# Public Relations in a Digital Era: Localising the Global Corporations' Activities and Social Media Uses in Tanzania

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**Abstract:-** Public Relations concepts and practice in different democracies vary according to the nature of their political, cultural, social, and the level of technological orientation or advancement. With the digital age and the increasing trend in globalization, Global or Multinational Corporations have both challenges and opportunities towards meeting their business goals as to win hearts and minds of customers/publics in a diverse environment. *Public Relations in Digital Age: Localising Global Corporations Activities and Social Media Uses in Tanzania*, using *Standard Chartered Bank*, *Coca Cola Company*, and *Barrick (Acacia) Mines*, as case, has investigated the activities done by the Corporations, social media engagement, Corporate Social Responsibility activities and comparing local and global activities of the Corporations. The three Corporations' profiles were surveyed to grasp their natures - activities and new media uses while a three-year content analysis was done through Corporations' social networking sites (SNS) – *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *You Tube* to understand their uses of SNS in enhancing their roles through Public Relations.

The findings show that despite their differences in nature, they all use their global business experiences in dealing with local activities. They have been responding to silent calls for glocalisation by identifying the basic needs of their customers/publics, for example, localizing the brand (*Coca Cola* to *Coca Cola Kwanza*), changing the brand name altogether (*Barrick* to *Acacia*), as well as stretching their Corporate Social Responsibility activities in health, education, environment and sports and entertainment while strengthening their ties with the government by not only responding to legal obligations like paying taxes but also supporting communication and health sectors. However, more glocalisation process is still in need as compared to what has been done in other countries in responding to cultural-centric and polycentric PR approaches.

Moreover, the MNCs use both asymmetric and symmetric communication through *Facebook, Twitter* and *You Tube.* Twitter has been the mostly used SN especially in a symmetrical communication followed by *Facebook.* It has been also observed that the sensitivity of Corporation's activities increases the engagement in CSR activities. Since, the area has not been extensively researched, the researcher calls for more studies on *glocalisation* of MNCs and new media uses in developing countries and Tanzania in particular in attempt to exploit the potentials of Public Relations.

*Keywords:- Public Relations, Global Corporations, Social Media, Glocalisation, Corporate Social Responsibility.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As the world is embracing new media technologies in information and communication activities, Public Relations is among the professions which is expected to be in the forefront in using the advantage of the coming and advance of the new media technologies especially in developing countries like Tanzania. This is because practitioners have been dragged to with current social trends, technologies, cultural phenomena, new communication trends as well as responding to the diverse local and global audience (Edwards, 2018). Globally, Corporations are performing their activities using both mainstream media and new media. Social media uses however have recently been given a wide girth due to the advancement of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in supporting the mainstream/traditional media as accorded by different studies (Wang & Yang, 2017; Sriramesh, 2017; Wright & Hinson, 2017 & 2009; Duhe, 2012; and Baran & Davis, 2010), and as they increase their global community penetration through globalization (Sriramesh, 2009 & 2017; Fong & Yazdanifard, 2014; and Rhee & Sung, 2013). It is actually, becoming a more powerful tool because more people, even in the less developed economies where many mining projects are located, have access to the Internet.

Beside the Corporate core activities, Social responsibility – which is one of the vital activities of Public Relations, but naturally voluntary (Ruggie, 2018) has been among the very important activities in laying a good foundation for the government, communities being served by the corporations and other stakeholders. The objective of this study will therefore to analyse how *Coca Cola, Acacia* and *Standard Chartered Bank* are operating in Tanzania focusing on their social responsibilities and to how extent new media is being used in their activities. The recent companies' activities have be examined by using various reports, scanning social media pages – *Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Instagram* and *You Tube* as well as mainstream media reports.

It is the anticipation of the researcher that using the mentioned corporate, this study will shed light into the local activities – and specifically CSR conducted by global corporate in Tanzania in relation to what are been done elsewhere by the same corporate as globalization pace takes its strings. Moreover, the study will show how new media is being used to reach the intended stakeholders with effective response.

