PR-ARCHITECTURE: AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR CORPORATE AND BUSINESS IMAGE

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines Public Relations and Architecture from their respective elementary contextual definitions, roles and functions performed in human activities and its environment, with a view to drawing a nexus. Information were gathered from literature, internet surfing, field survey/observations from case studies of architectural and public relations works. These were complimented with opinion poll in the form of an interview conducted on selected students of Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta, to finding their respective perception on one hand and their interpretation and understanding on the other hand, of selected building structures, in terms of owners' corporate identity, functions, activities and/or image. These were reviewed and descriptively presented. Findings amongst others reveal a high level of correctness in perception and understanding of the messages portrayed in the building form/images; and that there is a synergy between the two as art and science. The paper posits that, while Public Relations conceives and presents blue-print on issues of National Identity; Architecture brands the Nation with peculiar artifacts and designs; and that the Corporate image of Nigeria could be enhanced through well planned and executed corporate identity strategies. It is against this backdrop, that the paper also made recommendations and concludes that PRArchitecture is an essential tool capable of transforming the perception of any Nation or organisation or product for the better, if and when positively deployed.

Keywords: Architecture, Public Relations, Architectural Image, Identity, Synergy

1. INTRODUCTION: PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ARCHITECTURE

Two standards are globally acceptable definitions of Public Relations. They are espoused by the Mexican statement and that of the British Institute of Public Relations (1978, in: Nwosu 1996). The latter defined public relations as: "A planned and deliberate effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics."

A group of Public Relations experts who gathered in the city of Mexico in 1978 came up with another definition that gave the fundamental duties of a Public Relations professional. The definition presently known as the Mexican statement says: "Public Relations is an art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling leaders of the organization and implementing planned programmes of action that will serve both organization and its publics." But a more functional way to define Public Relations is to see it, especially in the context of this paper, as all activities directed towards creating a favourable mental

perception of one's deeds or misdeeds in the mind of those who would be affected by such deeds or misdeeds and consequently become its (deeds or misdeeds) evaluators. In other words, Public Relations are doing good things and getting credit for the achievement. Whereas, the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria define architecture as: "The art and science in theory and practice of design, erection, commissioning, maintenance and management and coordination of allied professional inputs thereto buildings or part thereof and the layout and master plan of such building or groups of buildings forming a comprehensive institution, establishment or neighbourhood as well as any other organised space, enclosed or opened required for human and other activities...." (Architects' Registration Council etc., CAP 19, LFN 2004).

Further attempts at defining architecture put it as: "… Human needs/activities, (like shelters, buildings, furniture, car, seats and dashboards, spoons, cooking utensils etc), using available resources like materials, man, money and machinery" (Jolaoso 2000). This may not readily provide the definition of architecture, because the word in itself and its ubiquitous application in our environment seem more of an abstraction, in which, its full-meaning and/or connotation could be identified by describing the functions it performs.

Architecture transcends designing and constructing building(s); it is an effective medium for communicating or presenting ideas and values. It is an historical, traditional, political, physiological, socio-cultural identity or classicism that combines the knowledge of anthroponometry or ergonometric as initiated and demonstrated by the likes of William Morris, Augustus Perret, Anthony Gaudi, Le-Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright etc, of the art and craft movement; the Art nouvouex; Renaissance and contemporary periods of architecture.

These developments were borne out of intellectual capabilities, artistic intuition and sensitivity of architecture and architects to the social demands and the desire to be great in the world of art and science of creating convivial built environment or setting(s) for human activities. Providence has over the time placed architecture amongst the professions in the built environment as a body of knowledge to speak and act as leaders of the team as the *shapeners* or fashioners of artistic understanding, whose commitment to the society goes beyond doing the job, but include taking a life-long responsibility in respect of the good health and safety of the job for the public good. In this stead, it essentially marries ethical integrity and the ability to create safe and aesthetically appealing physical habitable built environment. Consequently, architecture has the ability of creating physical forms for the preservation of history, ideals, values and memories. It expresses, illustrates or demonstrates and symbolises.

