
APPROPRIATING THE BENEFITS OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN THE WAR AGAINST CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Corruption as it is widely known is an anathema to socio political and economic development, and its negative effects on the image of both individuals and nations cannot be quantified. This paper examined the relevance of strategic communication in fighting corruption. The paper adopted the analytical method, via the review of secondary data, and found that all corrupt practices starts and ends with communication. The paper concluded that to effectively fight corruption, communication strategies capable of dealing with, uprooting corruption should be adopted to come out of the quagmire, and that agencies charged with the responsibility of prosecuting suspects should be strengthened.

Keywords: *Communication, Corruption, Strategic, War*

INTRODUCTION

As far as humans are concerned, there is no approximate or surrogate term to communication. This can be interpreted to mean that communication is sine-qua-non to human existence. In fact, the world we live in today, we are told, came into existence through the words of mouth- communication. God ordered, and obedience was observed as it was imperative. In virtually every aspect of human endeavour, be it in politics; religion, economy, education, international relations, family ties, social gathering, manufacturing, marriage, security, to mention but a few, communication remains a vital tonic that keeps all of the above identified, and many more going. The lack of it has led to many unforeseen regrets, and sometimes to preventable wars; divorce, struggle, extirpation, backstabbing, not to contemplate the backlashes associated with the refusal or inability to communicate. In situating the true meaning of communication, Hanson (2005) explains that, it is a process, an interaction which creates an avenue for individuals, groups, as well as institutions to receive and send information, ideas or feelings. He notes

that communication is all about how humans interact with each other through the media of spoken words, written words, gestures, music, painting, photographs or through dance.

In a similar thinking, Ngwokor (2014) writes:

In fact, society's survival and continuing existence depend on effective communication; hence communication is an indispensable tool of development and human association generally. As human beings, we express and share ideas, feelings or emotions, send and receive messages, express opinions, display attitudes, make our thoughts known (p.1).

On the other hand, corruption is a phenomenon that has come to stay with humanity. Unfortunately, corruption cannot take place without communication. Corruption is an anathema of growth and development. A society that is soaked in corruption cannot prosper. In providing an understanding of the term corruption, Otite (2000) defines it as a pervasion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or depravity. Corruption as a term was first applied by the renowned Greek philosopher, Aristotle, and later expatiated by Cicero who added 'forsaking decent habit' to the earlier definition by Aristotle. It is on record that countries of the world that are living in the pool of their corruption are backward politically, economically, culturally, socially and otherwise.

Conceptual Classification

Communication

Communication entails the exchange of ideas, opinions, feelings, intelligence and other pervasive and persuasive influences between, or among people of same or different orientation. Communication is an essential attribute of human anywhere, anytime. Paramount to both human and organizational survival is communication as it concretizes, and defines relationships. Inability to manifest communicative ability could make one an endangered species, as it could be used in both offensive and defensive situations. Ciboh, Chile & Ende (2014) define communication as the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver, involving the exchange of ideas, information and attitude between persons. It is an activity central to the survival in every social, political and economic sphere using both the spoken and unspoken words as channels. Communication encompasses all forms of signs and

symbols that aid human beings in conveying meaning or value to individuals or groups.

On the relevance of communication to man, Rabiou (2013) espouses that man communicates in order to survive in his environment, anyone who cannot communicate may face the danger of losing his body, mind or soul. Communication according to the scholar involves sending and receiving of information. Rabiou (2013) cited (Wolsely & Campbell , 1957) who identified five major reasons why men find it imperative to communicate with fellow men. These reasons are: Men communicate to make significant facts common knowledge, men communicate to make a desirable attitude popular, they communicate to enhance their prestige in whatever group they find themselves, they also communicate to express their feelings, and finally they do so to be at peace with themselves.

Corroborating the preceding definitions, Agbo & Fab-Ukozor (2000) posit that communication which is as old as life itself remains one of the most vital activities engaged in by man right from the earliest days. To live successfully with one's neighbours, man must be capable of effective communication. Agbo & Fab-Ukozor (2000) concluded by citing Agee et al who defined communication as "process or art of transmitting information, ideas and attitudes from a source to a destination. With the aid of communication, "business arrangements can be made promptly and internal communication can be enhanced" (Okosipe, 2016, p.143). This accounts for the reason why it was said from the outset of this article, that no human group or organization can survive in the absence of communication. Be it in written or spoken form, communication is what tells us what and who we are, because with it, we are able to express our thoughts, feelings, ideas, knowledge, intelligence, friendliness or hostility.

