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**SUSTAINABILITY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICES IN CREATIVE/PERFORMING ARTS
INDUSTRY IN KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role public relations can play in the creative arts industry. It examines the objectives, strategies that arts organizations can use in communicating with their diverse audience. The paper argues that creative arts industry in addition to entertaining the audience is a medium of communication that be used for social and economic development. Therefore, those working in this sector at an organizational and practitioner level need to embrace public relations and marketing tools. In order to maximise their creative opportunities and communicate effectively with their publics.

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Creative arts and popular culture enhances all our lives. They can challenge, stimulate shock and excite. The huge creative output of artists, producers and entertainers need to be managed sensitively if they are to present their artistic forms to a perceptible public. It is the task of the communication professionals in this diverse industry to understand the creative product, the aspirations of the creative producers to have a keen sense of the customers' desires and expectations from an arts or leisure experience (Belch and Belch, 2009)

Overall growth within the creative arts and entertainment sectors is a worldwide trend and there is an increasing need for public relations

1.0 Introduction

and marketing (PR) communication experts to understand the dynamics of this increasingly fragmented and competitive environment. (Belch and Belch, 2009)

The arts play powerful role in the society and many governments are involved in its encouragement, for social inclusion, economic regeneration and prosperity. In Kenya, the rapid growth of the creative arts industry especially performing arts and stand-up comedy is recognised not only as a leisure activity but also a tool for communication. The government encourages creative arts through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports and bodies like the Kenya Nations Theatre and the Kenya Cultural Centre. The Ministry of Education also runs two annual programmes; Music Festival and Drama Festival.

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In addition, a number of corporate bodies have been involved in sponsoring of theatre art performance for their public relations objectives. The corporate bodies need to be aware of the activities of the creative art organizations. At the same the creative arts organizations need attract a large audience for their shows which can only be achieved by good public relations and communication strategies. Fills (2004) cited in Tench and Yeomans (2009) posit that arts and PR marketing put the artist and the product at the forefront of planning, unlike conventional activities centred on consumer and this poses a unique challenge to the communication profession. Once relevant PR strategies and practises have been identified they can be applied to sustain communication between the performers and the audience. The author argues that performing arts, in addition to entertaining its audience, have a role of passing messages. The playwrights, performers and directors can benefit immensely when they use public relations tools to increase the size of the audience that attend their shows.

The papers seek to examine the strategies and tactics that those working in this sector can used in order to maximise their creative opportunities and to attract new audiences or members. The author has been motivated by the growth of performing arts worldwide in the 21st century and particularly Kenya where we have had many performing arts groups being established in major towns and education institutions. The performing arts has become a lucrative industry and a source of sustainable livelihood for many people. Notable artists like Daniel Ndambuki, Professor Hamo and Teacher Wanjiku (of the famous Churchill show on Nation TV), Charles Bukeko (of Papa Shirandula on Citizen TV), among others earn millions of Kenyan shillings for their creativity. These artists have been able to support themselves and their families from performing arts.

This has created a need to study how public relations ideas can be incorporated in running their groups. Fills (2004) cited in Tench and Yeomans (2009) argues that arts, PR and

marketing put the artists and the product at the forefront of planning, unlike conventional activities centred on consumers and this poses a unique challenge to the communication profession.

Understanding the role of public relations in creative arts come a long way in informing the cultural policy makers. In Kenya, the cultural policy is formulated by the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports. The Kenyan constitution and the policies formulated have put emphasis in promotion of culture in which performing arts is a major component. However, no studies have been done on the role public relations can play in performing arts organizations.

The study seeks to answer the following question paper:

1. How can creative arts organizations attract and sustain new audiences?
2. How can artistic directors, artists, board members seriously public relations strategies and make it a central part their decision making process?
3. Which public relations activities can be used by the creative arts organizations to increase frequency of attendance by audience to their shows?

2.0 Statement of the problem

The growth of creative arts market in the 21st century in the world cannot be questioned. In Kenya we have had many theatre groups being established in major towns and education institutions which get support from the government and corporate bodies, this has created a need to study how theatre art practitioners (artist and producers) can incorporate public relations practises in running their groups.

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3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Culture/art in UK

In the United Kingdom, the government's Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) defines the creative industry as those which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. Although there is no official definition of 'culture', the following activities provide an illustrative guide that is useful in understanding the diversity in this area. They include:

1. Performing arts and visual arts, craft and fashion
2. Media, film, television, video
3. Museums, artefacts, archives and design
4. Libraries, literature, writing and publishing
5. Built heritage, architecture, landscape and archaeology
6. Sports events, facilities and sports development
7. Parks, open spaces, wildlife habitats and countryside recreation
8. Children's playgrounds and play activities
9. Tourism festivals and attractions
10. Informal leisure pursuits
(www.culture.gov.uk)

3.2 Performing Arts in Kenya

Kenya adheres to UNESCO's definition of culture as "that whole complex of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features characterizing a society or social group. This definition encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value accepted systems, traditions and beliefs".

