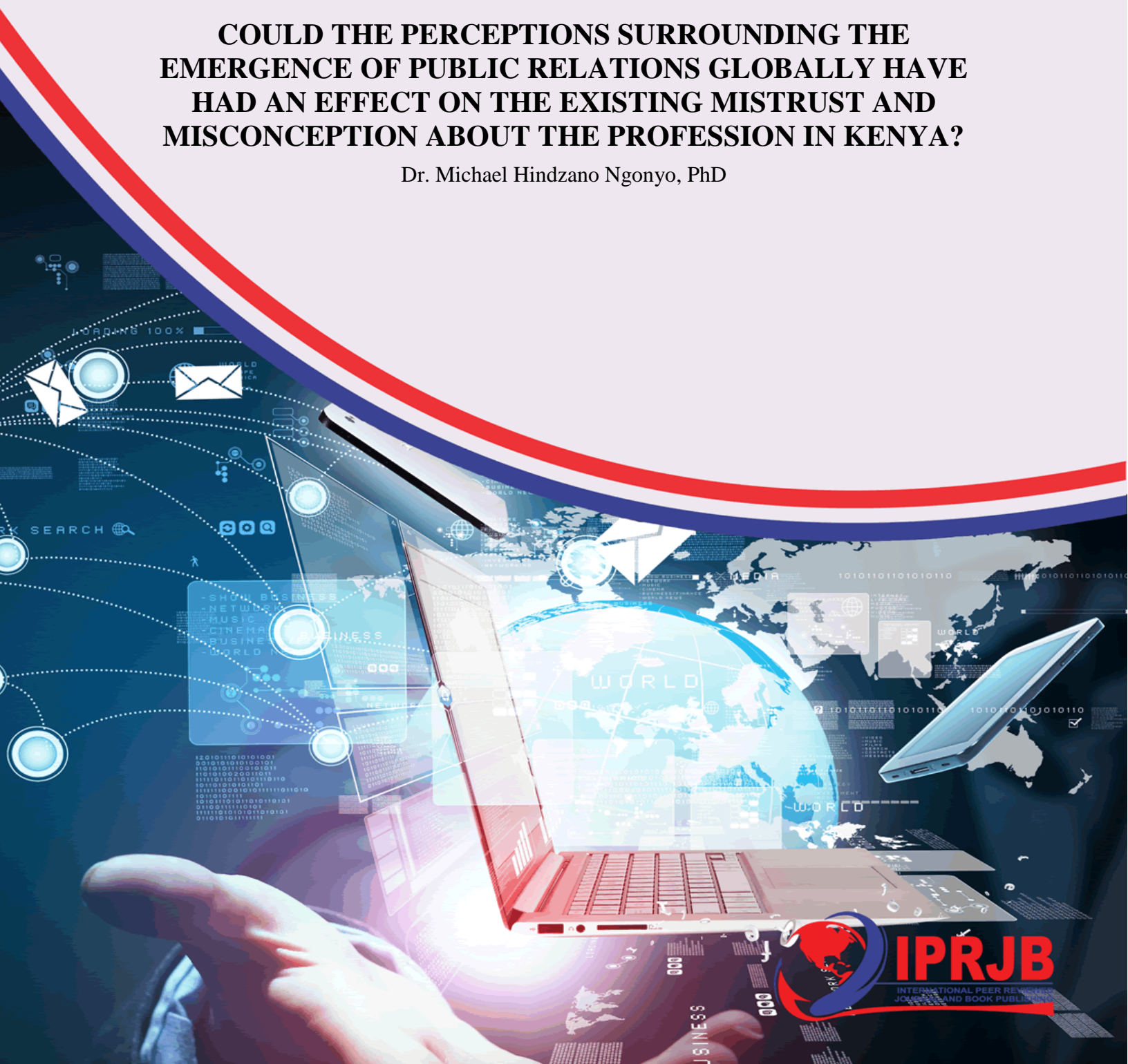


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**COULD THE PERCEPTIONS SURROUNDING THE
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MISCONCEPTION ABOUT THE PROFESSION IN KENYA?**

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Abstract

Purpose: To establish whether the perceptions surrounding the emergence of public relations globally have had an effect on the existing mistrust and misconception about the profession in Kenya.

