The Journal of Afar-Af and Sociolinguistics

Exploring Potentials and Perceived Impact of Dagu in Community Relations in Afar National Regional State's Selected Sector Bureaus

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the potential and perceived impact of Dagu in community relations in Afar National Regional Selected Bureaus. In carrying out this study, an exploratory research design was used, employing both quantitative and qualitative (mixed) approaches. The researcher employed a comprehensive sampling technique to select participants of the study.in doing so, seventy-five participants were recruited from thirteen sector bureaus that were purposively selected. The data were obtained through a questionnaire (self-administered for PR workers of 13 sector bureaus) and key informant interview conducted with 4 public officials of PADB, and an in-depth interview was conducted with Samara-Logia residents. The findings of the study determined that ANRS's sector bureaus mostly employ mainstream media, as the majority of respondents replied (TV 77%.TV. and 73.8%, followed by Newspaper 42.6%. The study also found that the preferred medium in sector bureaus to address organizational objectives to the community (TV 67.2%, followed by Dagu 14.9 and Radio 8.2%). It is uncovered that Dagu is the best fitting communication channel to address Afar people (Dagu 42.6%) followed by TV 37.7%. Findings show that Dagu is a traditional two-way communication system that fosters effective communication between Pastoral Agriculture Development Bureau and Afar people. Dagu can be used as a communication medium to enable the community to engage and benefit from community relations programs. The finding also uncovered that bypassing Dagu communication could result in ineffective community relations programs achievement. Therefore, every sector bureau in Afar National Regional State should employ Dagu to effectively communicate with Afar people, particularly PR experts of Pastoral Agriculture Development Bureau should utilize Dagu to enhance mutual understanding between the Bureau and Afar people.

Key words: Dagu, Potential, Impact, Indigenous communication, Public/Community Relations

Introduction

Public relations (PR) is a management function that helps organizations achieve their objectives, define their philosophy, and facilitate organizational change (Baskin, Aronoff & Lattimore, 1997). It encompasses all forms of planned communication, both outward and inward, between an organization and its publics, aimed at achieving mutual understanding (Jefkins, 1983). PR practitioners engage internal and external publics to build positive relationships and align organizational goals with societal expectations (Baskin et al., 1997), while also gathering and interpreting public opinion to inform management decisions (Dominick, 1993). Among PR's many functions, community relations is central to fostering communication and trust between an organization and the communities in which it operates.

Effective community relations, however, depend on communication channels that are accessible and credible to the target community. In many less developed countries, indigenous communication systems, including oral storytelling, drumming, village criers, and proverbs, remain more trusted and effective than mass media for reaching rural populations (Van den Ban & Hawkins, 1996; Kamlongera & Mwanza, 1993; Mundy & Compton, 1991; Mushengyezi, 2003). When organizations overlook these indigenous systems in favor of mainstream media alone, the result can be ineffective communication and weakened relationships with the communities they serve (Mundy & Lloyd-Laney, 1992).

This problem is especially pronounced in Ethiopia's Afar National Regional State, where modern mass media remain largely inaccessible. Electricity is scarce, television is virtually absent, newspaper distribution is negligible outside major cities (none of which exist in the region), and radio use is constrained by battery costs, limited broadcast coverage, and ongoing electricity shortages (Gulilat & Terje, 2008). In place of these media, the pastoralist Afar people rely on Dagu, an indigenous, traditional system of message-passing in which information is relayed face-to-face from person to person (Gulilat, 2006; Moges, 2013). Functioning as a social institution rather than a mere news channel, Dagu enables Afar communities to stay informed of distant events and to guard against potential danger, with strict internal norms requiring that information be verifiable and that any passer of news be able to answer cross-checking questions (Gulilat, 2006; Kelemwork, 2011; Winta, 2010). Jemal (2011) further characterizes Dagu as more akin to

journalistic practice than to conventional mass-communication flow, describing it as an interactive, multi-way system embedded in a well-developed oral culture.

These features suggest that Dagu could serve PR practitioners in governmental and non-governmental organizations as a viable channel for engaging with Afar communities more effectively than mainstream or new media. Yet expanding mainstream media use is gradually displacing Dagu, placing the survival of this indigenous system at risk, even as Afar communities continue to show limited engagement with radio and television.

