

## **Media Relations as Image and Reputation Building Tool of Co-Operative Societies in Kenya**

**Mr. Nyaruri Paul Okinyi.**

Mount Kenya University, Kisii Campus, Kisii, Kenya

### **\*Corresponding Author:**

Mr. Nyaruri Paul Okinyi

Email: [nyaruripaul@yahoo.com](mailto:nyaruripaul@yahoo.com)

---

**Abstract:** Media relation is a vital tool in communicating organization's message and maintaining image. It's either offered by organization's public relations department or outsourced. This enhances customers, stakeholders and general public relationship and awareness of organization's activities, roles and products. The objective of this paper is to discover how effective media relations was viewed and utilized in Co-operative societies in Kenya. More specifically, the paper hoped to find out if the media relations function was only used to generate publicity or if it also played a strategic role in relationship building with the media and achieving co-operatives' competitive goals. The study assumes that the respondents gave honest views and responses and observation. The study also assumes that, the research tools developed gave correct results thus factual. None of the respondents had prior instructions on information researched upon. The findings suggest that media relations plays a strategic role in building relationships with the media as well as informing and educating stakeholders in profiling and better managing the co-operatives reputations. Overall, the respondents viewed media relations as an investment given its Strategic role. There is a suggestion that organizations that see beyond media relations' promotional role fully benefit from its strategic value.

**Keywords:** Co-operative Societies, Media Relations, Strategic Roles, Image and Reputation

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background of the Study**

A co-operative society is an association of persons who have voluntarily joined together to achieve a common economic and social end by forming a jointly-owned and democratically controlled business association. Members make equitable contributions to the capital required and accept a fair share of risks and benefits of the undertakings. The purpose of a Co-operative society is to provide services to the members. Co-operative societies in Kenya are formed under the Co-operative Society's Act of Kenya.

#### **Understanding Media Relations (its meaning and concept)**

Media relations as relationships with and between media, media relations practitioners, and clients[1]. This is not limited to building relationships with the media but also involves the communication processes that bypass the media and deal directly with non-media stakeholders. Media relations play a central role within public relations precisely because the media are the information gatekeepers that control the flow of information to relevant publics[2]. Media relations thus have the ability to improve organization-public relationships, making it a vital component to examine in the Co-operative societies in Kenya context.

Practitioners and scholars have always acknowledged that media relations make up the core of public relations [2]. However, while macro and micro level interactions in combination form media relations, organization-media relations have been largely understudied. The focus has primarily been on micro-level analysis of practitioner-journalist relationships. This study, therefore, focuses on the macro-level analysis of the relationship between Co-operative Societies and the media in Kenya. This will not only involve practitioner-journalist relationships, but will also encompass factors that encourage or discourage Co-operative Societies from engaging in media relations.

#### **The strategic role of Media Relations**

Media relations involve working with various media for the purpose of informing the public of organization's mission, policies, and practices in a positive, consistent and credible manner. Typically, this means coordinating directly with the people responsible for producing news and features in the mass media. Most of the times, the terms Media Relations and Public Relations are used interchangeably. There is a very thin line separating the two terms, whereas media relations refers to the relationship the company has with the media or journalists, Public Relations extend that relationship beyond the media to the general public. To

---

understand the link between Media and Public relations, I examined Grunig and Hunt's [2] view on how public relations originated. According to the above authors, in the constant effort to get free space in the media for their clients, press agents or publicists used every possible trick to take advantage of the newspapers and other media. This was called "flacking for space" [2]. Although these press agents frequently got the publicity they sought, the authors indicate that the media and the public have never forgotten the press agency origins of public relations. Hence, this explains why media relations is considered to be the most traditional, visible and prominent of all public relations functions.

It is also worth taking a look back to see how the need for the business-media relationship came about. According to Argenti [3] the expanded media, referred to as "the press" in earlier times, has always had a more antagonistic relationship with business, even in the American context. This, the author states, partly stems from the privacy organizations enjoyed in the early part of this century.

However, organizations were later forced to rethink this isolationist approach as a result of increased public and media interest in business due to several controversial events. The public began to realize that business had a tremendous effect on their lives, explains Argenti. It is this shift in attitude in particular, which the author says had a profound effect on business and its dealings with the media. Describing media relations as one of the most critical areas within any corporate communication function, Argenti [3] supports this claim by explaining the media's role in an organization.

