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## **A Study of the Evolution and Growth of Public Relations Practice in Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

Public Relations (PR), a relatively new and emerging discipline in most developing nations, dates back to human civilization. In Kenya, the practice's evolution is associated with Country's communities' cultural practices and traditions even though they practiced it unconsciously. They used traditional methods for social interaction, dialoguing and solving problems through mediators who were people of influence, repute and integrity in society. These practices enhanced mutual understanding, integration and cohesion. They learnt and honed their PR through the process of socialization. Such skills were passed on from generations to generations as the first inhabitants of the present-day Kenya were hunters – gatherers. The arrival of the Arab merchants in 2000 BC to the East African region, later the Christian Missionaries, and the actual colonization by the British, gave the communities interaction a different approach and led to the modernization of the practice of PR as it is known today. This study aimed at understanding the evolution and growth of public relations in Kenya. A telephone and in-depth face-to-face interviews were made to interview the 10 purposively selected retired practitioners who served during the Country's transition to independence from the colonial rule. The findings revealed that though unconsciously, different communities in Kenya practiced PR.

**Key words:** Cultural and Traditional; Evolution; Missionaries; Public Relations; unconsciously.

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## **1. Introduction**

Public Relations, a practice that manages information between an organization or individual and its publics, is an evolving career whose role, unlike other well established professions like engineering, journalism, law and medicine among others, is still trying to define itself [1]. He further argues that the profession which started from obscurity to its present role of enhancing cohesion in society has made its unclear role enhanced by some doubts that are associated with its evolution. He attributes this skepticism to its controversial nature of evolution, as well as its lack of a universal definition which has made it suffer a serious identity crisis for a long time as it tried to position itself in society.

Reference [2] epitomizes this further when he claims that lack of the profession's single history of its development worldwide other than the many different and unrelated public relations histories was in itself a major point of criticism. It's these skepticisms that have made the practice become a subject of study by many scholars, professionals, and professional organizations in order to bring to rest its controversial debate on its evolution, misrepresentation, misunderstanding and perceptions associated with it, with the belief that it could eventually enjoy its status in society and be viewed in the same light as the other established professions.

Indeed, unlike other established professions, how it emerged (evolved), introduced and practiced in the countries it existed today is varied. Though it may seem like a modern career, it is as old as mankind as people utilized traditional methods that have similarities to the modern methods experienced today. For instance, people strategically placed stories in the media as far back as the late 1800s when famous historical figures and occurrences were promoted through smaller scale weekly newspapers. While this may not be similar to the modern form of PR, it resonated well with the basics of the current practice where interpersonal communication, literature, public events and art to persuade other individuals to believe in the client's services and programs is core [3].

The profession and practice of Public Relations in Kenya seem to be growing quite steadily, and attracting so many, especially the youth [4]. However, though the practice was well documented in most developed nations worldwide, its evolution in most developing countries, Kenya included, remained elusive. It is for this reason that this paper interrogates, investigates and brings to the limelight a clear picture and understanding of how the profession evolved in Kenya. The study therefore sought to establish the profession's evolution in Kenya.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The study was carried out in Nairobi (Fig 3.1) Kenya between 2009 and 2011. Kenya is an African country located in the East African coast of the African continent. The Country which gained her independence in 1963 from the British rule borders South Sudan and Ethiopia in the north, Somalia and the Indian Ocean in the east, Tanzania in the south and Lake Victoria and Uganda in the west. Nairobi is Kenya's capital and political administrative centre, while Mombasa, Kisumu and Nakuru are the other major cities. Kenya occupies a total land area of 580,370 km<sup>2</sup> (224,082 miles<sup>2</sup>) and falls into several welldefined topographical zones extending from the Indian Ocean coast to lofty mountain ranges that reach elevations of more than 3,048 meters (more

than 10,000 feet). ([www.gok.go.ke](http://www.gok.go.ke)).



**Figure 1:** Map of Kenya showing the study area, Nairobi Kenya Source: Ngonyo&Challa( 2016)

### ***2.1 Data collection and sample size***

The study used both primary and secondary data. A telephone and in-depth face-to-face interviews was used to interview the 10 purposively selected retired practitioners who served during the Country's transition to independence from the colonial rule. Some running Public Relations consultancy firms, as well as veteran practitioners who were still serving in different capacities in government and private sectors. The interviews were done based on their exclusive and extensive knowledge and experience of the profession's history, a few of them having been ex-officials and members of the later to be formed – Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK).