➢ *Public Relations and Global Corporations in Globalised Publics*

Public Relations is a part-and-parcel of corporate culture of most larger enterprises where the organisations use it to provide their information on their goods and services in a skilful manner through corporate communications such as press statements, press releases, social media posts as well as website contents. Public Relations has been discussed for years by a number of scholars and hence there is no a singled definition on the same. Rex F. Harlow provided more complex definition using 472 definitions which is useful both in Public Relations concepts operations (Sachdeva, 2009, p.4). He defines Public Relations as: ...a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools.

Globalisation has helped amplify the speed of networking and helped bring a meeting point in the need to align public relations application and scholarship to the global cultural diversity (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). It has given the practitioners and academicians a task to redefine the term public relations in a manner that reflects the practice as a global activity involving diverse publics. In lieu of this the definition is therefore need to be more holistic, as provided by Sriramesh & Verčič, (2009,p.xxxiv) that: *Public relations is the strategic communication that different types of organisations use for establishing and maintaining symbiotic relationships with relevant publics many of whom are increasingly becoming culturally diverse.*

In another publication, Sriramesh, (2010) has posited that four factors have played a significant role in the current area of globalization thereby also contributing to the importance of global public relations namely: The increase in democratization around the world that happened predominantly in the second half of the twentieth century; the formation of trading blocks in the final decade of the twentieth century (EU, NAFTA, APEC, etc.) that *"increased commercial interactions among countries around the world, leading to increased communication as well"* (Sriramesh 2010, p. 693); the development and spread of new media and technologies that *"have not only provided increased channels for communication but also increased avenues for people to communicate across political and cultural borders, thus increasing pressure on organizations to recognize global voices"* (Sriramesh, *ibid*); and attention of the world to unite to address common problems such as terrorism, environmental issues, nuclear nonproliferation, hunger, and human trafficking. The author adds that, taking into account the challenges and opportunities of such changes for the public relations profession, it is not surprising that globalization has become an important topic in public relations research in the early decades of this millennium. However, Sriramesh, Rhee & Sung, (2013) argue that beyond the novelty of the terminology, globalization has significantly influenced public relations practice and hence one can strongly query whether globalization is new adding that globalization may be traced back to human history.

Blomkvist, Kappen, & Zander, (2018) also explains that Multinational corporations are the agents of globalization while at the same time many multinational corporations are also affected by globalization in ways they may or may not like. This reality stems from the fact that multinational corporations have many subsidiaries, some of which benefit from globalization and others that do not.

Cultural aspect in globalization has been given special attention in the extent that if the global corporations want to nourish they have to engage themselves in a cross-cultural business or glocalization - referring to localizing global branding, messaging, corporate values, and marketing; process engineering; and time orientation (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). The authors emphasize that local issues are of different nature: geostrategic, economic, cultural, political, historical, social though a common denominator is that practitioners have to rethink the new ways in applying the new trends. Public Relations practice in global corporations in a globalised publics can therefore be by including overseas experience, deep self-awareness, sensitivity to cultural diversity, humility, life-long curiosity, global strategic thinking, and patiently

impatient while strategizing public relations activities for better achievement. This study is therefore interested to understand how global corporations working in Tanzania using Public Relations in meeting their goals in localized context compared to the global arena.

➤ *Global Corporations and New Media*

The emerging advancement in information and communication in the world under the auspices of the Web 2.0 (currently to Web 3.0 and 4.0) technologies has changed or rather improved communication systems in the world. With the widespread uses of digital devices in the world like smart-phones, tablets as well as accessibility of internet, companies everywhere in the world have been cultivating relationships with their publics through the Social Networking Sites (SNS) to supplement traditional media. The corporations have become more active to their publics since the technologies have enabled them to be more active and become content creators rather than mere consumers (Sriramesh, 2009; Fong & Yazdanifard, 2014).