Existing research on Dagu has approached it largely from a journalistic rather than a public relations perspective. Jemal (2011) examined the nature, attributes, and reporting practices of Dagu using a qualitative, exploratory design, concluding that it more closely resembles journalistic practice than mass-communication models. Gulilat and Terje (2008) studied Dagu ethnographically in relation to journalistic and mass-media quality, finding it readily adaptable to HIV/AIDS communication campaigns. Both studies, however, are methodologically confined to qualitative approaches and stop short of examining Dagu's relevance to PR practice, particularly community relations, or its capacity to foster mutual understanding between organizations and their publics. They also rely on different theoretical frameworks, whereas the present study draws on a modified Participatory Communication Theory to better capture Dagu's communicative function from a PR standpoint.

To the researcher's knowledge, no prior study has examined the potential and perceived impact of Dagu on public relations, specifically community relations, in this or any other context. This study addresses that gap by employing a mixed-methods approach to assess Dagu's adaptability as a communication tool for PR practitioners engaging with rural Afar communities.

Methods and Materials

This study employed an exploratory research design to uncover new insights regarding the potential and impact of Dagu communication in public relations (particularly community relations), as this topic has not been investigated before within this discipline. Exploratory research is conducted to address an issue or problem where there are few or no earlier studies about a topic,

and previous theories or ideas do not apply (Lettyann, 2011; Answer Corporation, 2012). Hence, the exploratory design was used to discover the potential of Dagu to be used by public relations experts of Afar regional sector bureaus as a medium of effective communication and means to build mutual understanding between bureaus and the community. This study used a mixed research approach, in which triangulation methods were applied to collect and analyze data.

This research was conducted in regional sector offices in Samara City, the capital of Afar National Regional State. For qualitative data, participants were key informants, including sector Bureau's head, vice head, PR director, and PR executive director. Additionally, Afar residents, including elders and educated adults from Samara City who have deep knowledge on Dagu and its phenomenon were identified and included in in-depth interviews. To select participants for qualitative data, the researcher employed snowball sampling technique in which data were gathered until saturation level was reached (i.e., the point where no new information is identified). For quantitative data, the researcher selected all PR practitioners in the sector bureaus. Since the number of PR practitioners was small (N = 75), all PR practitioners were included except PR directors of seven sector bureaus mentioned above. Hence, participants were selected using availability sampling technique. This was believed to eliminate sampling error and provide data on all individuals in the population. However, 61 respondents returned valid questionnaires while seven respondents did not return questionnaires.

Data was collected using two methods: questionnaire and interview. The researcher collected data primarily through semi-structured questionnaires containing both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was designed to contain personal background information of the respondents and questions related to the role of Dagu in community relations. The questionnaire was prepared in Amharic language because most PR practitioners working in all sector bureaus are non-Afar and it was difficult for them to read and understand questions in the local language.

Quantitative data was collected via questionnaire distributed across all 13 sector bureaus, excluding seven bureaus' PR directors based on the researcher's prior assessment of relevance. This was followed by qualitative data collection from the Pastoral Agriculture Development Bureau, selected for its close and sustained contact with rural Afar communities, through in-depth interviews exploring the perceived role of Dagu in community relations.

The questionnaire was pretested on 5% (n = 5) of PR practitioners from other organizations (police commission, environmental security and land management agency, and the mineral and energy office) to familiarize data collectors with the procedure and refine the instrument. Although initially drafted in Afar af, the questionnaire was translated into Amharic following the pilot study, as most participants were not proficient in the local language.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS v.16.0 and presented descriptively as frequencies and percentages. Interview audio was transcribed, translated from Afar af and Amharic into English, and coded verbatim into a matrix of thematic categories derived from the research questions and recurring interview themes. Coding continued iteratively until thematic saturation was reached. Findings were then interpreted in relation to existing literature to support or critically engage with the study's arguments.

Results and Discussion

Communication Mediums used in Sector Bureaus of Afar National Regional State

Table 1: Distribution of respondents' responses regarding mediums used in their respective sector bureaus

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent
Do you use TV	Yes	47	77
	No	14	23
Do you use Newspaper	Yes	26	42.6
	No	35	57.4
Do you use Radio	Yes	45	73.8
	No	16	26.2
Do you use Dagu	Yes	16	26.2
	No	45	73.8
Do you use social media	Yes	16	26.2
	No	45	73.8
	Total	**61**	**100**

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents (77.0%, n=47) reported that their bureau uses television, while a minority (23.0%, n=14) reported that it does not. Radio showed a similar pattern of high reported use, with 73.8% (n=45) of respondents confirming use of radio. Newspaper use was reported by 42.6% (n=26) of respondents, below the majority threshold, while 57.4% (n=35)

reported that their bureau does not use newspaper. Dagu and social media were both reported as used by 26.2% (n=16) of respondents and as not used by 73.8% (n=45) of respondents, placing them as the two least-used media among the five surveyed. Overall, the distribution indicates that broadcast media, specifically television and radio, are the two most widely reported communication mediums among ANRS sector bureaus, while Dagu occupies a position of comparatively limited reported institutional use, on par with social media.