According to Argenti [3] "the media is both a constituency and a conduit through which investors, suppliers, retailers and consumers receive information about and develop images of a company". The author adds that the media's role as disseminator of information to an organization's key constituencies has gained increasing importance over the years. Given this crucial role, Argenti says that almost every organization has a media relations department, either manned by a part-time consultant or a large team of professionals. Most public Relations Practitioners spend a significant portion of their time on media relations because of them media's ability to mass publicity.

### **Theories related with the aspect of media relations**

In this study, media relations will be explored as a subset of the relationship management as the principles are crucial in the examination of the relationship between Co-operative Societies and the media, and in conjunction with the contingency theory of accommodation to provide the practical dimension and the dialogic communication theory to study the value of engaging in dialogue in the Co-operative Society-media relationship.

### **Relationship Management Theory**

Apart from being a management function that adopts "public-centered approach" public relations has consistently shifted towards a "relationship-centered approach". It suggested that the relationships between an organization and its key publics should be the central unit of study of the public relations research[4]. Today, the relationship management perspective holds that public relations balance the interests of organizations and publics through the management of organization-public relationships. Public relations is thus a strategic-management function where managing relationships with key publics, in this case the media, is crucial. These relationships can affect organizations 'mission, goals and objectives[5]. Despite this apparent importance attributed to a relational framework, there has been a lack of definition for the organization-public relationship which, Broom *et al.* [6] argues inhibits further development of the perspective. According to Ledingham and Bruning [7], ideal organization-public relationship is the state which exists between an organization and its key publics that provides economic, social, political, and/or cultural benefits to all parties involved, and is characterized by mutual positive regard. Ledingham, Bruning, Tomlinson and Lesko state that many factors influence personal relationships, such as trust, openness, involvement, investment and commitment. They further suggest that these factors also affect organization-public relationships. Trust is conceptualized as an organization's doing what it says it will do; openness is sharing the organization's plans for the future with members of the key publics; involvement is the organization's being involved in the welfare of the community; commitment is the organization's being committed to the welfare of the community; and investment is the time, energy, effort and other resources given to build the relationship[7].

### **Contingency Theory of Accommodation**

This theory was proposed in 1997 by Amanda Cancel, Glen Cameron, Lynne Sallot and Michel Mitrook to highlight the pertinent factors of how a public relations practitioner facilitates communication between the organization and its external publics. One of Grunig's [8] tremendous contributions to the public relations field was the two-way symmetrical model of communication where communication is used by an organization to negotiate with its public, resolve conflict and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its stakeholders. This then evolved into the dialogic communication theory where dialogue is the central unit of communication between the organization and its publics. This study will utilize the continuum of accommodation as a variable to assess the state of media relations at Co-operative Societies in Kenya. A Co-operative by nature should be an accommodating organization, as its sole purpose is to contribute towards building civil society. The more

accommodating an organization is to its publics (such as the media), the more it likely will invest in maintaining the relationship with them.

### Dialogic Communication Theory

The dialogic communication theory has been incorporated into the framework of this study, because maintaining dialogue is a crucial part of a successful relationship between an organization and its publics. However, dialogic communications cannot be studied without an understanding of the concept of dialogue. Interestingly, when discussing effective public relations, dialogue as a concept appears several times in academic literature and, in fact, has a historical presence in the realm of PR. Consequently, it is necessary to trace the roots of dialogue in communications to understand its contemporary presence. Martin Buber [9], father of the modern concept of dialogue, argues that a genuine dialogue is one in which a mutual relationship grows. He suggests that dialogue involves an effort to recognize the value of the other.

### DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

In an overview, Mugenda and Mugenda [10] say that data is obtained from the field raw in form is difficult to interpret. Such data must be cleaned, coded, and key punched into a computer and analyzed. It is from these results that researchers are able to make sense of information.

This paper presents data collected from the respondents of selected cooperative societies in Kenya. The information was collected randomly basing on variables of age and sex. The study was covered on 60 respondents selected randomly after the study site and study population was identified.