Methodology: The study employed descriptive survey approach. A Survey was carried out in Kenya between November 2016 and April 2017. A semi-structured questionnaire was used from to collect primary data from 198 members of the general public on their perception towards PR practice. Secondary data was collected through review of published literature such as journals articles, published theses and textbooks, magazine, newspapers among others. The study adopted purposive random sampling. Information was sorted, coded and input into the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) for production of graphs, tables, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

Findings: The study found that indeed the perceptions surrounding the emergence of public relations globally such as lack of unclear history, lack a clear reporting structure, lack documented literature among others highly contributed to the existing mistrust and misconception of public relations profession in Kenya hence a lot needs to be done if the profession was to assume its rightful place in society.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: The study findings will help in the joint formulation of a PR curriculum by the professional body in consultation with the country's education ministry to train practitioners. This would give the practice the desired recognition as a profession that is controlled, and therefore, with some standards and not as it stands today where various institutions formulate their own syllabuses as they deem fit.

Keywords: *Public relations, origin, misconception, perception, reporting structure*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

There is hardly any dispute about the role public relations plays in emerging economies globally, but that cannot be said about the sort of questions lingering in people's minds about its actual role in the establishments it is employed. The debate surrounding its many definitions, legality as a career, ethics, and origin continue to cause suspicion as to whether it should be embraced like other mainstream professions. No doubt, it plays a twin role as an organization's window through which management is able to monitor external changes, as well as, a window through which society can likewise affect corporate policy, but behind this is suspicion, mistrust and misconceptions that have refused to go away. The protective nature of public relations practitioners during the course of their duties as they safeguard their territories (managing corporate images of the establishments they work for) against would be predators who may threaten the peaceful co-existence, image, and well-being of their organizations, has made their work be viewed suspiciously, and with some high level of mistrust by some members of the general public. This has resulted in varied perceptions, most of which put the emerging career in bad light as lacking objectivity, manipulative, sycophantic and a tool for propaganda.

Most researchers are of the view that the misconception and skepticisms bedeviling the profession could have been as a result of the career's accidental origin, not as structured as other well established careers are, despite the general belief that the practice is as old as mankind. This is besides the triple reason that the profession's three main elements, namely; informing people, persuading people, and integrating people with people has been part of us from time immemorial.

As Sachdeva (2009) opines, despite the profession's critical importance in society today, public relations has become a subject of study by many scholars, professionals and professional organizations so as to bring to rest this controversial debate on its evolution, misrepresentation, and misunderstanding with a view to enabling it start enjoying its status and be seen in the same light as other established professions like law, marketing, advertising, medicine, engineering and journalism, among others. Indeed, in relation to the earlier mentioned professions, PR lags far much behind because the characteristics are not promoted by individuals but an association that is supposed to organize and infuse professionalism in the discipline.

But even as it struggles to break away from this yolk of uncertainty, PR is still seen as a profession under siege. It is viewed by many with skepticism even by among others, the practitioners themselves. Salcedo (2008), for instance, associates public relations tribulations as far as its perceptions are concerned to its obscure origin. The professions' controversial nature of evolution, its lack of a universal definition which has made it suffer a serious identity crisis for a long time as it tries to position itself in society, has contributed immensely to the skepticism and suspicion about its professionalism among other reasons. These have formed part of the main causes for the raging perceptions the profession and practitioners alike have continued to face.

Further, there is the claim about lack of the profession's single history of its development worldwide, besides the many different and unrelated public relations histories which are in

themselves major points of criticism. In fact, Pearson (1992) argues that even the fact that most of the research about the history and development of public relations was conducted in the United States of America (USA) because it is claimed the USA has the largest PR industry in the world, and that many of its consultancies played a role in developing PR practice ‘exporting’ it abroad, and a long established community of PR academics who were able to carry out more research, is in itself raising questions. This has resulted in a general feeling that relying on a history that is so focused on one country is not realistic.

Which is why Butterick (2011, pg 8) observes that it has led to the belief that PR can only be practiced in one particular way and with one set of values, and ignoring the contributions made to PR practice by other countries, cultures and traditions.