Best-fitting Communication Channel in Sector Bureaus to Address Afar People

Table 2: Respondents' responses on the best-fitting communication channel to address the Afar people

Variables	Frequency	Percent
TV	23	37.7
Radio	10	16.4
Dagu	26	42.6
Newspaper	1	1.6
SM	1	1.6
Total	**61**	**100**

Table 2 presents respondents' assessments of the single best-fitting communication channel for reaching Afar people, independent of which channels their bureau currently uses. Dagu was identified as the best-fitting channel by the largest proportion of respondents (42.6%, n=26), followed by television (37.7%, n=23) and radio (16.4%, n=10). Newspaper and social media were each identified as best-fitting by only 1.6% (n=1) of respondents. This ranking differs from the pattern of reported institutional use in Table 1, where Dagu ranked among the least-used mediums; in Table 2, Dagu ranks first among the five channels when respondents are asked specifically which channel best fits the communication needs of Afar people.

The Reason Dagu is the best fitting communication channel

Table 3: The Reason Dagu is the Best Fitting Communication Channel to Address Afar People

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Why is Dagu the best-fitting communication	It enables the PR experts to maintain cordial relations with the bureau's teeming publics.	5	19.2
	It helps PR experts to identify trends and measure public acceptability of their bureau's activities.	1	3.8

channel to address the Afar people	It assists PR experts in identifying public concerns and expectations.	11	42.3
	It helps PR experts to access accurate and up-to-date information from the public.	9	34.6
Total		**26**	**100**

Among the 26 respondents who identified Dagu as the best-fitting channel in Table 2, Table 3 reports their stated reasons. The most frequently cited reason was that Dagu assists PR experts in identifying public concerns and expectations (42.3%, n=11), followed by its capacity to provide access to accurate and up-to-date information from the public (34.6%, n=9). Smaller proportions of respondents cited Dagu's value for maintaining cordial relations with the bureau's publics (19.2%, n=5) and for identifying trends and measuring public acceptability of bureau activities (3.8%, n=1). The two most commonly cited reasons together account for 76.9% of responses, indicating that respondents' preference for Dagu is concentrated mainly around its informational and relational functions rather than its evaluative or trend-monitoring functions.

Preferred Communication Medium to Address the Organizational Objectives

Table 4: Respondents' Answers on Preferred Communication Medium to Address the Organizational Objectives to the Community when compared to mainstream media

Variables	Frequency	Percent
TV	41	67.2
Radio	5	8.2
Newspaper	3	4.9
Dagu	9	14.9
Social media (SM)	3	4.9
Total	**61**	**100**

Table 4 reports respondents' preferred medium for addressing their bureau's organizational objectives to the community. Television was the preferred medium for the majority of respondents (67.2%, n=41), followed by Dagu (14.9%, n=9), radio (8.2%, n=5), and newspaper and social media (each 4.9%, n=3). This represents a different question from the best-fitting channel reported in Table 2: while 42.6% of respondents identified Dagu as the channel that best fits Afar people in general, only 14.9% identified Dagu as their bureau's preferred medium for pursuing organizational objectives specifically, with television instead dominating this latter measure.

The Reason Dagu is the preferred Communication Medium to Address Organizational Objectives

Table 5: Distribution of respondents based on preferred communication medium to address organizational objectives to the pastoralist community when compared to mainstream media.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Why is **Dagu** the preferred communication medium to address organizational objectives to the community	Trustworthy and credible	3	33.3
	Speed of news spread	1	11.1
	Accessible to all areas and localities	3	33.3
	Mainstream media is not available all the time, at all places	2	22.2
	Total	**9**	**100%**

As the above table shows, the reason why respondents claimed that Dagu is preferred in their bureau to address the organizational objective to the pastoral community: some respondents, 33.3% (n=3) claimed Dagu is preferred by their bureau because of its trustworthiness and credibility, and reachable to all areas and accessible all the time 33.3% (n=3). While other respondents, 22.2% (n=2) claimed the bureaus prefer Dagu due to the unavailability of mainstream media all the time at all places. Besides, 11% of respondents responded that Dagu is preferred due to its speed of news spread.