Secondary data involved articles/write-ups retrieved from newspapers and periodicals from media houses libraries and the Kenya National Archives which contributed immensely to the study. Equally, and most significant was the availability of the curriculum vitae of the late Mr. Jesse Opembe, regarded as Kenya's "father-figure" of Public Relations, from his family home in Butere, which helped shade more light on the establishment of the practice, and how the establishment of a formal professional body – the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) was done. Opembe passed on in 1988.

## **3. Results**

### ***3.1 Kenya's PR evolution has roots in its people's tradition***

The evolution of public relations practice in Kenya dates back to the Country's human civilization and can be viewed from two fronts, ancient and modern. In the ancient days people interacted, dialogued and even differed, but later compromised through the involvement of mediators who were people of influence, repute and integrity

in society. Communities utilized traditional practices such as talking drums, moonlight story-telling and folktales telling, village square gatherings and courts, as well as sporting activities among other activities that held communities together.

John Mramba (personal communication, March 27, 2010), points out that Kenyan communities were knit together by these values, long before the invasion of the East Africa region by the arrival of the colonialists. Communities unconsciously practiced public relations even though it could not be equated to the modern practice. They learnt and honed their Public Relations skills through socialization, while others utilized their traditional communication systems, structures, styles as well as spokespersons to achieve their objectives. These had been passed on from generation to generation, considering that the first inhabitants of the present-day Kenya were hunter-gatherers ([www.state.gov/](http://www.state.gov/)).

Mramba claims village chiefs or elders used specific individuals (liaison men) to convey messages or carry out errands that were meant to enhance better understanding and cohesion between either parties. The mediators, endowed with impeccable communication skills and interactive capabilities were used by the local leaders to help them maintain their grip on leadership in traditional societies that were based on communal lifestyles. As they carried out these responsibilities, the mediators also brought feedback to their leaders.

In the process, societies were bound together and there was an assurance of people living in harmony as 'good and friendly' neighbours, a requisite of public relations' role. The effect went a long way in enhancing mutual understanding amongst the communities.

The characters of those that were utilized as middlemen likewise were critical as they had to be of high moral standing, integrity and respect. They had to be linguists, conversant and effective in their skills to dialogue, negotiate and persuade.

Likewise, in the cases of communication, information from the leaders to the subjects (community) among the traditional communities was of utmost importance. Some would for instance put up some bonfire at certain strategic positions or locations, and the bellowing smoke emanating from such spots could easily communicate a message to those it was intended, and this would require them to act in a certain way.

Among the Luhya community in Western Kenya, for instance, whenever a cow was slaughtered, a specific person was charged with the responsibility of informing the general public about the event for action. According to Kennedy Buhere (personal communication, December 16, 2009), the 'specialist,' who was endowed with the expertise of knowing 'what to say,' and 'how to say it,' would climb the nearest hill-top to proclaim to the general public by the use of some significant noise of which the community would immediately associate it with the event they were called for, in this case, that there was meat for sale. People would then rush in their hundreds for whatever share they could afford. Those that were unable to purchase would still be allowed to take their share and pay during harvest time. This was certainly an enhancement of goodwill based on mutual understanding as it were. It brought trust, cohesion, strengthened their bond and cultivated a sense of unity. These acts brought good understanding and highly improved their relationships.

### 3.2 Public Relations: From Colonization to Kenyanization

According to [5], the link to what later became known as the practice of modern public relations in Kenya is associated with the history of East Africa about 2000 BC, when the Cushitic – Arab speaking people from what became, Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia moved into what is now called Kenya. On arrival, the Arabs settled at the Kenyan Coast town of Mombasa, a town that was inhabited by most incoming visitors due to its easy access because of the Indian Ocean, as well as for the conducive weather and attractive sites.

The town was by then frequented by the Arab traders who arrived directly from the Arabian Peninsula, an environment that invited colonization by the Arabs, before they were joined later by the Persians. They established their settlements along the Coast by the 8<sup>th</sup> Century before they allowed the Nilotic and Bantu people to move into the area during the first millennium [6].

