor, R A. 1991. The increasing Importance pf Public Relations in Fast Moving Consumer Goods. *Journal of Marketing Management* 7(2) 357-370
- Major, A. M. (1998). The utility of situational theory of publics for assessing public response to a disaster prediction. *Public Relations Review*, 24(4), 489-508. Retrieved February 06, 2016, from
- Murphy, J (ed) (1991) *Branding: A Key Marketing tool*, Macmillan, London

Olins, W ( 1989 ) Corporate Identity: Making business strategy visible through design, Thames & Hudson, London