According to Khajeheian & Mirahmadi, (2015), the creation of new media/social media enabled by Web 2.0 technologies has shifted the focus from companies to consumers, individuals to communities, nodes to networks, publishing to participation, and intrusion to invitation as they quoted Berthon *et al*, (2012) who emphasized that its effects are sociological and little short of revolutionary in their implications for business using the graph below. They also emphasize on the role of creative consumers and how social media can help organizations to benefit from customer contents. Khajeheian & Mirahmadi, (2015) are of the opinion that this concept can also be valuable for public relations to use new media to understand what customers are thinking about their organization and how to communicate with them in the best interactive way.
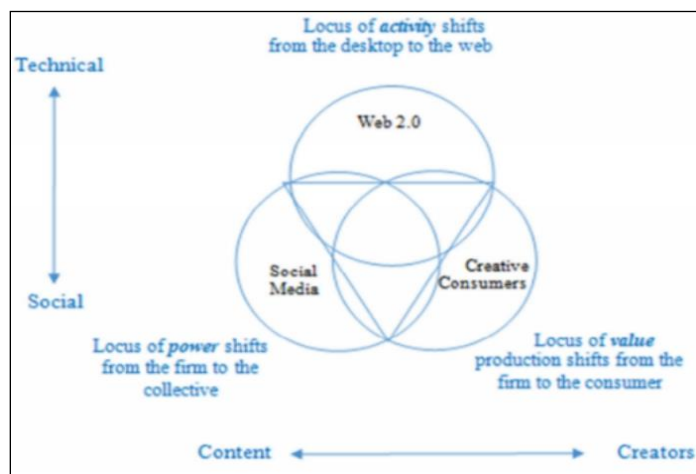


**Fig. 1: Berton et al, (2012) Conceptual Framework of Social Media and Creative Consumers**
**Source:** An Extract from Khajeheian &Mirahmadi, (2015, p.80)

There are a number of definitions concerning what new media: Sandra (2012,p.4), for examples – quoting Bennett, (2003) defines new media as; *emerging information and communication technologies and applications such as mobile phones, the Internet, streaming technologies, wireless networks, and the high-quality publishing and information sharing capacities of the World Wide Web.* Fitzpatric, (2017) observes new media as terminology sometimes referred to as social media as forms of electronic communication (as websites for social networking and micro blogging – including facebook and twitter) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos). Dewney & Ride, (2006) assert that the term "*new media"* is becoming the preferred term for a range of media practices that employ digital technologies and the computer in some way or another, adding that its definitions remain fluid and are evolving, with some definitions of new media focusing exclusively upon computer technologies and digital content production whilst others stress the cultural forms and contexts in which technologies are used. The SNSs has become an integral part of many individual's daily life making it an indispensable venue through which companies, non-profit organizations, and even politicians stay connected with a net-savvy citizens (Duhe, 2012, p.75). This advancement and popularity of social network sites, has tremendously impacted on the way companies manage their marketing (Fong & Yazdanifard, 2014). The most popular new media or rather social media networks in the world include; *Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, LinkedIn*, and *Instagram* (Wright & Hinson, 2017; Duhe, 2012).

However, it is also argued that following the challenge of globalization in embracing local cultures, in some countries, the social networks have adapted native sites like *Renren* in China, *Mixi* in Japan and *Orkut* in India as aptly explained by Linjuan Rita Men and Wan-Hsiu Sunny Tsai in their article *"How Companies Cultivate Relationships with Publics on Social Networks"* with evidence from China and the United States (Duhe, 2012, p.76). The authors as well recommended public relations professionals to customize their social media networks' messages and tactics to local audiences as they are communicating to publics of different needs and gratifications, internet behaviours and communication orientations (*ibid,*p.85). This study therefore is fervent in understanding the activities of global corporations working in Tanzania and their uses of new media.