The way Dagu can strengthen the relationship between Sector Bureaus and the Afar People

Table 6: Respondents on how Dagu can strengthen the Relationship between ANRS's Sector Bureaus and Rural Afar

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
How does Dagu strengthen the relationship between your bureau and the indigenous Afar	It creates a spirit of believability	12	19.7
	It fosters an interactive way of communication between the bureau and the indigenous/rural community.	24	39.3
	It makes the bureau know the needs of the rural community.	15	24.6
	It boosts mutual understanding between the bureau and the indigenous community.	10	16.4
	Total	**61**	**100**

The above table displays a large number of respondents, 39.3% (n=24), who perceive that Dagu can strengthen the relationship between their bureau and the surrounding community by fostering an interactive way of communication between their bureau and the public, respectively. Followed by 24.6%) (n=15), respondents claim that it can strengthen the relationship between the bureau and the public by letting the bureau know the needs of the rural community.

Equally, 19.7% (n=12) of respondents think that Dagu can strengthen the relationship between their bureaus and rural community by creating a spirit of believability. In addition to this, a few respondents, 16.4% (n=10) believe that Dagu can strengthen the relationship between their bureaus and rural community by boosting mutual understanding between them.

Conceptualization and Definition of Dagu

Informants converged on a definition of Dagu as a reciprocal, face-to-face process of exchanging information between two or more individuals about events they have seen or heard, available to community members largely irrespective of social status. Several informants explicitly framed Dagu as a process composed of identifiable communication components, including a sender, a receiver, a message, a channel, and feedback. Other informants emphasized Dagu's reciprocal structure, describing it as a system in which each party delivers and receives information from the other in turn, and its role in addressing both ordinary and urgent information needs, including information related to peace and conflict, drought and rainfall, death, marriage, and livestock conditions. Across informants, Dagu was characterized simultaneously as a communication channel, an instrument or tool for learning new information, a culturally rooted form of face-to-face interaction, and a participatory mode that incorporates active feedback from all parties involved.

The Structural Process and Rules of Dagu

Informants described Dagu as governed by a structured set of customary rules rather than occurring as unstructured conversation. The exchange typically follows a turn-taking sequence in which the host or resident initiates the exchange, the visiting party responds and reciprocates with their own news, and priority in questioning is given to the elder participant regardless of whether that person is the host or the guest. Informants indicated that the order and conduct of Dagu is governed by norms established through long-standing community consensus, and that age functions as the

primary determinant of priority within the exchange. This rule-governed structure was described consistently across multiple informants, suggesting it represents a stable and widely recognized feature of how Dagu is practiced rather than an idiosyncratic or informant-specific account.

Accuracy and Credibility of Information Transmitted Through Dagu

A recurring theme across informants was the perceived trustworthiness of information obtained through Dagu, attributed to specific verification mechanisms embedded in its practice. Informants explained that anyone relaying information through Dagu is expected to be able to substantiate it and to answer cross-checking questions if challenged. Verification typically requires the source of information to disclose their name, clan, and locality, particularly when the information did not originate from a firsthand eyewitness account, and information is generally regarded as most reliable when corroborated by multiple independent sources. Informants further described social and reputational consequences for individuals found to have relayed false information, including damage to personal and clan reputation and, in some accounts, sanction under customary law. Elder community members were described as playing a role functionally comparable to editorial oversight, exercising judgment over what information should be transmitted and what should be withheld in the interest of community welfare.

The Functional Role of Dagu in Community Relations Between PADB and Afar People

Informants from PADB described several concrete operational uses of Dagu in the bureau's interactions with Afar communities. These included the use of informally delegated young community members who relay information about emerging livestock disease symptoms, drought conditions, and rainfall patterns from rural areas back to the bureau, with bureau decisions and interventions reported as being informed by information obtained through this channel. Informants also described Dagu functioning in the reverse direction, with community members reportedly receiving advance, informal notice of bureau plans and interventions before such information is formally announced through official channels. Several informants noted that this informal advance disclosure can occasionally introduce inconsistency between what circulates informally and what the bureau later announces. Beyond livestock and agricultural information, informants identified Dagu as functioning to convey economic information, such as livestock market conditions, social information related to life-cycle events such as births, deaths, and marriages, and political information that in other settings would typically be conveyed through mainstream media.