In recognising the importance of performing art in the society, the Kenyan government has put in place policies that promotes the preservation and encourages research into tangible aspects of culture. In the policies formulated, **Performing arts** refer to music, drama, dance

and recitals (Narratives, histories and poetry). In the African set up, performances always reflect the aesthetic principles and ethical values of the society. Some of the performing arts are the media of teaching the young and passing language values, literary traditions and styles from one generation to another in the society.

According to the National Policy on Culture and Heritage policy statements:

- i. The Government shall create and sustain an enabling environment in which performing arts will thrive and, in particular, shall support creative expression as an effort to revive and revitalize dying languages, traditions and practices.
- ii. The Government will improve legislation to enhance protection of artistes' rights.
- iii. The Government shall endeavour to promote the development of talent in the performing arts. In particular, the government shall utilize the Kenya Music and Cultural Festival as the principal channel for talent development with a view to greater promotion of intangible culture.
- iv. The Government shall take all necessary steps to promote and encourage research in all aspects of performing arts: music, drama, dance and recitals, oral narratives, histories and poetry.
- v. The Government shall support and promote the use, teaching and examining of music and dance in all learning institutions as a means of transmitting and promoting culture and inspiring creativity among Kenyans.
- vi. The Government shall ensure that appropriate administrative and regulatory framework is put in place to ensure equity and cohesion in the use and accessibility of performing arts

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- centres both local, county and at the national level.
- vii. The Government will create an enabling environment within which music and dance will be promoted as an integral component of culture.
 - viii. The government policies that have been formulated shows the emphasis the government has put across to develop creative arts in the country.

3.3 Public relations objectives, strategies and tactics for arts organisations

Most of the PR activities conducted by PR practitioners in the arts and leisure field are identical to that practised in other fields. However there are some particular factors that

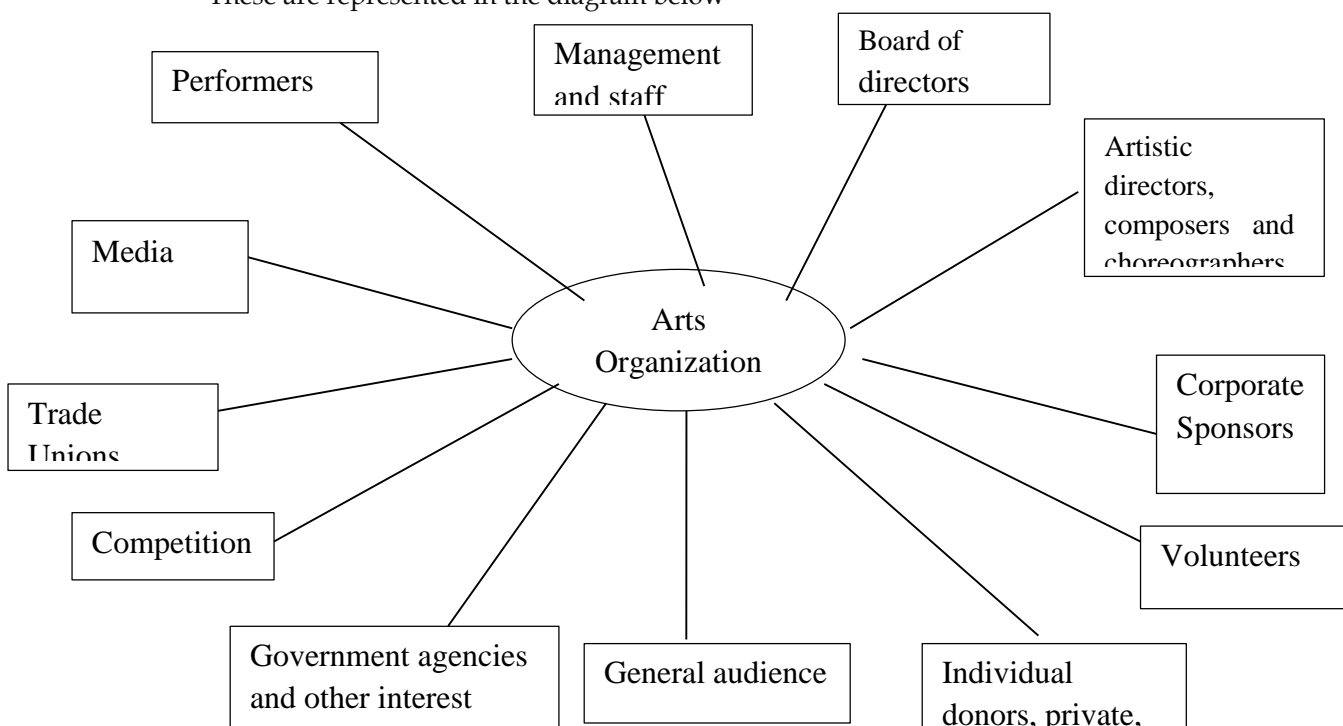
affect PR in the arts and these can now be outlined. These are: building image for the organisation, addressing audiences, theatre preview and media interviews.