➤ *Global Corporations and Public Relations in Developing Countries*

In stretching their services and goods to their publics, corporations, both governmental and non-governmental need to adopt strategic communication techniques and media relations which are among the tasks of public relations profession. Global Corporations sometimes referred to as Multinational companies (MNCs) often espouse corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities that are aimed at

providing 'public goods' and lobbying the government in policy-making. In their abstract Shirdkar, Beddewela & Richter, (2018) assert that: *"Such political CSR (PCSR) activities have been determined to increase MNCs' socio-political legitimacy and to be useful in building relationships with the state and other key external stakeholders."* Scholars have divided the approaches of Public Relations activities in Multi National Corporations into two: ethnocentric and polycentric. In ethnocentric approach asserts that Public Relations is not different in other countries than its country of origin-the "one-size-fits-all" (Illman, 1980; Mardox, 1993) while polycentric approach views public relations activities should be practiced differently in every culture (Curtin & Gaither, 2007,p.113-114). It is from this view this study explores the activities of global corporations in Tanzania with an eagle eye in Public Relations.

Developing countries have been a fertile land for goods and services produced by and distributed global corporations chiefly as receivers - in the old-fashioned two-way asymmetrical communication. Despite, their level of technological advancement, the wind of globalization has enabled them to be in the same wagon with the developed country though in the hind compartments (Wright & Hinson, 2017). In this way they have equally become active customers who can create contents for themselves and other colleagues elsewhere in the world and hence a highly need to understand their needs and gratifications (Duhe, 2012). Bearing this phenomena in mind Edwards, (2018,p.3) aptly puts:*"Practitioners are encouraged to be in touch with social trends, technologies, communication channels and cultural phenomena, which they use to enhance the relevance and circulation of organizational messages to target audience."* Edwards further explains that:

The integration of promotional thinking into daily life has become ubiquitous and matter-of-fact that we may not even be aware of it. Nevertheless, it constitutes fertile terrain for public relations to influence the ways in which society and culture are organized, and is the basis for the case that socio-cultural research on public relations is warranted. (Edwards, 2018, p.4).

Considering the cultural, technological and socio-political differences in Tanzania, this study discerns to investigate how global corporations are working in Tanzania, especially the uses of new media in their public relations activities.

➢ *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*
The term Corporate Social Responsibility is widely used by business, marketing, public relations as well as in the media studies. It is has also been defined by interest groups, organizations, and academicians in several different ways, and hence there is no universally accepted definition of corporate social responsibility in the literature (O'Riordan & Fairbrass,

2008). Corporate Social Responsibility is divided into two; internal organizational environment that includes: treatment of special groups and minorities, employee relations and advancement potential. The second part involves external environment that includes; environmental concerns, external perceptions of quality and external perceptions of employee compensation to market place (Rothbardt, 2012). Again as Shirdkar, Beddewela & Richter, (2018) describe that the main aim for Corporate Social Responsibility activities sometimes are coined with attempts to influence government(s) in feeling their existence in the governmental policies and hence hatching Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR) in quest of for political legality and building relationship with governments. It can also be explained as the tendency of the organization to share benefits with the surrounding communities in seeking for mutual understanding between the organization and its publics (Tench &Yeomans, 2014, p.49).