Perceived Impact of Dagu: Positive Functions and Identified Risks

The majority of informants characterized the use of Dagu, both within community settings and between PADB and Afar communities, as carrying no meaningful negative consequences, and several explicitly recommended its expanded and more deliberate use to identify the community's real needs and concerns. However, two informants offered a more qualified assessment. One key informant expressed reservations about using Dagu within internal office operations specifically, on the grounds that its open and unrestricted flow of information could be difficult to reconcile with the more controlled, flexible internal communication required for organizational planning and policy work, while still endorsing its use for external community engagement and needs assessment. A second key informant raised a distinct concern regarding the gradual erosion of Dagu's traditional reliability safeguards over time, noting an increased incidence of distorted or exaggerated information being circulated, including for political purposes, despite the cultural value historically placed on truthful reporting. Taken together, the qualitative data indicate a predominantly, but not unanimously, positive assessment of Dagu's impact, with the identified risks concentrated in two specific areas: compatibility with internal organizational communication needs, and the gradual weakening of traditional verification norms under contemporary social pressures.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The quantitative and qualitative findings converge on several points while also surfacing one notable divergence. Both data strands agree that Dagu functions as a two-way, interactive system: this is reflected quantitatively in the 39.3% of respondents who cited interactivity as Dagu's primary relationship-strengthening mechanism (Table 6), and qualitatively in informants' consistent description of Dagu as a reciprocal exchange governed by structured turn-taking. Both strands also agree on Dagu's diagnostic value for identifying community needs and concerns, reflected in the 42.3% of respondents citing this function in Table 3 and the 24.6% citing it in Table 6, alongside qualitative accounts of Dagu being used to investigate the real problems and interests of Afar communities. Both strands further converge on the credibility of Dagu as an information source, with 33.3% of respondents in Table 5 citing trustworthiness as a reason for its preference, and qualitative informants providing detailed accounts of the specific verification mechanisms, including attribution, cross-checking, and reputational accountability, that underpin this perceived trustworthiness.

The clearest divergence between the two data strands concerns institutional practice versus institutional and individual preference. The quantitative data show that Dagu ranks among the least-used communication mediums in actual reported bureau practice (26.2% reported use, Table 1) and the least-preferred medium for pursuing organizational objectives among the full sample (14.9%, Table 4), even though it is simultaneously identified as the single best-fitting channel for reaching Afar people overall (42.6%, Table 2). The qualitative data help to contextualize, though not fully resolve, this divergence: informants attributed continued reliance on mainstream media to the bureaus' selection of communication approaches that, in their assessment, do not adequately reflect the cultural communication preferences or geographic accessibility constraints of the communities they serve, despite individual recognition by PR staff that Dagu may be the more appropriate channel.

Discussion

This study set out to explore the potential and perceived impact of Dagu, the indigenous face-to-face communication system of the Afar people, in the practice of community relations within selected sector bureaus of the Afar National Regional State (ANRS). Three principal findings emerged from the integration of quantitative and qualitative data. First, the sector bureaus surveyed relied overwhelmingly on mainstream media to communicate with their public: television was reported as the dominant medium (77.0%), followed by radio (73.8%) and newspaper (42.6%), while Dagu was reported as actively employed by only a minority of respondents. Second, despite this institutional reliance on mainstream media, respondents identified Dagu as the single best-fitting channel for reaching the Afar community (42.6%), ahead of television (37.7%) and substantially ahead of radio, newspaper, and social media. Third, the qualitative accounts from key informants and community elders converged on a consistent characterization of Dagu as a reciprocal, verifiable, and trusted two-way communication system that performs functions directly analogous to core public relations objectives: fostering mutual understanding, building relationships, identifying community needs, and disseminating organizational information. Respondents further indicated that bypassing Dagu carries a perceived cost, namely, weaker engagement with rural publics and a heightened risk that community relations programs fail to reach or benefit the intended population.

Taken together, these findings depict a structural mismatch between the communication channels that Afar regional sector bureaus use and the channel that their own publics, and indeed the bureaus' own staff, recognize as most appropriate to the sociocultural and infrastructural realities of pastoralist Afar communities.

The three specific objectives of this study were to identify the communication mediums currently used by Afar regional sector bureaus, to determine the role Dagu plays in community relations, and to assess the perceived impact of Dagu on public relations practice. The findings address each objective directly. With respect to the first objective, the descriptive data establishes that sector bureaus operate a media mix dominated by conventional broadcast and print channels, with Dagu occupying a marginal position in formal institutional practice. This finding answers the objective by demonstrating not an absence of channel choice but a misalignment between the channels selected by bureaus and the infrastructural conditions of the region, where electricity supply is unreliable, radio penetration is comparatively low, and broadcast access is limited.