Locally, misconception about public relations was evident from the early days, and immediately after Kenya’s independence from the British Colonialists when the profession was formally introduced. A wider public among the locals did not understand and appreciate its strategic importance in the management of organizations. John Thuo (Personal Communication, February 22, 2010), a PR professional for instance, once lamented that PR practitioners continued to be ‘everything’ to ‘everybody’ instead of carving out their niche and developing areas of specialization. This was why some people felt that training in PR was not necessary for one to practice, a belief that is still being held by many to date.

He claimed practitioners were yet to be recognized and valued, though their practices had evolved both in depth and in width, though some organizations still did not consider PR as a vital tool making the practitioners and professionals continue to fight the wrong perceptions that PR could be guided or replaced by marketing or advertising.

Co-founder of Kenya’s Public Relations Society (PRSK), and the man considered father - figure of Kenya’s PR, Mr. Jesse Eshikwati Opembe (Daily Nation, 1979, pg 15) was once quoted expressing his disappointment and disgust over people’s perceptions towards the profession. He claimed:

Some companies in Kenya, through lack of knowledge were making a mockery of Public Relations Officers (PROs) by using them as messengers.....the PRO has not even met the managing director nor seen the chairman of the company.....this makes the practice of public relations a mockery.

Even then, the misconception about PR practice continued to be so severe that in the early 1980s, according to Opukah (1993), the profession had lost focus. The corporate world for instance, still misunderstood the strategic importance of PR, with its practitioners reduced either to mere personal assistants to CEOs or “gin and tonic” press officers, a situation that Okungu (2000) referred to as a tragedy. Indeed, the plight had become so critical that it even involved the Chief Executives who still regarded the practitioners as fire - fighters in times of crisis and errand boys and girls who were meant to draft and send press releases to the media when there was a public outcry against their establishments.

Where training was to be offered, it was for low level positions. A story is equally narrated to affirm the less colourful training that was offered to the locals at the Kenya Institute of Administration (KIA) during the transition period prior to the Country's independence. According to Mr. Josephat Mutugi, a graduate of Makerere University College in Uganda then, and the only graduate trained as a Labour Officer, one of the first trainees at the Kenya Institute (KIA), there was total discrimination on the nature of training that was offered to locals. Recalling his experience as a trainee at the KIA doubted the British were committed about their endeavours to train Africans to take over from them.

Said Mr. Mutugi;

".....the aim of the 1961 courses offered were to train Africans who would be junior officers to the British white officials. They were not yet ready to accept that Africans could occupy these senior positions.....the majority of the first administrative officers were not called District Officers, despite holding positions at that rank. Instead, they were referred to as African Assistant Administrative Officers (AAAOs), a completely new designation. Any African who deserved to be trained as a District Officer had to be a graduate, even though they were very few", (KIA 1961 -2011).

However, unlike the case of the labour officers which was corrected and affected later despite some resistance, the misconceptions about public relations practice still abound, and can be attributed to one major cause - the career's introduction into Kenya by the local subsidiaries of transnational companies that had well established PR departments in their respective head offices overseas. The expatriates did not see the reason for duplication at the local level, where they felt there was a scarcity of qualified local personnel in the field.

When political pressure to 'Africanize' the managements of the industrial sector as one way of training the citizen so they could assume their original control of the various sectors of the economy after independence in Kenya, the expatriate owners of the business firms were not willing to do so. At least, not to the control of the local people. As a result, they resorted to window-dressing techniques in order to buy time and be seen to be complying with the authorities.

This is when positions such as "Personnel Manager," "Public Relations Officer," were promptly created and filled with people whose main, if not only qualification, was that they were 'nice' (Anderson, 1987, pg.6). These are said to have been people with unquestionable loyalty (read sycophants) to the top management and the ability to carry out the wishes of the expatriate superiors without questions. In fact, the duties of such people included liaison with government departments in matters pertaining to contracts, work permits and licences. This is the impression people still believe public relations practitioners should be doing in organizations despite the transition the career has undergone to date.

It further became evidently unfortunate that the creation of such positions required occupants who were lowly placed and never participated in any decision making. In fact, the roles of such occupants turned out to be to help in giving the false but desirable impression that the

organizations concerned were complying with the policy of Kenyanization (even if they were not).