In this study, classification will be done according to attributes. Since this is a qualitative phenomenon, (perception) which cannot be measured quantitatively, the data obtained will be descriptive in nature. The study has produced descriptive analysis of the perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs of the responds on the role of media relations on this Co-operative Society. It categorizes responses into groups, for example, strong/very strong, little/very little, and none and so on. In this study the following data analysis designs are recommended:

#### Classification.

It will involve arranging data in groups on the basis of common characteristics. This study used classification according to age and gender. The logic behind using classification design was because it made it possible to classify data according to the respondents' views and opinions.

### Descriptive analysis.

In this study, descriptive analysis involved the study of distribution of variables. There was a descriptive analysis of the respondent's views, perceptions and attitudes. There was a descriptive analysis of the audience's views, perceptions, and attitudes towards the role media relations play in the success of the Cooperatives. The logic behind using this design was that it made it possible to measure the relationships between the variables. Various Instruments of data analysis and presentation were used. These include percentages (number of people who share a response category) tables, pie charts, bar graphs.

### General information

#### Classification according to Age of Respondents

The sample was made up of 30 females and 30 males. This number would give a balanced representation and reliable results. The respondents' ages ranged between 17 years to 63 years and above. This presented in terms of classes ranging from:-

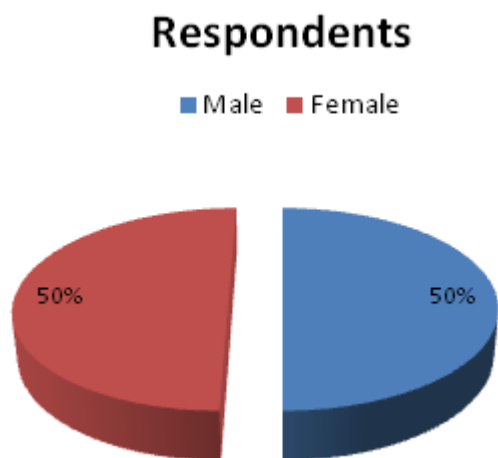
17-25=20	47—55=6
26-30=10	Over55=8
31-35=6	
36-46=10	

**Table 1: Classification according to Age**

Age Group	Respondents	Percentage
17-24	20	34
25-30	10	17
31-35	6	10
36-46	10	17
46—55	6	10
Over 55	8	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

Out of the 60 respondents, 20 were aged between; 17 - 24, representing 34% of the population. 10 respondents were aged between 25 - 30 representing 17% of the population. 6 were aged both age groups of between 31-35 and 46-55 accounting for 10% of the population. The same number (10) were aged between 36 and 40 while the remaining 15 were above 41 years, representing 30% of the total population as shown in table 1. In graphical format, it will appear as follows. Out of the 60 respondents, 30 were male representing 50% of the population while 30 were women, representing 50% of the total population. As shown in fig 1

**Classification according to gender**



**Fig 1: classification according to gender**

**Findings from Media relations knowledge questions  
Media Relations Knowledge**

This study sought to find out how many among the respondents had an idea what Media relations is all about.