Incidentally, according to [7], the Arabs were tradesmen who had difficulties communicating with the locals they came in contact with. This forced them to learn the local Bantu languages for effective trade to flourish. That too, was not easy. The only other option remaining was to craft a communicative language that could be easily understood by all in the area. They too, had introduced Islam and the Omani dialect of Arabic influence on the locals. This culminated into a mixture of some Bantu and Arabic words that gave birth to the *Swahili* language, (an Arab word which means ‘boundary’ or ‘coast’, ‘coastal person’, or ‘coastal dweller’).

Kiswahili immediately picked up to become the medium for trade transactions and the blending of cultures with the Arabs left a notable Arabian influence on the local Bantu Swahili culture and language of the Coast. Kiswahili, a Bantu language with Arabic, Persian, and other Middle Eastern and South Asian loanwords, later developed as a *lingua franca* for the trade between the different people. It has continued to incorporate other words from the German language, Portuguese, English and French into its vocabulary through the contacts and interactions the locals have had with the new comers into the region during the last five centuries, according to [8].

Swahili, therefore, became a communication breakthrough, as a two-way communication tool that enabled effective communication to take place with relative ease. Both the Arabs and the Bantu tribesmen could therefore strike a middle ground of exchange and understanding. The language which went on to become Kenya’s national language and an influential medium of communication in the East African region became an important tool that enhanced interpersonal as well as social communication between the people. It signaled the beginning of modern public relations with a two-way communicative language in place, Swahili, a language that was used to make communication more effective, easier and which brought mutual understanding.

Johann Ludwig Krapf, a German Missionary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), became the first European to enter Kenya in 1844 and started the first Anglican Christian Mission alongside Dr. Johannes Rebmann who joined him in 1846 at Rabai in Kilifi (Rabai is the first place in Kenya where education is said to have been introduced before spreading over to other parts of the country) near Kenya’s second City of Mombasa. They bought the land from the Rabai *Kaya* elders and after building their first church and houses,

established the mission station in 1846 completing it in 1848. Another missionary Jacob Erhardt later joined them in 1849. The increase in church followers after the construction encouraged the missionaries to build the larger St Paul's Church (the Church, the second oldest in East Africa after Zanzibar Cathedral, retains its original architecture to date, and is credited as the venue where 2,000 slaves were issued with certificates for their freedom) which was opened in 1887. The two explorers (Krapf and Rebmann) and the local Kenyan communities in the area then practiced interpersonal communications and social public relations. This practice of public relations by both the explorers and the Kenyan communities improved their relations [5].

As E. Demla (personal communication, December 18, 2009), a descendant of the freed slaves at Rabai stated, "At first the local community was suspicious of DrKrapf's intentions, but because of his interest, first, in learning the local languages, and secondly, his closeness to the people, he received a warm welcome." Indeed, upon setting up a mission at Rabai at the Coast, Krapf made good relations with the Mijikenda, learnt the local languages besides Kiswahili and translated the Bible into Swahili (a language that already existed courtesy of the Arabs and the Bantu mix). He also wrote a Swahili dictionary and grammar, tools that made it easy for the locals to understand the Bible, and communicate easily. These publications were great public relations tools that improved understanding and relations between the two sides, as they became quite instrumental in enhancing and spreading Christianity and evangelization not only in the Kenyan coast but the region as a whole.

Despite all these significant preliminary preparations for institutionalized Public Relations, however, it was the construction of the Kenya – Uganda Railway, popularly known as the *Lunatic Express* by the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC) in 1894, a railway line constructed to reduce the challenges of transportation between the Kenyan Coast and Uganda that is in a big way credited for the evolution of public relations in the country, according to John Mramba (personal communication, March 27, 2010. He further admits that indeed public relations practice as is known today was brought about mainly by the construction of the railway which was one big formal employer and institution that he believed formalized the practice of Public Relations just before the turn of the Century in the late 1880's. This forced the British to employ effective communication strategies that could get their messages across.

