Corporate Communication, Indigenous Languages, and Community Relations: A Discourse on Practices by Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This conceptual work examines corporate communication as a tool for coordinating universities' internal and external messages in Nigeria. It explores universities' attempts to harness, link-up, and interact with their publics. This chapter presents effective corporate communication as the unifying principle in many institutional decisions. It emphasizes that sometimes, universities' efforts to communicate effectively and profitably with their host communities end up in futility especially where indigenous language is a key environmental factor. University-neighbour relationship globally ought to be symbiotic and mutually-reinforcing. This chapter reviews scholarly commentaries on corporate communication, the relevance of indigenous language to community relations; and highlights in conclusion, the implications for universities in neglecting indigenous language during community engagements. It recommends that universities should motivate their employees to apply indigenous languages in enhancing understanding between the institutions and their host communities.

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Introduction

Corporate communication is a tool for harmonizing internal and external messages by institutions all over the world. This tool is extremely important in universities' community relations where indigenous languages are inevitable means of communication. Universities' harness corporate communication activities to transact, link-up, send messages and interact with internal and external publics. In the corporate communication manual of the University of Gothenburg (2014, p. 2), proper corporate communication within universities could increase the awareness of universities' activities; create, maintain and further develop relations within and outside of universities to enhance a clear and positive representation of universities. Though complex at times, nothing is as valuable to corporate entities as their ability to relate effectively and harmoniously with their various stakeholders through communication. As such, universities need corporate communication to establish, extend, maintain and sustain mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders (Mamuli, Mutsotso & Namasaka, 2013).

Sometimes, universities' efforts to communicate effectively and profitably with their host communities end up in futility (Fashiku, 2016). This is because, communication for universities is becoming more complex given the fact that wherever a university is founded in Nigeria and many other places, it has to contend with the indigenous language of that environment. Language plays a vital role in all fields of human endeavour since it is a channel through which people interact. The Nigerian university structure comprises a liberal socio-educational mix of people who do not only communicate but expect to be understood. Communication in indigenous languages has been observed to enhance social attachment between all concerned (Salawu, 2006). For a harmonious existence of a university in a community, it is important for that university to be able to interact and send out messages to this external public in the appropriate language of that community.

Some communities would desire to benefit from universities around them. For universities also, fostering mutually beneficial relationships with their host communities is top priority (Onabajo, 2013). Thus, community relations becomes imperative. Community relations activities are those actions that a university undertakes to enhance itself

and build a mutually beneficial relationship and of course, goodwill with its host community. In its absence, peaceful communities could become hostile; and inactive communities could become restive. Communication experts believe that indigenous language holds the key to avoiding host communities' hostilities and dampening their restiveness (Chima, 2012; Olatunji 2013; Siddiqui, 2019). However, applying appropriate language to create favourable relationships with host groups upon which an institution depends is a huge challenge for universities in Africa, especially Nigeria. The rationale for this, Popoola (2014) notes, is as a result of the colonial history and diverse ethnic composition of Nigeria. English is the official language of the country which has been adopted by institutions of learning and for this reason, indigenous languages do not appear valuable. Moreover, the local communities are also investing in their wards to acquire and speak in the English language. Also, managerial activities such as planning, coordinating, counselling and advisory in corporate communication are best tied to appropriate indigenous languages for courting neighbour publics of an institution. Conversely, these are dependent on how effective corporate communication is within that institution (Goodman, 2006; Fashiku, 2016).

Key Terms in this Chapter

Indigenous: This refers to the characteristics of people inhabiting a particular region.

Indigenous language: This refers to a tribal, vernacular, local language of a people that originated from a specified place. It is spoken, owned, shared amongst a set of people.

Public Relations: This is the management function that helps to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships, goodwill, understanding, acceptance, agreement and cooperation between groups, organisations, and their various internal and external publics. In this study, public relations refer to those activities carried out by information units in support of universities' organisation and goals.

Mutually Beneficial Relationship: This is a polite display of friendliness, based on mutual respect, towards another person or group of people. Mutual relationship is not one that is necessarily void of unrests, mutual suspicion and hostilities, but one in which provision is made for proper settlement that is acceptable to all the parties involved.

Corporate Communication: This refers to the deliberate and strategic creation and management of relationships between an organisation and its various publics through the use of a variety of integrated communication methods to achieve mutual understanding and realize organisational goals whilst serving that organisation's publics' interests. In this study, corporate communication refers to those activities that are carried out by information units of universities.

Community Relations: It is a specialized arm of public relations that focuses on building mutual and profitable relationships between a university and its host communities.

Communication: It is the exchange of relevant information between universities and their host communities.

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