1.1   *PRArchitecture*

If we accept the definitions and descriptions above, then we can establish a synergy between Public Relations and architecture by bringing out the followings:
- 'PRArchitecture' as the duo is being referred to in this paper, is an "Art and Social Science".
- Both are "Planned and deliberately undertaken" activities.
- Both counsel their clients/publics appropriately.
- Both are forms of deed(s) capable of creating positive or negative mental perception or realities of one's deeds/actions or inactions;
- Both are ingredients of idea and value representation which enhance corporate communication; and that
- Both are instruments of National development

With these similarities, one can deduce that Architecture and Public Relations can work together as creators of convivial things that can project the nation in good light and consequently enhance national development.

But then, one major thing that is common to Public Relations and Architecture is that they both project an image. Therefore, it is important to take a cursory look at the concept of image in the context of the two professions.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
2.1 The Concept Of Image

Image, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is the impression that a person, an organization or a product, etc gives to the public. Therefore, a collection of activities will present an impression or a mental picture of an organization or its products before the general or specific public. This perhaps accounts for why the image question has been the central focus of the total activities of most serious organisations in recent times. Image is given so much consideration by managers of organisations because the people's opinions about an organisation usually inform their disposition to such organization, its activities and products. That is why Dokunmu (2006) describes image as the picture, reflection or appearance of someone or something and the impression, perception, feeling or opinion these create in people's mind.

Different types of images exist as had been identified and supported by different scholars. Jefkin (1998) suggests six types of images, viz; mirror images, current image, wish image, corporate image, multiple images, good or bad image. While Odigbo (2007) posits that eight types of images can be found, viz: mirror image, wish image, multiple image, corporate image, black and white image, red image and current images. Keghku (2007) summed up the different types of images that scholars and practitioners have identified and conclude that image is the symbol or perception associated with representations of organisations and judged by others as positive or negative. It thus implies that, the makers of these symbols, whether physical or abstract significantly includes the practitioners of Architecture and Public Relations; and that while, Architecture initiates ideas that will enhance the image of the organisation through the use of creative design and color-application or artistic impression. Public Relation in this stead, concerns itself with the identification of issues capable of distorting, obstructing or adversely affecting the image of the organisation with the view to professionally conceiving programme of actions that can effectively and efficiently facilitate a change of negative attitude or perception or misconception and its concomitant effects on the image of the organisation into a positive and productive one. It therefore presupposes that, Architecture and Public Relations focus on the projection of image that will be beneficial to the organization as a whole rather than only its products. While Public Relations do this by establishing and maintaining the opinions of specific publics, evaluating the activities of the organisation and blending this together for the overall interest of both the organisation and its publics. Architecture designs good structures that project the establishment well and situate it in the right place in the industry with unique functional and aesthetic values.

These, of course, must have motivated many persons to buy a particular car, furniture, domestic product etc just because of its design and shape of the seats, dashboard and body moulds. The application of knowledge of materials, anthropometry/ergonometric, colour-manipulation and user's reaction to colour, shapes, forms and signs etc and perception of the overall activities of the organisation might have perhaps informed their choice. It was in this sense that, Jolaoso (2003) revealed that architecture takes the credit for the wrapper, packaging kit and engineering products; and of course mass media in the areas of illustration, page-planning, lettering; in the use of light colour which implies spaciousness as in public buildings and the use of earth-like colours which implies identity for shrines, museum, temples; while the usage of multi-colours expresses identity for resort-related structures. These can also be said about Public Relations, because its effectiveness begins when PR inputs are part of product idea-generation and not ending with the final product. This is because PR waters the ground for

other marketing-mix to thrive by ensuring quality control from inception. Other examples include the aggressive use of rubble stones and wrought iron on facades as the symbolic identity of dominance, security, power and strength; such as in the military barracks, police stations, bank vaults, prison buildings. These were evident in the products of architecture elucidating corporate image like:

- The Burj Khalifah (2004) at Dubai designed by Kidmore Owings and Merrill Up under the leadership of Nada Andric. The Burj Khalifah is one of the current world's tallest buildings. A display of affluence and world's landmark or reference point, and better still a beacon of progress;
- The Obafemi Awolowo Mausoleum at Ikenne, Nigeria (1986), which expresses two hands, joined in prayer, when viewed from the front as a symbol of religiosity of the personality of late chief Obafemi Awolowo;
- The Guggenheim Museum designed by Frank Genhry, (1997) in Bilbao Spain. A museum of modern and contemporary arts, featuring the Spanish and international exhibition of works;
- The Rotating Tower, designed by David Fisher (2004), Dubai. A dynamic tower with each floor rotating independently at 360º in 90 minutes per tour, which expresses the human dynamic nature;
- The Puzzling World, designed by Stuart Landsborough (1973) at Wanaka, New Zealand which started as a maze and expanded over the years to accommodate a Puzzling Café where guest could try out several puzzles like rooms with optical illusions. Thus, facilitating a learning tower, which expresses a seemingly impossible balance on one corner and making the whole structure leaning at an angle 53º to the ground-line. It is a theoretical exposition of structural analysis based on the principles of counterbalancing and anchorage;
- The Archipelago Arena designed by Ridwan Kamil at the interception nodes of Jalan Gerbanq Pemuda and Jalan Asia-Africa. It is a winding cyclical and helical structure for international events. It expresses and symbolizes the importance of social-interaction, sports, exhibition etc.
- Others include, the Kansas City Public Library designed by Henry Williams in USA which was built to help New York space highly influential books that represented the Kansa City. This was reflected in the design of the façade (exterior) of the parking garages, to inspire people to utilise the downtown central library:

  - The Dancing Tower, designed by Architect Zaha Hadi, in New York, which expresses the confirmation of business bay's roles as a project that reflects the rapid changing characteristics of the development scenario in Dubai;
  - The Kuwait Cobra house designed by Architect Armin Fisher in Auckland, Bandra, which expresses and celebrated the importance of Cobra in that environment;
  - The Crocodile Moath in the Gagudju Crocodile Hotel Inn designed by John Wilkins, in Australia, which similarly expresses and celebrated the importance of Crocodile in that environment;
  - The Piano House (2008, in Kyainan City of China) designed and built by Kenneth Tan, with the use of violin/piano-like shaped with diagonally (propped) supported roofing in an opening position to express the functional relevance of the structure.

The following examples also present the ubiquitous nature of architecture in the making of corporate image or public relation:

- The Bank of the North, Kano, which is a symbolic example of a 3-dimensional representation of the Arewa Logo of the Northern Nigeria;
- The Nigeria National Shipping Line (NNSL House), Abuja and the Chief Sunny Odogwu's private home, Kaduna, which are shipped-like shape structures and as such speak about the ownership, functions, activities and users of the property;
- The John F. Kennedy Airport in America – an expression of flight;
- Many a design has somewhat revealed the socio-economic status, religion, values and culture of the users. All of these and others are strong references projecting the importance, the relevance and ubiquity of architecture in the emergence of the modern society and the creation of a convivial built environment for human and human activities. The benefit of this synergy between Public Relations and Architecture is that corporate image is not only given adequate priority, but it is being considered to be an asset in the contemporary business World. From this perspective, it is essential to briefly examine the idea behind corporate image.

2.2   Corporate Image: The Thrust of PRArchitecture

The concern here is to establish how Public Relations and Architecture (*PRArchitecture*) can work together to evolve sound corporate image, noting very well of course, that National development will come faster if all organisations imbibe and inculcate policies and practices that promotes sound corporate image, in which the totality, could most possibly translate into enviable National Image. If we agree that the activities of NEPA, now PHCN and that of other federal and state agencies have been summed up each time we talk of the image of Nigeria being good or bad, then there should be no argument on whether or not the image of public institutions, ministries or agencies at federal state and local levels of repositioned, would present a new picture of Nigeria.

The impressive corporate reputation that gives birth to a healthy image, as a matter of necessity, must adopt the following basic principles posited by Byrnes, In: Caldwell (1999): that:

- Corporate Profile must have a good corporate profile and positioning to project the corporation.
- Corporate Policies, must be well defined to enable you know where to start on key issues and actions to take.
- Opens your gate, which allows the political world to see what is happening, explain problems, prospect and challenges.
- Communication: Corporate reputation requires good communication and use of the right communication tools. For example: "See Paris and Die" is a deliberately coined message by the government of France to emphasise the beauty of its Capital City as reflected in their building structures of those periods in time and date.