### ***3.3 From 'Community Awareness Programme Unit', Public Information Office to Public Relations***

Following the successful achievement by the 'Community Awareness Programme Unit' the British had initiated to contain the hostilities of the locals who were opposed to the construction of the railway line, the Colonial rule introduced a 'Public Information Office' in Government to take care of its information requirements. This was immediately followed by the introduction of a substantive officer's position of the 'Principal Information Officer' (PIO) for the Kenya Information Office (KIO) under the Ministry of Information on the East African Command in 1942. According to [9], the key responsibilities of the new post were among others; to keep the public informed on the activities of the Government and its intentions. Two years later, a specialized post of Public Relations was created within the KIO in 1944, to foster favourable public opinion towards the war effort. It later became the technical department with the responsibility of producing and supplying publicity materials. Having experienced the value of establishing the KIO between 1944 and 1949, the Colonial rule further realized a broader increase in the importance and effect of public relations towards their

Colonies in Africa. For this reason, and for their subjects to understand the purpose of the office, they issued a Confidential Memorandum dubbed *Public Relations work in the Colonies*, which eventually led to the establishment of a specialized post of Public Relations under the colonial rule for its colonies. The Memorandum specifically outlined the duties of the Colonial Public Relations so that their subjects could understand it. In part, the memorandum read, “the purpose of this Memorandum is to define the objectives of Public Relations work in the colonies and to outline the duties of colonial public relations departments and of the Information Department in the Colonial Office”[10].

The establishment of the Department of Information in 1954 was, hence, arguably seen as the beginning of Public Relations practice in Kenya [11]. The Department was started for two reasons; to communicate to both internal and external publics. The Annual Report outlined the department’s internal function of communication as that which was meant to ensure that the people of Kenya of all races were kept fully informed of government’s plans, policies and achievements, as well as, to give help in the introduction and fulfillment of government plans as could be afforded by publicity methods available to the government.

Some vibrant, youthful and aggressive local Kenyans felt it was time to take over the leadership of the then professional body, which had just been started but was still in the hands of the whites. They mobilized themselves, formed **groups and lobbied to be elected to official positions. The new crop of passionate youthful people wanted to reclaim the glory of the profession and direct its cause as they deemed appropriate.** They included individuals such as the late Jesse Eshikhathi Opembe, P. Lumet (personal communication, February 11, 2009), recollected.

### ***3.4 advent of public relations consultancy in kenya***

Kenya’s Public Relations practice is associated with the emergence of Consultancy firms, most of which were started by the early settlers who came to Kenya during the Second World War as volunteers. The roles of most consultancies then were basically publicity and events management as that was the immediate need and concern for most organizations. Available records indicate that the first such consultancy to practice in pre-independence Kenya and the East African region as a whole was that of Michael Dunford in partnership with Andrew Hall, which became Dunford Hall and Partnership Limited in 1954 [12]. The Company operated in East, Central and West Africa producing farming and agricultural magazines such as *Ukulima wa Kisasa* and *Kenya Farmer* [13].

### ***3.5 Bob Dewar Publicity***

Bob Dewar, an Oxford University trained Lawyer, born to an English army officer, and who after the Second World War served as a Librarian and Administrator in the Colonial Government took up the Kenyan Citizenship after the war ended. He started Bob Dewar Publicity in 1970 as an individual Public Relations novice Consultant after putting in an application to run Public Relations for Caltex. Like most other practitioners, his activities were publicity and events management based [14].

### ***3.6 Noni’s Publicity***

Muthoni Likimani's establishment, Noni's Publicity, Public Relations, General Consultancy and Publishing firm became the first fully African owned Public Relations Consultancy in Kenya in 1973. It was equally the first of its kind to be established by an African woman in the region, a move that was considered unique especially in the 1970's when men dominated public affairs [15]. Likimani was a prominent media personality.

### ***3.7 Church Orr Associates***

Church Orr Associates Consultancy was also among the early Public Relations firms that made their debut in the mid 70's. After Colin Church, the firm's chairman and managing director left his job at a reputable local newspaper, [16] claims, "He ventured into the then relatively untapped area of public relations consultancy in Kenya when in 1970, he bought the controlling equity in what came to be known as Church Orr Associates in 1975." The firm works either directly or with associates in over 25 African countries, the Indian Ocean Island States and parts of the Middle East [17]. It is considered one of the largest Public Relations firms in the world.