With respect to the second objective, the qualitative data clarify that Dagu functions in ANRS sector bureaus, particularly the Pastoral Agriculture Development Bureau (PADB), as an auxiliary rather than a primary channel. Informants described its use in disseminating early-warning information on livestock and crop disease, in soliciting community feedback through informally delegated youth facilitators, and in legitimizing bureau activities through clan leaders and elders. This represents a substantive answer to the second objective: Dagu's role in community relations is real but currently informal, ad hoc, and dependent on individual initiative rather than institutionalized communication strategy.

With respect to the third objective, the perceived impact of Dagu was assessed through both the frequencies reported in the survey tables and the elaborated reasoning offered by informants. The convergence of the two data strands is notable: quantitative respondents linked Dagu's suitability to its capacity to reveal public concerns and expectations (42.3%) and to provide access to accurate, up-to-date information (34.6%), while qualitative informants attributed Dagu's credibility to verifiable sourcing norms, in which the deliverer of information must be able to substantiate it through named attribution and is subject to social sanction for distortion. This consistency across methods strengthens confidence that the perceived impact of Dagu is not an

artifact of a particular instrument but a stable feature of how both PR practitioners and community members understand the system.

The finding that mainstream media remains institutionally dominant despite limited reach among pastoralist publics corroborates the long-standing observation that mass media have shown limited success in promoting rural development in contexts such as Afar (Van den Ban & Hawkins, 1996; Yahaya, 2003). The infrastructural constraints identified in this study, namely irregular electricity supply, limited broadcast hours, and the cost and availability of batteries, echo the conditions previously documented for the Afar region (Gulilat & Terje, 2008), suggesting that the structural barriers to mainstream media penetration identified more than a decade ago persist largely unchanged.

The characterization of Dagu as a reciprocal, two-way, attribution-based system of verified information exchange is consistent with earlier ethnographic and journalistic accounts of Dagu (Gulilat, 2006; Jemal, 2011; Kelemwork, 2011). In particular, the informants' descriptions of source attribution, the requirement to disclose name, clan, and locality, and the social penalty for circulating false information replicate the credibility mechanisms that Gulilat (2006) described as functionally equivalent to editorial gatekeeping in conventional journalism. The present study's qualitative findings on the structured turn-taking process of Dagu, in which priority is given by age and guest status, likewise align closely with descriptions in Winta (2010) and Moges (2013).

Where this study extends rather than merely replicates the existing literature is in its disciplinary framing. Jemal (2011) and Gulilat and Terje (2008) approached Dagu primarily as a journalistic or mass-communication phenomenon, situating it relative to news flow models and broadcast journalism standards. The present study instead situates Dagu within a public relations and community relations framework, evaluating it against established definitions of public relations as the deliberate, sustained effort to establish mutual understanding between an organization and its publics (British Institute of Public Relations; Public Relations Society of America; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006). Read against these definitions, the findings suggest that Dagu satisfies the relational and dialogic criteria embedded in mainstream public relations theory at least as well as, and arguably better than, the one-way mainstream channels currently favored by the bureaus surveyed.

Several tensions in the findings merit closer scrutiny rather than simple reconciliation. The most salient is the gap between stated preference and institutional behavior: respondents working inside the bureaus themselves rated Dagu as the best-fitting channel for reaching Afar publics, yet the same bureaus' reported practice shows continued heavy reliance on television and radio. This is not necessarily a contradiction in the data so much as evidence of an attitude-practice gap, in which awareness of an indigenous channel's relational advantages has not translated into institutional adoption. Such gaps are well documented in development communication research more broadly (Mundy & Compton, 1991) and may reflect organizational inertia, donor or government reporting requirements that privilege measurable mass-media outputs, or simply the absence of formal protocols for incorporating Dagu into bureau communication planning.

A second tension concerns the mixed assessment of risk. While most informants described Dagu as carrying no meaningful negative consequences, one key informant explicitly cautioned that Dagu's open, unregulated flow of information could destabilize internal organizational communication and that, over time, the system has become more vulnerable to distortion and politically motivated misinformation. This is a partial departure from the more uniformly positive characterizations of Dagu found in Gulilat (2006) and Jemal (2011), and it suggests that the perceived reliability of Dagu, while still strong, should not be treated as absolute or immune to the same pressures of misinformation that affect other communication systems, particularly as urbanization, mobile telephony, and social media platforms such as Facebook reshape information ecologies in the region.