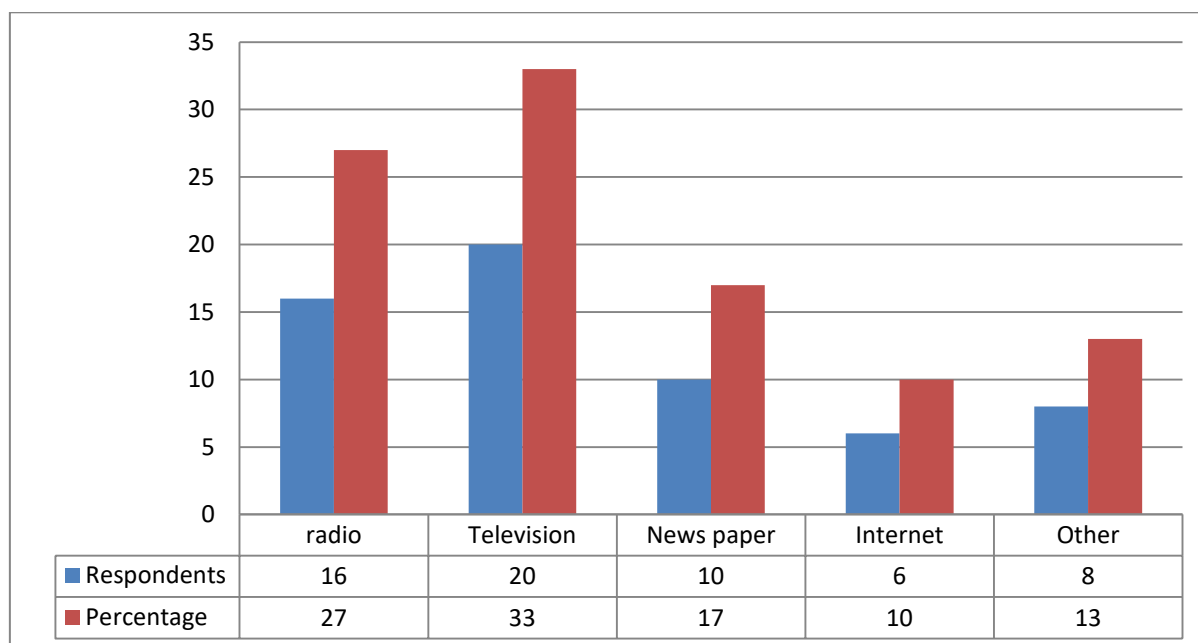
**Table 2: Media Relations Knowledge**

MR knowledge	Yes:	No:	Total:
	56	4	60

MR : Media Relations

Out of the 60 respondents, 56 ascertained that they had ideas to what media relations is all about, representing 93% of the total population, while the ones who had no idea to what media relation is were 4 which represent 7 % of the population as shown in table 2.

**Media preference**



**Fig -2: media preference of the sample size**

Out of the 60 respondents, 27% prefer listening to radio, 17% prefer reading newspapers, 33% prefer watching television, and 10% prefer surfing on the internet, while 13% prefer other forms of media not listed above as shown in fig 2.

**Preferred time for visiting selected media**

Out of the 60 respondents, 53% preferred using the media in the evening, 7% preferred midday while 30% preferred to use it on the morning. 10% preferred all-day while another 10% had no particular time preferred for using the media forms.

**Table -3: Preferred time for visiting selected media**

Time	Respondents	Percentage
Morning	18	30
Mid-day	4	7
Evening	32	53
All-day	6	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

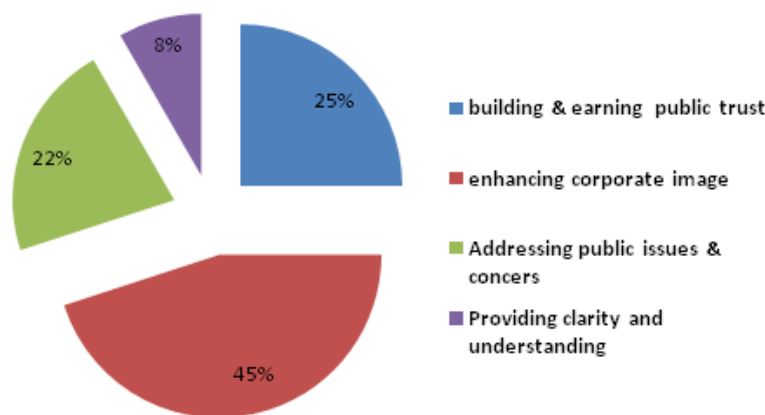
**Whether Media relations has a role to play in Cooperative Societies**

Out of the our respondents, 90% felt that media relations have a role to play in the success of the

Sacco while 3% felt that media relations has no role to play in the success of the Sacco as 7 % did not give a response.

**Table 4: Whether Media relations has a role to play in Cooperative Societies**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	54	90
No	2	3
No answer	4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>



**Fig-3: Importance of Media relations to cooperative societies**

**Areas Media Relation addresses at Cooperative Societies**

Out of the 60 respondents, 20 representing 30% felt the media relations department address crisis situations, while 14 accounting for 20% of the total population hear Advertisements, 6 people representing 8% felt that the media relations department in the Sacco address issues to do with publicity, 10 which is a representative of 13% of the population felt that media relations in the Sacco deal with issues of Marketing, as 10 people which is represented by 15 % felt that media relations played other un-mentioned roles in the Sacco like issue management, as shown in table 5.