Indeed, this was achievable because according to Mwaloma (1993, pg.7), a good number of the people who claimed to be proficient PR practitioners had very little understanding of what PR as a profession was all about. He argued that a competent PR practitioner needed to be fully conversant with the corporate objectives of his or her organization, the means available for realizing those objectives, and the impact of those objectives and the general public. Only then, could they draw up an understanding and support of an organization's role. All these were lacking in those that were hired.

This is the poor perception that has continued to follow the practice to its current state despite the transformation and training some of the practitioners have undergone. Many in Kenya still view PR as a propaganda tool in establishments, a career that specializes in sugar-coating, manipulation of facts and spin, without standards or code of ethics, without a history, as well as one that could be practiced by anyone, including those that did not have any academic qualifications, as the survey carried out amongst the general public in the country exhibited.

1.2 Objective of the Study

Kenya's PR is on the take-off stage. The profession has become quite popular in the country and especially amongst the youth who are joining it in droves according to Ngonyo and Oywer (April, 2017). However, even with this popularity lies a cloud of uncertainty about the actual position of the career in relation to other established professions in Kenya. PR is one career that seems to have a long way to go before it is embraced as a mainstream profession despite the positive role it plays. It is viewed differently by those that come into contact with the practitioners. To some, it is customer relations, a profession of liars, sugar-coating experts, spies, spin, and even propaganda and manipulators. However, all these seem to have a bearing on so many things, such as; how it emerged, practiced, training, standards and code just to mention a few.

This study therefore aimed at establishing whether some of the perceived perceptions the general public have had could be attributed to the career's poor perception in the eyes of the public since the practice came into existence in Kenya in the early 1970s.

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Sampling Design and Sample Size

Questionnaire surveys were carried out from among journalists practicing in Kenya's mainstream media, and the general public randomly selected to ascertain their perceptions about the practice of public relations. Questionnaires were shared to 200 members of the general public working in various public offices. At the end of the exercise, 198 were retrieved. Most of these respondents were drawn from government ministries, public officers, governmental parastatals, private enterprises, Non - governmental organizations among others.

2.2 Data collection and Analysis

To obtain data survey methods were used where questionnaires were sent out to respective respondents. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was utilized to analyze the quantitative data with descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency, percentage, valid percentage as well as cumulative percentages put into use. Secondary, qualitative data (literature review) was obtained from books and newspapers, as well as qualitative data that was generated from narration using words from some of the respondents.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: What would you associate PR practice with?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Media Relations	48	24.2	24.5	24.5
	Propaganda	9	4.5	4.6	29.1
	Customer care/Relations	105	53.0	53.6	82.7
	Journalism	4	2.0	2.0	84.7
	Management Function	29	14.6	14.8	99.5
	Lies	1	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	196	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.0		
Total		198	100.0		

Lack of a specified role that defines Public Relations, and which have been associated with its unclear definition and introduction as a profession in the countries it is practiced have been attributed to its undoing, leading to the varied perceptions people have had about it as a profession. While the actual role of the career is basically managerial, as advisers to top managements in establishments, the practice has often been associated more with other roles like media relations and customer services than mainstream management.

According to the study, over half of the respondents surveyed (53.6%) associated the practice with Customer Care/Relations, 24.5% with Media Relations, and only 14.8% with the actual place the career is to be domiciled - Management. It is worth noting further, that 4.6% of the respondents associated it with propaganda, 2.0% with Journalism, and 0.5% with lies.

In Kenya, most establishments employ or hire public relations services for purposes of getting maximum publicity (especially media relations) and for firefighting, as the primary reason. This is common across the board. According to Ngonyo (2012), most managers in organizations view public relations as an important profession to keep hostilities at bay, and especially attack from journalists towards their organizations, as well as ensuring that its activities too, get positive publicity.

Table 2: Who should PR practitioners report to?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Chief Executive Officers (CEOs)	110	55.6	57.0	57.0
	Deputy Chief Executive Officers	59	29.8	30.6	87.6
	Any other	24	12.1	12.4	100.0
	Total	193	97.5	100.0	
Missing	System	5	2.5		
Total		198	100.0		

The confusion and uncertainty that exists amongst some of the PR practitioners in Kenya about who they should report to in their places of work seem to equally be unclear even to the general public that have such positions existing in their organizations.

