

**THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN AFRICA:
A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY**

by

GENÉ VAN HEERDEN

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**SUPERVISOR: PROF RONÉL RENSBURG
CO-SUPERVISOR: DR GERHARD BÜTSCHI**

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SYNOPSIS

The global PR society is seeking to understand PR by codifying a global body of knowledge. This has inspired global discussions on the fundamentals of PR. These discussions emphasised the fact that PR differs across the globe and are influenced by many issues. Africa has not effectively participated in these discussions due to various reasons but the one identified in this study and formulated into a research problem, is the lack of knowledge and understanding of the practice of PR in Africa.

The aim of this research study is to describe the practice of PR in Africa. It is therefore necessary to define the main concept, the practice of PR. This is done through a literature review focused on two other concepts, namely the models (purpose) and the roles (activities) of the practice of PR. Each of these concepts consists of a few constructs, which were theoretically explored, in the attempt to determine what the current level of development is.

Two sets of objectives were therefore developed focussing on the theoretical as well as the empirical phase. Primary research data was collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire. A snowball sample was used to identify African PR practitioners. A total of 151 respondents participated in this study. An existing measuring instrument was used for both the models and the roles but these instruments were adapted to include the latest developments in the practice of PR. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted, which assisted in purifying the measuring instrument. The instrument proved to be valid and reliable. The hypotheses testing were mainly focused on Pearson's product coefficient and ANOVA's.

The exploratory factor analysis identified 3 models, namely the reflective/ two-way symmetrical, two-way asymmetrical/ symmetrical and the public information/ press agency and 2 roles namely, the strategist and the

technician/ manager in the African context. The empirical phase of the study therefore found that the reflective model and the role of the strategist are present in Africa.

Some of the other main findings include the fact that African PR practitioners function at a very influential, strategic level within the organisation. Furthermore it was found that the purpose of PR according to the opinions of the PR practitioners are centred around the importance of understanding society and the important influence on organisational decision making as well as behaviour.

The implications of this study are that African PR practitioners need to communicate the role that is fulfilled by PR in Africa. A lack of documented empirical research has created perceptions that PR is not active in Africa or if it is active it functions at a very low level. Africa should therefore actively participate in global discussions as well as adhere to the NEPAD initiative and participate in continental discussion regarding the practice of PR. It was found that culture has a major impact on the way in which the practice of PR is fulfilled in Africa and one of the recommendations is that disciplines such as Anthropology and Sociology are consulted when further studies in Africa is initiated. African should participate in global discussions on the fundamentals of PR and can definitely make a unique contribution to the understanding of PR from an African perspective.

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