In explaining the centrality of communication to human existence, Sambe (2005) interrogates what can be achieved without communication. He came to the conclusion that communication serves as an instrument or vehicle of social interaction. It helps us to understand ourselves, keep in touch with other people, understand them and be able to predict their response to situations. "It is a means by which power is acquired, exercised and sustained"(p.2). In furtherance of his conceptualization of the term, Sambe (2005) notes that communication provides a platform for the establishment of relationships, as well as the means by which all other facets of human activities are made effective.

Corruption

Corruption is described as a situation where those in position of authority misuse their power by appropriating to themselves and their cronies those things that should serve the interests of the generality of the public. It means when standard and due process are undermined. Ekpo, Chime & Enor (2016) opine that corruption as a term was first used by Aristotle and also later applied by Cicero who added the term “bribe” and “abandonment” of good habit. As an adjective, corruption connotes negativity and specifically, it simply means “utterly broken”. According to Ekpo, Chime & Enor (2016), corruption is where persons abuse public power resided in them for private gains. “Corruption is an act that deviates from due process of a public role due to personal relationship. Such deviations include acts of bribery, nepotism misappropriation.” (Nye as cited in Onuigbo & Eme, 2015). Falz as cited in Acheme & Hammonds (2021) explains that corruption ranges from politicians and law enforcement agents to religious houses, and their leaders as well as citizens. Politicians according to Falz steal from public funds with reckless abandon, without accounting to anyone and even the law enforcers who are supposed to see to the end of justice, instead, abdicate their responsibility for personal gains. He holds religious leaders guilty for extorting money from their members in the form of offering, tithes and seeds proceeds with which they go ahead to build schools which those who pay the money cannot afford to send their children. In the case of corruption among citizens, Falz says everyone is a criminal in Nigeria and blames it on lack of accountability.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Some Established Cases of Corrupt Practice among Politicians and Top Government Officials

When a disease becomes peculiar to a particular area, region or country, we say such a disease has become endemic. Similarly, it would not be wrong to say that corruption has become cancerous among most Nigerians. Everywhere one goes, what one finds is broken chains of due process, people are shortchanged both at seaports, airports, borders, at schools (both higher and lower levels), at police stations, on the highways, in courts, at revenue offices, and several other points of human contacts. Developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, are today mostly where they are because of corruption. Buttressing this, Africa and the World Group (AFRICAW) (2012) observes that corruption is the greatest tragedy affecting socio-economic development in less developed countries.

“Corruption is an effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means, private gain at public expense, or a misuse of public power for private benefit” (Lipset & Lenz, 2000). Where wealth is acquired illegally through the resources of public offices, including the exercise of discretion, corruption is said to have taken place (Ayua, 2001). Watering the term down to its simplest definition, Igbimovia (2003) refers to it as all kinds of bribery, abuse of office and nepotism, or any favour extended to someone in anticipation of any kind of gain in return. In a nutshell, corruption can be likened to an endemic disease that has contaminated every strata of the socio-political and economic life of any society.

Because of the damage corruption has done on the image of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in 2009 as president of the country decided to put mechanisms in place to deal with this ugly trend that was dragging the name of the country in the mud, by signing into law the anti-corruption bill. Thereafter, he established the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) as well as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to frontally confront those perpetrating the demonic but human act. Notwithstanding, corruption still continues to rear its ugly head in every facet of our national life (Muhammed, 2013).

Ogundiya as cited in Muhammed (2013) reminds us that the fourth republic was characterized with corruption among politicians: he cited Evans Enwerem, Chuba Okadigbo and Adolphus Nwabara who were all impeached on corruption allegations. On investigation, it was discovered and established that Senator Chuba Okadigbo actually inflated the contract sum for mounting street lights to one hundred and seventy-three million naira. He also authorized the payment of three hundred and seventy-two million naira for furnishing his residence, a contract that was over-invoiced with twenty five million naira and later approved the installation and commissioned a 100KVA generating set of the senate president at a bloated amount of fifteen million naira. (Ogundiya as cited in Muhammed, 2013).

In a similar vein, Madam Patricia Olubunmi Etteh who was the first female speaker of the House of Representatives was compelled to throw in the towel, due to allegations brought against her bordering on misappropriation of public funds in multiple contracts of six hundred and twenty-eight million naira, earmarked for the renovation of her official

residence and purchase of official vehicles. Recently, a top brass in the Nigeria Police Force, DCP Abba Kyari was nabbed for his complicity in the celebrated Abbas Ramoni aka Hushpuppy who defrauded the American government of huge sums of money through fraudulent means. Abba Kyari is also answering charges of drug related offences. One driving force of corruption is greed and desire to live above one's means. At the same time, the grab-grab syndrome among many Nigerians could be attributed to corruption, as many are found to want to reap where they did not sow. It was because of the escalating rate of corrupt practices which were in most cases committed with crass abandon that the international community initiated the idea of dealing with the anathema for a better Nigerian society and its image among the committee of nations. Consequently, during the President Obasanjo's administration, the country was placed under threat of sanction, if nothing was done to curtail the level of corruption in the country. Obasanjo was wooed to do this with a possible debt cancellation. And this came to fruition when eventually the Paris Club wrote off a total sum of eighteen billion US dollars which represented sixty percent of Nigeria's debt in the year 2005. (Ademola in Mohammed, 2013)