Of the responsibilities of global corporations (multinational corporations), are ethically responsible in handling Corporate Social Responsibilities in the countries of their reach targeting in building more pleasant images for more customers in accommodating both confrontational and collaborative responses as described by Paul Argent (Rivoli & Waddock, 2011,p.94). However, the "parent company" enjoys limited liability even if it wholly owns all of its subsidiaries. This means that the corporate parent is generally not liable for risks incurred by a subsidiary, or monetary damages imposed on a subsidiary, beyond the extent of its investment in it (Ruggie, 2018, p.4) and it is rather majoring in meeting its objectives (Osibanjo, Oyewunmi, & Salau, 2014; Tirimba, & Macharia, 2014). It is the interest of this study to investigate Corporate Social Responsibility activities performed in Tanzania by Global Corporations for the betterment of both internal (Branch/Agency) and parent images in stretching for their acceptances.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The study on *Public Relations in a Digital Age: Localising the Global Corporations' Activities and Social Media Uses in Tanzania* with its case study of three multinational companies (corporations) - *Coca Cola, Barrick (Acacia Mining)* and *Standard Chartered Bank* have been used case study design as well as descriptive and content analysis methods (Stacks, 2011; Botan &Hazleton, 2009). Data have been surveyed and analysed in the period of three years from November, 2015. Samples for the study have been purposively selected to suit the objectives of the study. Social media selected for analysis are; *Facebook, Twitter* and *You Tube*.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

➢ *Corporations Activities/Roles in Tanzania*

The three Multinational Companies selected for this study, namely, Standard Chartered Bank, Coca Cola Company, and Barrick (Acacia) Mines with different main objectives since they are in different sectors all together – Banking, Beverage and Mining, respectively have shown close similarities in performing other activities. All of them have been engaged in paying attention to government and community relations by providing employment, paying taxes, and community in education, health and communication, sports and entertainment in different approaches. *Table 1* below shows the details on the same.

*Table 1: Local Activities by the MNCs*

| Roles | Multinational Corporation | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Coca Cola | Standard Chartered | Barrick Gold (Acacia Mines) |
| *Primary roles* | *Beverage production and supply* | *Banking* | *Mining* |
| *Other roles (CSR)* | *Employment* | *Employment* | *Employment* |
| | *Support health sector* | *Special consideration in gender* | *Pay taxes* |
| | *Pay taxes* | *Provision of trainings* | *Improve road infrastructure* |
| | *Engagement in entertainment* | *Engagement in entertainment* | *Support health sector* |
| | | | *Support Education* |
| | | | *Engagement in entertainment* |

➢ *Corporations Engagement in New Media*

All the three MNCs are using the opportunity of new media from using internet services in their main activities and communication with their customers and the general publics. The selected SNS sites - *Facebook, Twitter,* and *You Tube* have shown differences in using as Twitter emerged as a leading SNS in all the MNCs witnessing Coca Cola leading using both *Facebook*, and *Twitter*. *Table 2* below shows the detailed information. On the distribution of posts (messages) communicated to their publics, Standard Chartered Bank and Acacia Mines have leaned on *Twitter* than *Facebook* contrary to Coca Cola which had more posts in *Facebook* compared to *Twitter* and *You Tube*. This might be due to the nature of their major activities. Moreover, *Acacia* had more overall messages, followed by *Coca Cola* and *Standard Chartered* Bank. *Table 3 below* has more details on this.

*Table 2: Number Penetration of MNCs in SNS in Tanzania*

| S/N | SNS | Multinational Corporation | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Coca Cola | | | Standard Chartered | | | Barrick Gold (Acacia Mines) | | |
| | | *Following* | *Followers* | *Likes* | *Following* | *Followers* | *Likes* | *Ing* | *Followers* | *Likes* |
| 1 | *Face book* | - | - | 107M | - | - | 16K | - | - | 35 |
| 2. | *Twitter* | 35.3 K | 1.25M | 2,977 | 541 | 52.2K | 342 | 131 | 936 | 3 |
| 3. | *You Tube* | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

*Source: Researcher, (2018).*

*Table 3: Distribution of posts in Social Media of the Multinational Corporations according to their activities in Tanzania*

| S/N | SNS | Multinational Corporation | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Coca Cola | | | Standard Chartered | | | Barrick Gold (Acacia Mines) | | |
| | | CSR | Policy/ Administration | Marketing | CSR | Policy/ Administration | Marketing | CSR | Policy/ Administration | Marketing |
| 1 | *Face book* | 13 | 27 | 11 | 7 | 3 | 13 | 1 | 75 | 1 |
| 2. | *Twitter* | 8 | 9 | 3 | 4 | 12 | 8 | 104 | 78 | 19 |
| 3. | *You Tube* | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | **Total** | **23** | **37** | **16** | **12** | **17** | **21** | **106** | **154** | **21** |