While a sizeable number of the general public (57.0% (110) believe PR practitioners should report to the Chief Executive Officers, the uncertainty amongst some of them makes others (30.6% (59) think the practitioners should report to their deputies, while 12.4% (24) feel they should report to any other in the establishments they are engaged in as shown in the table above.

This might be worsened by what some of the general public interviewed thought was a misplaced role. They claimed that in as much as organizations could have PR departments, it is the chief executive officer who frequently communicates to the public in times of crisis. Instead, they believe it is the duty of the practitioners to do so in consultation with the CEO.

Table 3: How would you rate PR in a firm

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Management level function	122	61.6	63.2	63.2
Middle level function	61	30.8	31.6	94.8
Lower level function	8	4.0	4.1	99.0
None of the above	2	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	193	97.5	100.0	
Missing System	5	2.5		
Total	198	100.0		

The rating or level of PR in the hierarchy of an establishment has been quite unclear, not only to the general public but even to among the practitioners themselves. This is quite contrary to the situation found with other mainstream professions whose place and role in organizations is quite distinct.

According to the general public's perception about PR, 63.2% (122) of the valid percentage of the 198 people interviewed believed the profession was a management level function, 31.6% (61) a middle level function, 4.1% (8) believed it was a lower level function, while 1.0% (2) felt it was none of the above.

This has been the puzzle, and indeed, not only complex to the general public alone, but even to the practitioners themselves. A study carried out in Kenya between 2009 – 2012 (Ngonyo, 2012) raised more questions than answers as to the practitioners understanding of their standing in the organizations they served.

According to the study, a greater percentage of the respondents drawn from mostly the Country's Public Relations Association perceived public relations to be a Middle Level Management function. Of the total 110 interviewed practitioners, 60.0% (66) of them perceived PR a Middle Level Management function, with 30.9% (34) feeling it ought to be a Top Level Management

function, 8.2% (9) p of them perceiving it as Low Level function, while 0.9% thinking it ought not to be categorized.

As John Thuo (personal communication, February 22, 2010) said, “there are still no structures in Kenya that clearly defined the entry point of a public relations practitioner when employed and this is why there is confusion from even among the practitioners themselves as to what category in the organizational hierarchy they ought to be placed.” This, he said was the reason why there were many theories about PR as a profession because of an unclear placement in the establishment from time immemorial. He argued that the profession’s position in any organization ought to be at top management.

Indeed, Dozier (1986) implores that PR practitioners needed at all times be placed at management levels if they are to be influential in an organization, as they are to be part of the decision making team at the table and also part of corporate governance.

Table.4: Who according to you is best suited to serve as a PR practitioner in a firm?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	12	6.1	6.1	6.1
Female	41	20.7	20.7	26.8
Does not matter	145	73.2	73.2	100.0
Total	198	100.0	100.0	

The notion that PR as a profession is leaning towards women than men is a feeling that has been in most peoples’ minds, the practitioners included. When the general public were interviewed to give their views as to they felt was best suited to serve as a PR practitioner in a firm, while 73.2% (143) said it did not matter, 20.7% (41) believed PR was a woman’s profession while 6.1% (12) said it was best suited for men. The view that PR practice is a woman’s career seems to have been the perception many still hold.

According to Ngonyo (2012) for instance, while trying to establish the sex of some 110 randomly selected PR practitioners under the banner of Kenya’s Public Relations Society

(PRSK), found that the career was dominated by women. According to the study, 57.3% (63) of the PR practitioners were female while 42.7% (47) were male.

A look at the PRSK’s website in March 2017 further revealed that the PR dominance by women in Kenya was real. According to Ngonyo & Oywer (April, 2017), out of the 510 PR paid up members, 60% of them were women, a situation that was also replicated in the leadership of the professional body too, where six out of the 11 executive members (54%) were women. They occupied the position of the chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and those of two committee members, leaving the position of assistant secretary, treasurer and three committee members to their male counterpart.

Table 5: Is PR a Well Established Profession in Kenya?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	60	30.3	30.5	30.5
	No	101	51.0	51.3	81.7
	I have no idea	36	18.2	18.3	100.0
	Total	197	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.5		
Total		198	100.0		

Majority of those surveyed felt more needed to be done if PR was to be accomplished and viewed as an established profession in the country like other mainstream careers like law, engineering, accountancy, medicine, just to mention a few. This has been seen by many as being the profession's undoing as far as its perception in the eyes of the general public is concerned.