These principles are relevant in view of Nwosu's (1996) definition of corporate image. Nwosu had written that Corporate Image refers to the overall reputation of an organization as determined by various pictures, impressions; knowledge, information and perception the public of that organisation have about it. Similarly, Uduji (2007) argued that the corporate image of any organisation must be noted as closely related or affected (positively or negatively) by the way its publics perceives or sees its corporate mission, corporate picture or corporate lifestyle, media image as well as the totality or nature of its corporate communication. Thus, we cannot agree less because the Publics who are mostly concerned/connected with an organisation's activities are very critical to its survival. Olukotun (2012) therefore suggests that images about a place or country once formed tend to ossify and are not easily amendable to change even when the realities of a country has changed or are changing for the better or indeed for the worse. That

explains why many organisations today and the people who manage them are extremely sensitive about the way they are perceived by their critical publics (Seitel, 1987). Therefore, organisations including the government should be wary of the impression that people will hold of them, as this is capable of forming the basis of corporate image evaluation.

3. METHODOLOGY

Information was essentially collected from relevant literature published and unpublished), internet surfing, drawings, pictures, architectural models/imageries, field survey or observations from case studies of architectural and public relations works. These were complimented with opinion polls (purposive) in the form of interviews conducted on selected students of Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta, Nigeria, to finding their respective perception on one hand and their interpretation and understanding on the other hand, of selected building structures. The selected Building structures were provided and presented in the form of pictures, architectural perspective (3-Dimensional) drawings and models to the respondents with the view to determining the level of correctness of their perception, interpretation and understanding of the messages openly or inherently portrayed by the building forms in relation to the owners' corporate identity, functions, activities and/or image.

A purposive sample size of 250 respondents was drawn from the Students' enrolment lists for the 2011/2012 academic session for the study on school- by-school basis, which comprises the School of Environmental Studies; School of Management and Business Studies; School of Science Technology; School of Communication and Information Technology; and School of Engineering. The first twenty-five (25) students on the enrollment lists from each of the academic programmes within the school were selected as the sample-respondents as follows: *Architecture- 25, Urban & Regional Planning - 25, Building Technology - 25, Estate Management - 25*; *Marketing/Banking - 25 & Business Administration - 25*; *Tourism- 25 & Hospitality- 25; Mass Communication - 25*; and *Civil Engineering- 25* respectively. The levels of correctness in respect of the respondents' perception were rated as very high, high, average, low and very low*; while the level of correctness in respect of interpretation and understanding was rated as correct and incorrect. The results were thereafter discussed and descriptively presented.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. *Perception, Interpretation and Understanding of pictures, architectural models, drawings of buildings/structures and images*

Table 1: PERCEPTION

Level of Correctness	No. of Respondents	%
Very high	76	30.4
High	112	44.8
Average	35	14.0
Low	15	6.0
Very Low	12	4.8
Total	250	100

Source: Field work, 2013

Table 2 INTERPRETATION

Level of Correctness	No. of Respondents	%
Correct	213	85.2
Incorrect	37	14.8
Total	250	100

Source: Field work, 2013

Table 2 (b): UNDERSTANDING

Level of correctness	No. of Respondents	%
Correct	201	80.4
Incorrect	49	19.6
Total	250	100

Source: Field work, 2013

Table 1 reveals that about 75.2% of the respondents have a reasonable correct perception; about 14% and 6% of the respondents have a relatively low perception, while about 4.8% of the respondents have a very low perception. It could also be safely deduced that about 95.2% of the respondents have reasonable degree or level of correctness of perception of the messages openly or inherently portrayed by the building forms in relation to the owner's corporate identity, functions, activities and/or image.

Table 2 (a) reveals that about 85.2% and 14.8% of the respondents, respectively expressed correctly and incorrectly the interpretation of the messages openly or inherently portrayed by the building forms in relation to the owner's corporate identity, functions, activities and/or image. While Table 2 (b) reveals that about 80.4% and 19.6% of the respondents, respectively expressed correctly and incorrectly the understanding of the messages openly or inherently portrayed by the building forms in relation to the owner's corporate identity, functions, activities and/or images.