3.3.1 Publics for arts organisations

In the arts and entertainment sectors Kotler and Scheff (1977) cited in Tench and Yeonmans (2009) identify the following publics:

1. Input Publics- playwrights, composers who supplier resources
2. Internal publics- performers, staff, board of directors and volunteers
3. Intermediate publics - PR agencies - Advertising agencies and critics
4. Consuming publics- audiences, activists and media

These are represented in the diagram below



A model of an arts organization's publics adapted from Kotler and Scheff (1997).

3.3.2 PR and Marketing Activities for Arts Organisations

) Selling of tickets

One of the main goals of the arts organizations is to sell tickets to events, PR campaign will

provide publicity build up to inform the fans, viewers, and participants of when, where and at what time the event will occur and stimulate them to buy the tickets and attend the show.

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While marketing communication concentrates on information on prices of tickets and tickets distribution public relations focuses on media relations activities.

b) Media relations for arts organisations

No matter how well planned or creative an art performance is, it will fail if no one sees it, hears about it or reads about it. The creative arts activities are to be consumed by an audience.

PR techniques enable the key players in creative arts industry to maximise media attention before, during and after the production and public showing of a play by providing the media with sequential stories about forthcoming theatrical events. The stories for generating public awareness include:

1. Information on actors and stars taking part in the play.
2. 'Work in progress', including insights into the production of the play, Quotes and interview with the directors, producers, actors during and after production and public showing of the play itself.
3. Controversial debate generated by the social and political issues of the play.
4. Interactivity with the audience during the creative process on the social media

c) Publicity

PR practitioners can also use interview with journalist, theatre previews and award ceremonies as tools and techniques for publicity to reach the target publics of theatre critics, industry stakeholders and the audiences to attain sustainability.

d) Sponsorship

The public relations department in art organisation is responsible for getting sponsorship for its shows. They are to devise a sponsorship strategy for the events which entails defining potentials sponsors and thinking about ways of contracting the sponsors. Those corporate bodies and members of the public with a strong feeling for noble cause-environmental issues, elimination of hunger, child welfare, AIDS research etc will

Therefore a performance to attract audience and sustain itself for the duration of the performance, there has to be good media relations. Various media outlet are available for creative public awareness and sustainability. These include newspapers, magazines, electronic media (television, radio, and internet), out-of-home methods i.e. billboards, transit sights, bus shelters and posters in public waiting areas.

always come on board to support a creative performance tackling these topics.

4.0 Theoretical background

This study is based on the agenda setting theory and uses and gratification theory.

4.1 Agenda setting

Agenda setting is the process by which the media communicates the relative importance of various issues to the public. The media can be used to draw attention to a social issue; this process is referred to agenda setting. According to MaCombs and Shaw (1973) the news media highlights the importance of an issue by encouraging people to think and talk about it. In the covering of the art scene by the media will draw attention of the people to art theatres.

4.2 Users and Gratification Theory

This theory perceives the consumer of media fair as actively influencing the consumption or reception since he or she selectively chooses, pays attention to, interprets and retains the media messages on the basis of his/her needs, beliefs or even whims and caprices. The individual has some communication or information need he or she selectively picks the medium or media that appears to meet this need then selectively consumes the content.

In relation to performing arts, it is the individual who chooses what he or she wants to watch from the shows that are to be staged. Therefore, it is upon the arts organisation's public practitioners to present information that the audience can consume.

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5.0 Methodology

The paper relied on secondary research. Secondary research/desk research uses data that has already been gathered through primary research and documented in various sources like libraries, government records, books, newspapers, online sources and scholarly journals.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The fact that a Kenyan can win an Oscar award (Lupita Nyong'o) demonstrates that performing arts are a big money spinner. In addition, the Kenyan government over the years has offered support to the performing arts industry. The new constitution promulgated in 2010 is no exception to this as it states in chapter 11 Article (2) (a) that the state shall promote all forms of national expression through literature, the arts, traditional celebration, science and communication: information, mass media publication, libraries and other cultural heritage.

Our cultural policies also support creative arts among the young people. This gives an opportunity for the government to establish training institutions in all the counties where the youth can undergo training in creative arts and therefore polish and harness their talents. This will not only cause them to be productive members of the society, but also help them earn a better living.

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Public relations objectives show that all types of organisations, whether a company, charity organisation or government body should be concerned with good public relations practice.

Creative arts organisations can use PR tools at their disposals combined with advertising activities to interact with consumers and gain sponsorship for their shows. This stimulates the sale of their products and services in the free market economy. Public relations can change the attitude and behaviour of consumer and create more favourable ticket sale for arts performances.

When public relations objectives are incorporated in creative arts organisation, there is bound to be accelerated development in this sector. Development of creative arts industry will offer opportunities for the young people to use their creativities and talents and create jobs for themselves and empower themselves economically. Using PR strategies will ensure suitability in the industry.

The author recommends more public relations research particularly in creative arts and culture in general. Because of the promising future in creative arts industry so that in be structured and more young people get employment in the Industry.