A third, less expected finding is the relatively modest proportion of bureaus reporting newspaper use (42.6%) compared to the near-universal reliance on television (77.0%) and radio (73.8%), despite the literature's emphasis on the weakness of print media distribution outside major urban centers in Ethiopia (Gulilat & Terje, 2008). The data suggest that, contrary to a simple assumption that bureaus would default to the cheapest or most familiar medium, television retains a disproportionate institutional preference even though informants widely described actual household and pastoral access to television as minimal in rural Afar areas. This points to a discrepancy between the medium organizations report using and the medium their intended audience can plausibly receive, a discrepancy that itself constitutes one of the study's more concerning findings.

These findings carry several implications for theory in public relations and development communication. First, they lend empirical support to extending Grunig and Hunt's (1984) models of public relations, particularly the distinction between asymmetrical (press agentry and public information) and symmetrical (two-way) communication, into indigenous and pastoralist contexts. The bureaus surveyed appear to practice predominantly press agentry and public information models through mainstream media, which privilege one-way information flow from the organization to the public. Dagu, by contrast, exhibits the structural features of the two-way symmetrical model that Grunig identified as most conducive to mutually beneficial organization-public relationships, including built-in feedback, reciprocity, and negotiated meaning-making. The findings therefore suggest that two-way symmetrical communication need not be a uniquely Western managerial innovation; it may already exist as an indigenous cultural practice that public relations theory has not previously recognized or theorized as such.

Second, the findings inform situational theory of publics (Grunig & Dozier) by offering a concrete illustration of how communication channel mismatch can hold a population in latent rather than active public status. Because rural Afar communities are largely outside the reach of the media channels the bureaus employ, they may fail to recognize organizational decisions that affect them as a problem requiring their engagement, not because the issues are irrelevant to them, but because the information never reaches them in a usable form. This suggests a theoretical refinement: situational theory's account of public activation may need to incorporate channel-cultural fit as a precondition for problem recognition, rather than treating problem recognition as solely a function of issue salience or personal involvement.

Third, the study contributes to the theoretical literature on indigenous and participatory communication by demonstrating that a traditional oral system can be analyzed productively through a public relations lens rather than only through journalism or development-communication lenses, as in prior Dagu scholarship. This reframing positions Dagu, and by extension other indigenous communication systems documented elsewhere in the literature (Kamlongera & Mwanza, 1993; Mushengyezi, 2003), as a legitimate object of public relations theory rather than a residual category to be replaced as modernization proceeds.

The findings have direct practical relevance for public relations practice within ANRS sector bureaus and, more broadly, for organizations operating in pastoralist regions with comparable

infrastructural constraints. At the operational level, the gap between institutional channel use and audience-preferred channel suggests that bureaus, and particularly the Pastoral Agriculture Development Bureau, would benefit from formalizing Dagu within their community relations strategy rather than treating it as an informal supplement. This could include training PR personnel to work systematically with existing community information intermediaries, such as clan leaders, elders, and the youth information facilitators already described by informants, rather than relying on these actors only incidentally.

At the policy level, the findings suggest that regional government communication guidelines and capacity-building programs for sector bureau PR directorates should explicitly recognize indigenous communication systems as legitimate channels for public engagement, particularly for early-warning and crisis communication functions such as livestock disease alerts, drought warnings, and conflict mediation, where speed, trust, and local credibility matter more than broadcast reach. The data also imply a role for cultural heritage institutions: because informants reported that Dagu's traditional rules and performance are weakening under pressure from urbanization and social media, the Bureau of Culture and Tourism and related regional bodies have a stake in documenting and supporting the continuity of Dagu's verification norms, not as a matter of cultural preservation alone but as a matter of sustaining a functioning channel of public communication.

Finally, the findings caution against treating mainstream media expansion and indigenous communication systems as mutually exclusive policy choices. Several informants explicitly recommended a complementary, rather than substitutive, approach, in which modern channels are used to extend rather than replace Dagu. This implies that resource allocation decisions in sector bureau communication budgets should be evaluated not only by cost per broadcast hour but by actual reach and credibility among the specific publics each bureau is mandated to serve.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it is, to the researcher's knowledge, the first investigation of Dagu conducted explicitly from a public relations and community relations perspective, as distinct from the journalism and mass-communication framings that have characterized prior Dagu scholarship (Gulilat, 2006; Gulilat & Terje, 2008; Jemal, 2011). This reframing opens a line of inquiry that connects indigenous communication research with mainstream public relations theory, a connection that has been largely absent from both literatures.