As a result of the promise of the Paris Club to cancel Nigeria's debt if its government shows resilience in the fight against corruption, former Delta State governor, James Onanefe Ibori was nabbed and to face 129 count charges by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for laundering over nine billion naira. Another celebrated case of corruption was that of former Governor Orji Uzor Kalu of Abia State who was accused of investing his ill-gotten money amounting to three million, one hundred thousand naira in establishing SLOK Airline and two banks located in the Gambia and Sierra Leone as well as some landed properties in the United Kingdom and United States of America. (Ademola, 2011)

In a similar circumstance, former governor of Jigawa State, Saminu Turaki was alleged to have spent thirty-six million naira, money from public coffers to acquire oil blocks from the federal government. Another was that of former governor of Taraba state, Reverend Job Nyame charged with stealing one billion, six hundred million naira belonging to the state. Other former governors who faced various charges of corrupt practices were: Lucky Igbinedion of Edo state, Ayo Fayose of Ekiti State, Peter Odili of Rivers State and Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu State. He

and two former commissioners in his administration, Peter Mba and Spine Ejiofor were charged with stealing 5.6 billion naira (Ademola as cited in Mohammed 2013)

There are a number of factors responsible for the massiveness of corrupt practices in the country. Nduka as cited in Dike (2008) writes that obsession with materialism, compulsion for shortcut to affluence, glorification and appropriation of ill-gotten wealth by the general public are among the most common causes of corruption especially in the Nigerian society. Dike (2008) decries the situation where there is a total absence of ethical standards at all government agencies or parastatals, as well as in business organizations in the country. Olusheye (2013) on the other hand identifies covetousness; greed, inordinate ambition, materialism, the get-rich-quick syndrome associated with the post-independence era, nationwide poverty, inadequate social security, corrupt and extravagant political system in operation , the inefficient socio-economic structures as causes of corruption; and laments that the system set up to deal with the rampant cases of corruption instead encouraged the giving and receiving of illegitimate wealth or its acquisition. (Olusheye, 2013).

Communication: Every Man's Tool

Communication as a tool of human interaction and expression is not a special reserve for any country, group or individual; rather it is a gift from God to mankind, to differentiate him from the lower animals. It involves sending and receiving messages meaningful to both the sender and the receiver. Communication is an exchange of meaning. Each participant comes into the communication situation with his or her past experiences which he or she hopes to exchange with other participants (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifiso, 2008).

In explaining the importance of communication to humankind, Daramola (2003) writes:

It is pervasively mentioned in schools, at home, in our daily interactions. During crisis, we have come across the word being spoken of, maybe as a cause of the problem or as the solution not yet employed. For instance, a riot in school is blamed on the communication gap between the school authorities and the students. Same goes for an organization and its striking workers (p.1).

Stepping in the same line of thought, Agbo and Fab-Ukozor (2000) note that notwithstanding the fact that communication is as old as life itself; it undoubtedly remains one of the most essential aspects of man's existence right from creation. Communication makes life and living go smoothly and meaningful.

For Asemah (2018),

Communication is an essential aspect of human life which can be said to be the basic essence of life that it revolves around. Communication apart from being essential is also the central fact of human existence and social process. Nobody can be an island; without communication with others in one way or the other and existence would be impossible without it. (p.1).

Communication Types Relevant to Tackling Corruption

Corruption has become hydra-headed in the Nigerian social life, and since nothing on the earth happens without communication, there should be a particular means of communication to fight this monster. Understandably, we have intra-personal, inter-personal, group communication, public communication, organizational communication, international communication, mass communication among others. Corruption just like any human activity begins and ends with communication. **Intrapersonal:** At first, there must be an intra-personal level of corruption where it is formally conceived in the mind of the perpetrator. At this level, the individual begins to nurture the idea of corruptly enriching himself. **Interpersonal:** Once he/she concludes with going ahead with the idea, the next stage sets in which is inter-personal communication. At this level, he/she may require accomplices. If successful in finding one, the plan is finalized. **Group Communication:** Group communication according to Janssen (2015) involves three or more persons, and this could take the form of work groups, social groups, occasion making groups and others. Members of any group should all be given proper orientation; regarding the danger of extorting from the system, or fraudulently gaining from a process, material things meant for a whole or larger group. **Public Communication** Public communication takes place when messages targeted at a group of people gathered in a designated place are transmitted to them. A good example of this can be observed during political rallies, conferences, seminars, convention and other forms of gatherings. Because of the largeness of the people in the