Other earlier Public Relations Consultancy firms included; Opembe Enterprises Limited, a company that belonged to the PRSK's co-founder and which served both as a Public Relations Consultancy, and a management advisory. It was established in 1979. Others are Sealpoint Publicity, Aussie Walker Public Relations, Yolanda Tavares Public Relations, founded in 1986, Corporate Reflections Consultancy firm in 1994, Strategic Public Relations in 1996, and Gina Din Corporate Communications (GDCC) started in 1997. There are however many other Public Relations consultancies that have emerged over the past 30 years which include, James Smart Limited, Muthoni Muthiga, Koor Public Relations, Kibao Publicity, Vivi Communications, AfriLimited, Associated Publicity, Ogilvy and Mather, Silver Bullet, Communication Concept Limited, Oakland Media, Crawford Ellis Limited, Strategic Communication PR, and Synovate PR.

In 2011, the PRSK website indicated that there was a total of 47 registered Public Relations Consultancy firms, and a registered population of about 600 practitioners in the country, up from 25 active consultancy firms in 1997 when the Society had 270 practitioners ([www.prsk.co.ke](http://www.prsk.co.ke)). By then, all the 25 Consultancies shared a cake with an estimated U.S \$1.3 million (Kshs 72 million) per annum. It was relatively very small compared to the size of the Public Relations industry in South Africa – whose estimates stood at about U.S. \$87 million per annum according to Mwembe in 1997.

According to FatumaHirsi Mohamed (personal communication, February 20, 2010) Public Relations consultancy was growing, although not as developed as is the case in developed countries. In Kenya, consultancies consisted of relatively few large consultancy firms, some medium sized firms and an overwhelming majority of small firms. Some of the consultancies have specialized in areas such as investor relations, employee relations, corporate social responsibilities or crisis management. Others are general Public Relations consultancies offering services across a broad range of public relations activities, she pointed out.

### ***3.8 Indigenous pioneering public relations practitioners***

While Public Relations Consultancies run and managed by the whites were credited for being the pioneers of Kenya's Public Relations practice, nothing is mention about the locals' contribution towards the practice. As P.



Lumet (personal communication, February 11, 2009) stated, “It was unthinkable that any indigenous Kenyan would be entrusted to play any role in the practice unless they were under close supervision if at all, as they were considered inferior and without any professional training, as training facilities too, were unavailable.” As a result, Public Relations practice by the indigenous Kenyans remained a pipe dream till the late 60’s and early 70’s when some of them were sponsored to go abroad by their employers for short training courses.

There were others who, despite the non-availability of their training records, were active in practice. They included Muthoni Likimani, Eunice Mathu, Muthoni Muthiga, John Luseno, then working with the British American Tobacco (BAT) as director of Public Affairs, and Isaac Lugonzo who served as a Public Relations Manager with the then Power and Lighting Company and later became the Nairobi Mayor. In fact, Muthoni Likimani (personal communication, September 27, 2010) started off as a broadcaster in the late 1950s before venturing into public relations in 1971. She later started her public relations consultancy, Nonis Publicity in 1973.

In the midst of all these, one person who emerged from obscurity after dropping out from school in Form Two due to lack of school fees to later become a leading light in Kenya’s Public Relations practice was Jesse Eshikati Opembe [18]. Opembe joined the Nyanza Maize and Produce Board (NPMB) in 1946 as a stores clerk at the age of 27. He rose through the ranks as the first African to become an Assistant Public Relations Officer of the NPMB in 1958 (p. 1).

His new position in NPMB motivated him to play a leading role in the Country’s development of Public Relations, when he later became the first indigenous Kenyan to serve the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK), for a record nine years as its chairman

According to K. Buhere (personal communication, December 16, 2009), Opembe ought to be honoured as the ‘father-figure’ of Kenya’s Public Relations for the role he played in the formation of the professional body which was largely white – dominated. He pointed out that despite his limited education; Opembe was a unique, dynamic and very aggressive Kenyan who discovered the importance of public relations earlier than many people did. He saw the potential in the profession and pursued it to his very end.