Out of the 198 general public who were surveyed, 51.3% (101) of them believe PR was not a well-established profession in Kenya, and only 30.5% believed it was. The situation was worsened by 18.3% (36) of them who out rightly stated had no idea whether the career was well established or not.

A profession has been defined as a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and who hold themselves out as, and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognized body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to apply such knowledge and exercise such skills in the interest of others.

As a result of such professional understanding therefore, there is no doubt that each corporate body should have a code of ethics that all staff, including PR professionals comply to, but having an exclusive code of ethics set by a professional body gives the practicing professionals credibility. This is due to the fact that litigation can only be carried out easily if professionals belong to a specific professional body. Indeed, litigation is only possible if PR practitioners become members of the professional body. Managing trust, transparency and good governance are among the most difficult things for every organization to gain credibility from their stakeholders.

However, this elusive perception that has followed the profession in the different countries it is practiced has made the profession be viewed suspiciously. In the case of Kenya for instance, Public Relations is yet to be regulated in law (Marete, Nov. 18, 2016). This is quite a contrast to the other established careers mentioned earlier. PR lacks standards too, which is why it is seen as a career where it is claimed, anyone could join and practice. In fact, as stated elsewhere, even legal officers and journalists are found in other establishments acting as PR practitioners.

Table 6: Has Kenya's PR any history?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	65	32.8	33.0	33.0
	No	49	24.7	24.9	57.9
	I have no idea	83	41.9	42.1	100.0
	Total	197	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.5		
Total		198	100.0		

The history of PR in the various countries it is engaged globally is narrated differently. There has so far never been a uniform history of how PR started unlike is the case with other mainstream professions.

According to the study about 132 of the general public surveyed (67.0%) outrightly believed Kenya's PR either had no history, or had no idea whether a history existed. In fact, only 33.0% (65 people) of those surveyed affirmed that the profession had a history. This is contrary to the actual position on the ground. Other than articles written in newspapers and magazines that touch on various events that either took place or take place in Kenya, there has never been any history in the form of a book or books written about PR in Kenya (Ngonyo, 2012). Clearly indicating that the practice as envisaged is based on books written by foreigners, mostly in the U.S., Britain and India, that locals read and apply based on the prevailing circumstances.

Oriare (2009) for instance gives a link to what later became known as the practice of modern public relations in Kenya. He associates the practice with the history of East Africa about 2000 BC, the interactions of the people, when the Cushitic – Arab speaking people from what became Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia moved into what is now called Kenya.

There is also the advent of the practice by the Colonial rule according to the *Kenya Information Annual Report* (1942) when it introduced 'Public Information Office' in Government to take care of its information requirements which through various transitions led to the formation of the

Colonial Public Relations office to take care of their colonies (*Kenya National Archive, CS/2/8/98*).

All in all, there is not any specific history about the practice that stands out other than varied narrations that require to be pieced up together for documentation. This is how elusive the history of the practice has been in the country.

Table 7: Is Kenya's PR literature well documented?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	52	26.3	26.5	26.5
	No	86	43.4	43.9	70.4
	I have no idea	58	29.3	29.6	100.0
	Total	196	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.0		
Total		198	100.0		

One of the reasons the profession has taken long to gain recognition in the country is lack of documentation. There has not, and there remains, no literature written about PR in Kenya. Majority of those interviewed felt there was a dire lack of PR literature in the country, something that defines other professions, making people think the profession was foreign, because of the foreign literature on the practice available.

To ascertain whether Kenya's PR literature was well documented revealed a very serious disparity. According to the survey, those who outrightly felt there wasn't any documented literature (86 people accounting for 43.4%) and those who had no idea (58 people making 29.3%) stood at 144 people forming a 72.7% of the total with only 52 of them which is 26.3% saying there was well documented literature.

An investigation on the status of public relations literature on the African context that had been intended to be used as a basis for *A Study on the Evolution of Public Relations and Practitioners' Perceptions Towards their Profession in Kenya* (Ngonyo, 2012), revealed that there was very little that had been documented about African PR. The study showed that by 2001 when an electronic literature search was made, no information was found, and the same was true about electronic database information or even a textbook on the topic. According to

Ferreira study (cited in Heerden, 2004, p.11), “The only documented literature on the subject to be found was an *ad hoc* study conducted in 1994, and two articles published in South African accredited Journal, *Communicate*.”