4.2 The Imperatives of PRArchitecture

Corporate image of Nigeria could be enhanced through well planned and executed corporate identity strategy. Architecture and Public Relations have roles to play here. While Public Relations conceives and presents blue-print on issues of National Identity, the image and reputation factor; Architecture brands the Nation with peculiar artifacts and designs. It is widely observed that Nigerian Banks (FCMB, UBA, Diamond, Zenith and Union Bank) have imbibed the culture of corporate identity. Buildings of these banks are the same nationwide in the characters and are adorned with their respective corporate symbols/signs and colours. It is, thus, instructive that, *PRArchitecture* is an essential tool capable of transforming the perception of any Nation or organisation or product for the better, if and when positively deployed. Perhaps that was why Nweke: in Olukotun, 2012, argued that whether we like it or not, we have to "*reconstruct*" the perception of our country (within and outside) and position Nigeria as the destination of choice, not just tourism but for investors and indeed for adventure seekers. To partner with each other and come up with a synergy that will work or suggestive that, practitioners in the fields of Architecture and Public Relations should not only employ scientific research, but other methods peculiar to their field of practice/trade to device new breakthrough, that will encourage and enhance creativities useful for the duo to facilitate and propel national developments. They should find means of making good to integrate their ideas into the scheme of the Nations operations.

It could however be noted that, the traditional notion about professionals generally (Architecture in particular) have been so ethically challenging, especially in respect of architect – individual/ client relationship, which oftentimes purely serves the interest of the client only as against looking at the overall general public good health and safety. That is, the moral ambiguities of the architect's dilemma or conflict on one hand; the client interest and professional ethical betrayal on the other hand. These moral ambiguities are often noted to have consequence(s) on business survival efforts at the expense of doing the right thing for the overall public good, health and safety.

It is apt to note that designing for the sake of art or aesthetic and traditions leads to less patronage and /or financial ruins; and that designing to serve the client's sole interest without consideration for others and the safety of the built environment leads to spiritual emptiness and failure. Hence, architectural designs need to be dignified, courageous, decent, and as such, should possess regard for the general public, good health and safety, social-values, users' needs, in order to enjoy user's acceptance and honour. In order to protect and promote public trust or confidence, there is the need to maintain and sustain professional integrity and ethical standard for the general public good devoid of suspicions. Consequently, architecture needs to reasonably, efficiently and effectively engage in Continuing Professional Development Programme (CPDP), such that it would offer opportunity for knowledge acquisition that will enhance the delivery of quality services. This will in turn facilitate advocacy response to service delivery through competitiveness or individualistic or community or a combination of two or more approaches (perhaps a social responsibility in terms of a pro-active advocacy and/or damage control and disaster management approach). In effect, the architect need to be more alive in assuming a legal and professional responsibility of protecting public good health, safety and obtaining value for money spent or investment in property development through quality service delivery:

- Educate and advice client(s) and the public on the implications of their requirements, available materials, financial resources, relevant extant regulations, value/cost and time/duration; which of course must be offered based on ethical standard and professional code of practice;
- Promote synergy amongst other relevant professionals in this pursuit.

It is essential that architects need to love their works and the environment in which it is built. Hence, his/her designs or works must be done well, while he/she lives his/her life well. It is, of course, in this stead lies the relevance of public relations in an architecture and vice-*versa*. Therefore, Public Relations have become an essential part of running a successful architectural practice. With the media, profile of an average architect becoming an important factor in the award of high-profile jobs/or star projects becomes potent with the activities of public relations; where architecture has to compete with film, theatre, literature., art and music for space on the art pages of the broadsheets and consumer magazines.

5. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

It is required to provide a specially tailored approach for architects and architecture beyond the limited space(s) provided by the extant code of practice in order to productively engage the public/client interest. The use of public relations tools like the media (Print and electronic, on-line working/social media network) is apt through organizing workshops/conferences/seminar, public talks, talks shops, competitions, exhibitions, to include byline articles, press releases news, magazine, stories feature/columns and newspaper reporting to the targeted market. This will in turn help to:

- Increase visibility and awareness of the roles, relevance and importance of the professional expertise, especially architects and PR practitioners;
- Reinforce the credibility and advantage of professional expertise through media validation endeavours;
- Generate new leads and referral from qualified and competent prospects, through continuous robust leveraging newsworthy/marketing materials that will amplify or properly position the expertise, opportunities, ranking etc of the profession in the targeted market/pool of potential clients and the general public for the development, maintenance and sustenance of their trust/confidence in the profession and the architects.
- It, therefore, underscores the relevance of Public Relation in order to elevate the visibility and credibility of the profession of architecture/architect for public overwhelming acceptance and productive patronage.

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