*Source: Researcher, (2018).*

➢ *Corporate Social Responsibility Roles*

From Table 3 above, it can be seen that the selected MNCs for survey, show differences in the way they are using the SNS where the main categories were; Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR), Political/administration, and Marketing. Acacia had many posts in CSR and Policy/administration categories compared to the other two MNCs. Moreover, Acacia had majority of posts in CSR with very impressive interaction in *Twitter* compared to *Facebook* and *You Tube* (See *Table 4* below).

*Table 4: Corporate Social Responsibility Engagement in Social Media by the three Multinational Corporations*

| S/N | SNS | Multinational Corporation | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Coca Cola | Standard Chartered | Barrick Gold (Acacia Mines) |
| 1 | *Face book* | 13 (61.9%) | 7 (33.3%) | 1 (4.7%) |
| 2. | *Twitter* | 8 (6.3%) | 4 (3.1%) | 104 82.5 |
| 3. | *You Tube* | 2 (50%) | 1 (25%) | 1 (25%) |
| | **Total** | **23 (16.4%)** | **12 (8.5%)** | **106 (75.1%)** |

*Source: Researcher, (2018).*

➢ *Comparing Corporations' local and global activities*

As it can be seen in *Table 1* above, the MNCs selected are in different category – banking (finance), Beverage, and Mines respectively, they have been carrying their activities almost as conducted elsewhere in the globe. However, the differences have been detected on their framing of government and community relations in doing their businesses. For example, as Swahili language is the most spoken language in Tanzania, *Coca Cola* localized its Tanzanian services with a *Swahili* Brand – *Coca Cola Kwanza* (Coca Cola First) to win the Tanzanian customers. Barrick had even changed its Brand from Barrick Mines to Acacia *inter alia,* after facing some confrontations with the government on its activities in striking the win-win balance. Moreover, in their CSR activities, the corporations have been engaged in supporting education, communication, health and sports sectors in a different way compared to projects conducted by corporations in the developed countries. In developing democracies like Tanzania, basic human needs are to be given priority in winning hearts and minds of the publics. Another observation is that *Coca Cola* has not localized its SNS uses as most of posts go to *Coca Cola* global.

## IV.    CONCLUSION

Despite the differences in their core activities, the three sampled Multinational Corporations/Global Corporations namely; *Standard Chartered Bank*, *Coca Cola Company*, and *Barrick (Acacia) Mines*, are business entities looking for profit. With their wide experiences in global/multinational business they have become aware of global business trends as far as glocalisation is concerned in attempts to win hearts and minds of their customers and the entire publics. With eagle eyes on cultural, political, social and technology, the MNCs have tried to be dynamic in responding to the tune of the communities they are serving. Tanzania as applied to most developing countries has more challenges compared to developed countries especially the basic needs. It is from this juncture, the MNCs are expected to equally respond to the available challenges in meeting their business goals. Apart from paying

taxes (legal responsibility), MNCs have engaged in supporting education, health, environment, communication and sports and entertaining as their social responsibilities. Their engagement in CSR also differs according to the nature of their business – for example since mining has been framed as very sensitive, its degree of engagement is also expected to increase as it evidenced in the study.

Of social media uses, the three MNCs have shown their engagement in new media and social media from their administrative/policy, marketing and CSR activities witnessing *Twitter* as the highly preferable SNS compared to *Facebook* and *You Tube*. Moreover, as there have been some limitations in acquiring enough information as primary data collection has not been used in this study, and hence may overlook some important information from the customers as well, the researcher calls for more studies on *glocalisation* of MNCs and social media uses in developing countries and Tanzania in particular in attempt to exploit the potentials of Public Relations.

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