gathering, a Public Address System (PAS) would be required to enhance reach, clarity and audibility. Politicians ready to serve should use this occasion to preach against corruption and other negative and unethical tendencies. **Organizational Communication:** An organization has the power to hire and fire at will. It hires when there is the need to employ to achieve organizational objectives and goals. Organizational communication takes place within and among organizations, and it can take either the written or unwritten form. Whichever form it takes, organizational communications are usually formal or official (Daramola, 2003). Very frequently, organizations should engage their employees in communication where they are psychologically counseled on the danger of getting involved in corrupt acts capable of dragging both their (employees) names and that of the organization in the mud.

In both inter-personal, group, public and organizational communication, there is opportunity for feedback. Since it is not a one-way affair, it implies that the persons involved in the communication act can ask questions for clarification and get answers. By so doing, each party has entered into an agreement, such an understanding should include not deviating from an established standard, i.e., not to use one's office, position or power to cheat, amass wealth, divert or siphon monies meant for the public. In other words, entering into such an agreement- written or unwritten, has so much impact on moral beings. **Mass communication:** This is yet another form of human communication which involves large organizations dissemination information, ideas, entrainment and other persuasive and pervasive influences to a large, scattered and heterogeneous audience through an automated medium such as newspaper, magazine, radio, television. (Nwosu, 1993: Ngwokor, 2014). Through the media of mass communication, the public has been mobilized to fight corruption among other societal ills. This is usually done when media set agenda for public discourse. Media set agenda by continuously or repeatedly throwing up an issue of national interest to the front burner, thereby making such a topic a common public knowledge. One aspect of mass communication that is good at handling issues such as corruption is investigative reporting. Asemah & Ekerikevwe (2015) defines it as the journalistic reports or efforts, that are aimed at unearthing certain absurd deeds which those behind them are attempting to conceal. It requires curiosity and pungent nose for news, so much of hard work and the ability to tell a story in terms of what it really means to the audience. According to Asemah and Ekerikevwe (2015), "Muckraking

gave birth to investigative journalism. Muckraking has to do with exposing corruption in business; it is a term coined by Teddy Roosevelt in 1906. It is the idea of digging in-depth to get a story” (p.20). **New Media:** In the 21st century, means of for disseminating information meant for mass consumption have gotten more proliferated. New technology has given birth to what is now referred to as citizen journalism which allows anyone including non professionals to gather and disseminate news with immediate effect. Orlu-Orlu (2017) writes that “earlier research on the impact of new media technology on journalism practice has tended to focus more on how these technologies have reconfigured news production, dissemination and consumption.

Most social or new media outlets have facilities for recording (audio and video), a transaction whether openly or secretly. Illegal transactions could be captured and those involved pinned down for prosecution. By implication, corrupt practices either in public or private sphere can be prevented, or those who successfully indulge in it get apprehended when there are available evidences to be used in their prosecution in court of competent jurisdiction.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is pegged on the Information Processing Theory. The theory was propounded in 1968 by Williams J. McGuire. The theory assumes that to change an attitude, six stages are involved each leading to the next, until the last step.

1. There must be a communication of the persuasive message.
2. The receiver must be drawn to the message.
3. The receiver will understand the message.
4. The receiver gives in to the message and is convinced by the arguments presented to him.
5. He retains the newly adopted position.
6. He behaves as required of him by the sender of the message.

According to McGuire, any independent variable in the communication process can affect any stage of the six steps. For example, intelligence level of an individual can make him less yielding to such an argument targeted towards a change in attitude. McGuire as cited in Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso (2008) identified eight steps that occur in the Information Processing Theory: (i) Exposure (ii) Perception (iii)

Comprehension (iv) Agreement (v) Retention (vi) Retrieval (vii) Decision making (viii) Action.

This theory is relevant to this topic because, it provides us with the process of attitude change. Corrupt act is against ethical norms and values; it is in the attitude of people to be soaked in corrupt acts. Therefore, to overcome it, intensive communication aimed at changing the mindset of perpetrators is a necessity.

CONCLUSION

From the literature reviewed, it can be concluded that effective communication is what is required to tackle corruption. This is because corrupt practices do not only involve the receiver but it also involves the giver. Both the giver and the receiver must communicate in one way or the other before the act itself is committed. Communication therefore, especially one that is guided by the Theory of Information Processing as postulated by McGuire (1968) is germane to uprooting corruption from Nigeria's social life.

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