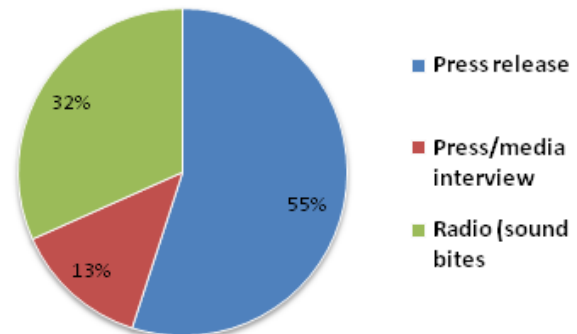
**Table 5: Areas Media Relation addresses at Cooperative Societies**

	Frequency	Percentage
Crisis management	20	30
Advertising	14	20
Publicity	6	8
Marketing	10	13
Others	10	15

**Tools employed by Cooperative Societies in enhancing Publicity**

**Importance of Media relations to Cooperative Societies in Kenya**

Out of the 60 respondents, 27 representing 45% felt media relations main importance is enhancing corporate image, while 15 representing 25% felt that media relation is important in building and earning public trust, 13 representing 22% felt that media relation is important in addressing public issues and concerns so as 5 representing 8% felt that media relation is important in providing clarity and understanding.



**Fig 4: Tools employed by Cooperatives societies in enhancing Publicity**

When confronted with the question of “the most used publicity tool by Cooperative societies in image building of the corporate society” 55% (representing 33) were of the view that cooperatives mostly uses press release to enhance its corporate image while 32% (representing 19) were of the view that radio sound bite in form of advertisement is mostly used. 13% were of the view that Cooperatives uses media interview to enhance its image as shown in fig 4.

**Perception of management on Media Relations as an element of Image and Reputation building.**

65% of the interviewees felt that indeed, the management of Cooperatives highly values Media relation as a crucial element to image building, with



35% feeling otherwise with some having the opinion that the management should make constant use of Media Relations in reaching its members country wide as shown in table 6 above.

When asked whether media relations has influence on members to invest in the Cooperatives, out of the 60 respondents, 75% of the population agreed that media relations have influenced the members to invest in the societies. 25% felt that media relations have not done much to influence members to invest with the Sacco as shown in table 7 above.

**Table 6: Perception of management on Media Relations as an element of Image and Reputation building**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	39	65%
No	21	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 7: Media Relations and its influence over investment in Cooperatives**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	45	75
No	15	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

## CONCLUSION

Basing on the analyzed information, this study concludes that media relations play a strategic role in the Co-operative Societies in Kenya. Media relations plays a significant role in shaping the opinions of the Co-operatives' stakeholders towards the Societies. Basing on the results of the research, media relation is highly important to cooperatives in building trust with its various publics and majorly in crisis management. This factor makes Media relations important to the societies in creating the need for mutual relationship with the media. The paper concludes that cooperative societies engage in media relation as a publicity tool which in turn improves the organization image through the use of media/press release.

Press release is the publicity tool that is mostly used by the staff of cooperatives' Media relation department use in image building. The study also concludes that the respondents have positive perceptions and attitudes towards media relations department. However they still felt that media relations in the organization need to furnish them with more educative and interesting programmes about the cooperatives. However, the respondents felt that the cooperatives should engage with the media on a regular basis so that the members countrywide can be reached easily in case of any communication from the management.

## REFERENCES

1. Stanton RC; Cheong and Mateship: The Socialization of Media Relations. *Asian Social Science*, 2009; 4(5):27.
2. Grunig JE, Hunt T; *Managing public relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1984.
3. Argenti PA; *Corporate Communications*. New York: McGraw/Irwin, 2007.
4. Bruning SD, Ledingham JA; *Organization and key public relationships: Testing the influence of the relationship dimensions in a business to business context. Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations*, 2000; 159-173.
5. Dozier DM, Grunig LA, Grunig JE; *Manager's guide to excellence in public relations and communication management*. Routledge. 2013.
6. Broom GM; *Cutlip and Center's effective public relations (10th ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall. 2009.
7. Ledingham John, Bruning Stephen; *Relationship Management in Public Relations: Dimensions of an Organization-Public Relationship Public Relations Review*. 1998.
8. Grunig JE, IABC Research Foundation. *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 1992.
9. Buber, M. (2003). *Between man and man*. Routledge.
10. Mugenda OM, Mugenda AG; *Research Methods: Quantitative & Qualitative Approaches*, ACTS: Nairobi. 2003.