Second, the study offers empirical, mixed-methods evidence, drawing on both a structured survey of PR practitioners across thirteen sector bureaus and in-depth qualitative accounts from key informants and community elders, of the perceived practical utility of an indigenous communication system for organizational community relations functions, moving the discussion beyond description of Dagu as a cultural artifact toward an assessment of its applied institutional value. Third, by documenting both the potentials and the limitations of Dagu, including the risk of information distortion and the pressures of urbanization and social media on its traditional performance, the study provides a more calibrated account than earlier, largely celebratory treatments of indigenous communication, offering future researchers and practitioners a more realistic basis for designing interventions that incorporate Dagu into formal organizational communication strategy.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This study was conducted in Afar National Regional State's selected Sector Bureaus, with exploratory research design employing both quantitative and qualitative (mixed) approach. This study finally came up with certain conclusions from both quantitative and qualitative data. The study investigated that Dagu is employed in few sector bureaus occasionally and in Pastoral Agriculture Development Bureau (PADB) often. Dagu is also used to deliver information about any new symptoms of outbreaking problems (regarding livestock, crop and irrigation) in the specific area of Afar.

It is also identified that Dagu can be exercised between PADB and Afar people in news relaying means, for instance, the bureau delegates voluntary groups of youths working as information facilitators, giving information from PADB to community and receiving information from community in Dagu approach.

The study also depicted the potential of Dagu; it can foster interactive communication system, and create mutual understanding between PADB and Afar people, help to identify the real needs of Afar people, enable community to benefit from and informed about community relations activities.

Another remarkable role of Dagu is that it can strength relationship and reduce communication gap between regional sector bureaus. Furthermore, Dagu provides a win-win communication arena for both sector bureaus and Afar people. it is through Dagu that Afar most preferably can acquire new knowledge and get reliable information from indigenous organization (regional sector bureaus) because they give due attention for information, new experiences, and knowledge obtained through their traditional communication system (Dagu). It is also imperative to note that rural habitants of Afar give less credit to mainstream media due to that they perceive any information disseminated on TV and Radio as propaganda.

Regarding the impact of Dagu, it is found that Dagu has more advantages than disadvantage; its demerit might be assumed if some individuals relay false accounts about PADB and the Afar people. Otherwise, it is a means of communication that can boost common understanding between Afar people and indigenous sector bureaus of Afar National Regional State (ANRS).

Dagu has the communicative potential for Public Relation in information delivering and receiving, mutual understanding, relationship building, identifying existing problem of Afar people and transferring innovation to them, and learning indigenous knowledge from them.

On the other hand, this study uncovered that ignoring Dagu would result in ineffective development and PADB would also fail to attain its objectives and relationship with its community members. Moreover, bypassing Dagu communication form could make Afar people to be latent public of sector bureaus, particularly PADB. As time passes, Dagu's traditional performance is declining and it is also threatened by urbanization and new media, like social media; esp. FB. Nowadays it is not performed the way it has been.

Recommendations

These recommendations are given based on the major findings.

- Afar people prefer Dagu system to obtain information rather than technological products (media). Thus, Afar National Regional State's sector Bureaus in general and Pastoral Agriculture Development Bureau in particular should use Dagu to communicate with Afar people when it is applicable.
- Dagu is threatened by expansion of urbanization and social media. Consequently, its traditional rules and regulations, and performance are declining. Therefore, Culture and Tourism Bureau

of Afar Region must work in retaining actual performance of Dagu and maintaining Dagu as it was.

- Greater efforts are required to ensure the participation of pastoral people in all stages of community-based activities to carry out effective community relations. To this end, more attention needs to be paid to employing Dagu to identify and analyze context-specific information or the real problems and needs of the Afar people.
- PR practitioners in all sector bureaus of Afar National Regional State should employ Dagu to communicate with, earn the attention of, influence the opinion of, and be appreciated by Afar people.
- Finally, I recommend that scholars of communication and public relations develop cultural communication models to enable an organization operating in a traditional society with traditional communication media and systems.

Funding

This Study was funded by Jimma University. The funder had no role in the study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of data, manuscript preparation, or the decision to publish the findings.

Acknowledgments

The author expresses gratitude to the College of Social Science and Humanities, Jimma University, for the opportunity to enroll in this program. I duly appreciate the cooperation and willingness of PR practitioners working in thirteen sector bureaus of Afar National Regional State, namely Pastoral Agriculture Development, Communication Office, Education, Health, Peace and Administrative, Water Construction, Finance and Economy Development, Urban Development and Construction, Women and Children Affair, Labor and Social Affair, Trade and Transportation, Culture and Tourism, and Justice Bureaus.

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