### ***3.9 jesse opembe: kenya’s ‘father – figure’ of public relations***

Born on August 14, 1929 at Eatundu, Emaholia Village, Khwisero District, Western Province of Kenya, Opembe joined the Kakamega Government African School for his primary school, but could not proceed with his secondary school education beyond Form II due to lack of school fees [18]. He was forced to look for a job as a Junior Stores Clerk with the then Nyanza Province Marketing Board (NPMB) in Kisumu from 1949 -51, where he rose to become a Senior Stores Clerk between 1952 and 1955 [19]. While on employment, he contested for a Union post and was elected Shop Steward of the Grain Union representing the NPMB. A year later (1956), he was promoted to the position of Accounts officer for the entire region. He advanced his interest in serving the masses and was elected Councilor, Kisumu Municipality. Having discovered the potential in the young Opembe, the NPMB management appointed him to the position of Assistant Public Relations officer in

1958 at a youthful age of 29. In his extra-curricular activities, Opembe was elected Vice Chairman, Child Welfare Society Kisumu branch, and President, Kisumu Football and Athletics Association at the local level. The following year (1959), NPMB sent Opembe to Jeannes College (present day Kenya Institute of Administration), Kabete in Nairobi, for an advanced course in Administration, Management of Public Affairs and Governance . This training was in preparation for a broader role of handling public affairs. His successful completion of the course guaranteed him a promotion in 1960 when he became the organizations' Public Relations Officer.

Opembe's mobilization skills of the Kenyan Africans towards the PRSK worked in his favour three years later when he was officially elected the Society's chairman in 1973, after having served as vice chairman the year before [5]. By then, the Society only had 37 full, associate and students members who met regularly for discussions and at times addressed by guest speakers [20]. This was the beginning of his long leadership journey. In 1974, he became chair of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Federation of African Public Relations Association (FAPRA), a meeting that was held in Kenya and which brought over 3000 practitioners from all over the World (The Weekly Review, 1988, p. 9 -10). During the meeting, Opembe was bestowed membership into FAPRA, and in 1975 became a Fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (FNIPR).

In the same year, Opembe was elected chair to the International Public Relations Conference in Mexico City where he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal by the Mexican president for his outstanding contribution to the field of Public Relations Internationally, and more particularly, to Southern America . In a different fete, he was also presented with the Golden Medal Award by the British High Commissioner to Kenya on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen of England, from the International Public Relations Association for outstanding contribution to the worldwide growth and acceptance of Public Relations (Daily Nation, 1975, p. 4).

Besides running his consultancy firm after leaving office as PRSK chairman in 1982, Opembe pursued his longtime dream of leadership and influence through politics when he was elected member of parliament and rose to become an Assistant Minister for Planning and National Development in the Kenyan Government, a position he held for only six months before he died in 1988 [18].

### ***3.10 public relations training in kenya***

Training in Public Relations in Kenya remained an uphill task for most practitioners who could not get sponsorship to study abroad before, and a couple of years after independence as there were no institutions offering the same locally, until in the 80's. This was because, though the Colonial Government had started the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC) in Nairobi in 1961 to train engineers, it was not until 1969 that the training commenced. The intake was later expanded to include Public Relations and communication related training to take care of the rising needs of Information officers (they were not called PROs then) who were needed in the Civil Service alongside others that were meant to work as press attaches in foreign missions.

### ***3.11 recognition of public relations in kenya***

After Kenya got her Independence in 1963 and later became a Republic in 1964, the new Government

recognized the role and importance of communication and information. One of the reasons for this was because most of its ministers were nationalists who had largely relied on the media platform to disseminate issues concerning their political ambitions and development [5]. As a result of this recognition, the Department of Information Services which at independence was under the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs and Administration was upgraded to a full Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Tourism in 1964, and was charged with the responsibility of Information, Communication (including broadcasting) and Tourism. It was hence, mandated to spearhead publicity for development projects through mass education campaigns.