The Kenyan situation is not any better. Tikolo (2011, p.19) noted that there has not been any known documented PR evolution research carried out, or literature written by a Kenyan or otherwise. Indeed, practitioners in the country rely of foreign public relations literature such as that from Britain, India and America as a guide to their practices and training, a situation that had compromised on their effectiveness and values due to some incompatibilities in some applications.

Similar sentiments were expressed by South Africa’s Heerden (2005) who further strongly lamented on the lack of documentation on African Public Relations practices. The author argued,

“If African Public Relations practitioners were really to understand the context in which public relations was practiced, then, it would be critical to do research and empirically verify certain fundamental aspects of public relations” (p.8).

Heerden further affirmed that it was due to this that lack of published African literature on the profession that had forced academies to teach western approach to public relations practices as well as use western literature as a framework for studying public relations.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Though the practice of PR is gaining grounds in Kenya, basing this argument on the many youths joining it as outlined by Ngonyo and Oywer (2017, April), and the critical role it continues to play in the establishments it is engaged, there is still a lot to be done to correct the poor perception and misconception it carries with it in the eyes of the general public. Indeed, though most of such perceptions seem to be directed towards the professionals per se, the actual culprit is the way the profession was introduced, among other reasons.

PR has had so many definitions and introduced titles globally, Kenya included, a situation that has added to the woes of misconceptions the general public and even the practitioners have about their own career, a statement supported by Onabajo (2006, pp119 -124), Jenstedt (2008, p.39) and Gisesa (2011,p.5). The many questions than answers still being peddled about the practice – where, and the context in which it evolved, its identity in society that is still being investigated, its ethics, with a majority of the population still believing it to be a tool for propaganda (Mehta, 2006, p.3), and with no tangible usefulness among others are still issues of significant concern to researchers.

These reasons are not any different from those bedeviling the Kenyan situation. In fact, right from the emergence of the profession, the locals did not understand or appreciated its strategic

importance in the management of organizations, and therefore the need for training for one to practice was not a necessity or requirement as they felt it could be practiced by anyone that was interested. This was beside the fact that even when training was offered by the corporates that existed, it was for low level positions. In fact, the 80's were worse when the practice was deemed to have lost focus. During the mentioned period, the corporate world had reduced practitioners to mere personal assistants to CEOs or "gin and tonic" press officers or 'fire-fighters' in times of crisis and errand boys and girls meant to draft and send press releases to the media when there was a public outcry against their establishments.

From its emergence to date, PR has continued to have histories unlike is the case with other established professions. In fact each country seems to give its individual origin about the profession, something that has continued to cast aspersion. These and many other reasons have therefore made the profession's poor perceptions globally uniform.

4.1 Steps towards Professional Recognition in Kenya

To arrest the mistrust and misconception that has continued to devalue PR as a lowly profession, and give it the desirable recognition in line with other established professions with acceptable standards, several things have to be undertaken.

Like in most countries in the world, the PR practice in Kenya is yet to be regulated in law; this has to be done urgently to give the profession legitimacy. This will likewise ensure most practitioners practice under some form of acceptable professional standards.

While a professional body – the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) has been in existence since 1970, it is still neither recognized by law nor mandatory for any practitioner or would be practitioner to join. This is certainly a cause for worry and a pointer to the suspicion people have had about the career. Accountability is critical for every professional. To professionalize PR, the longtime proposed Kenya Institute of Public Relations meant to train and certify practitioners would urgently need to be put in place. In this way, professional ethical values and accountability will be guaranteed.

However, of critical importance will be the joint formulation of a PR curriculum by the professional body in consultation with the country's education ministry to train practitioners. This would give the practice the desired recognition as a profession that is controlled, and therefore, with some standards. As it stands today, various institutions formulate their own syllabuses as they deem fit.

It is indeed evident therefore, and without doubt that the perceptions surrounding the emergence of PR globally continue to be experienced locally, and have been the reason for the existing mistrust and misconception the general public has continued to have about the profession in the country. An intervention is necessary to arrest these negativities following a crucial career in today's economic and social dispensation otherwise; the misconception trend will not stop soon.

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