National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) Government came to power under President Mwai Kibaki in 2003, the significance of Public Relations came into play with the Government once again fully utilizing its services. The new Government became keenly conscious about the strategic role the profession played in the management of public opinion to the extent that soon after taking over, it established the office of the Public Communications Secretary and Government Spokesman in 2004 to package and disseminate Government information to the media so as to minimize distortions, contradictions and information gaps, and ensure the projection of proper public image of Government (Government of Kenya Report, 2006). To many, this was seen as the Government's heed to a call and challenges made earlier by the PRSK urging it to appoint a spokesperson for the same purpose [24]. Just like the earlier Government of President Daniel arap Moi, the new government was accused of lacking a centralized office for dissemination of information, a reason why it had often tended to create the impression that it was concealing vital information on various critical issues as the information disseminated by its various ministries / departments was viewed as lacking proper harmonization [21].

In a newspaper article, '*Tale of PR practice gone rogue*', Duke Kosprin Mwanicha lamented that it was hard to admire the Government Spokesman's professional skills considering that he was the senior most Public Relations practitioner in Kenya. He claimed, "Dr. Mutua (the spokesman) has deliberately projected himself as a cunning sophist who only understands PR as spin" [22].

John Mramba (personal communication, March 27, 2010) on his part further claimed, "The Government Spokesperson's office must have the impact it was expected to have, not as a mouth piece of defending the Government's wrongdoing, which should not be there in the first place if good Public Relations advice was given." He said the office was not only expected to play to the popular perception of Public Relations that it was there to only talk 'good' about the employer, but should instead be seen as counselor and adviser on communication matters and how the Government should propagate its various policies and programmes to the general and targeted publics, and cease to be a propaganda office.

As a result of the important role Public Relations was seen to be playing in the Country, the government was busy restructuring the Ministry of Information and Communication to make it more responsive to a changing public service. It initiated an ambitious capacity-building programme for information officers, many of whom were being sponsored to study masters' degrees in communication at public universities [23].

### ***3.12 The Dawn of Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK)***

Efforts to start Kenya's public relations professional body, the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) commenced in 1969, when its founders felt there was need for practitioners to be more professional and coordinated in their approach to the practices. It was further felt that the professional body would guide and bring public relations practitioners together for a common purpose. However, it was not until a year later (1970) that the formation was realized. While hosting a dinner organized by PRSK in honour of Mr. Denis Buckle, the President of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) who had visited Kenya in 1978, attended by 75 public relations men and business executives, Opembe informed the gathering that PRSK was formed in 1970 to maintain the standards of the practitioners [25]. Others who participated in the struggle for the formation spearheaded by Opembe included, Isaac Lugonzo, a former Nairobi Mayor, Patrick Orr, Michael Dunford, James Smart, MuthoniLikimani and Colin Church. According to [26], "they saw the need to build standards and develop a national voice," (p.200).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it is apparent that the profession of public relations in Kenya which started on a traditional practice footing was on its take – off stage, and on a very steady growth basing this conclusion on the youthful practitioners it was attracting. This population clearly demonstrates the profession's vibrancy and bright future it holds as a growing profession that had become indispensable in organizations due to the crucial roles it played. Different communities in Kenya practiced public relations through their interactive activities and the utilization of traditional methods of communication such as the use of moonlight story – telling and folktales telling, village square gatherings and courts, talking drums, negotiations during marriages and sporting activities among others, long before they were colonized and modern practice of public relations was introduced. The activities enhanced their relations, strengthened their bond and brought mutual understanding. It was further revealed that the crafting of the communicative language, Kiswahili, which became a very crucial tool of communication in Kenya and beyond, became an important catalyst in the acceleration of the practice of public relations in Kenya. It brought commonality and understanding as a wider public could easily interact freely. It was also evident from the study that the specialized post of public relations was first created in 1944 by the Colonial Government and the actual practice commenced in 1954. However, the study ascertained that Public Relations Consultancy firm, Dunford, Hall and Partners became the first to practice public relations in Kenya and the East African region. There was a further discovery that the first indigenous Public Relations Consultancy firm in the country started in 1973 was Noni's Publicity, a Public Relations, General Consultancy and Publishing firm by MuthoniLikimani, a woman who was also a co-founder of PRSK, while Jesse Opembe, the man who championed the formation of the PRSK in 1970 was the first indigenous Kenyan public relations practitioner to practice in 1958 when he became an Assistant Public Relations Officer of a government organization.

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