

Assessment of The Town-Gown Relationship in Media and Communication Research in Nigeria Universities: A Study of Selected Institutions in Southeast, Nigeria

OGU, Clinton Chukwuma

Department of Mass Communication, Imo State University, Owerri

Email: clintwisworth@gmail.com

Abstract

The study examined the assessment of the town – gown relationship in media and communication research in Universities in Southeast Nigeria. The objectives of the study among others were to ascertain the extent to which University researchers in the field of media and communication studies approach corporate bodies outside the University for sponsorship and collaboration. The study was anchored on social exchange theory. From a population 1,679, a sample size of 313 was drawn using the Wimmer and Dominick online calculator. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. Closed ended questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. Data obtained were analysed and presented in simple percentages and frequency tables as well as mean analysis where Likert scale was used. The findings revealed among others that at a mean average of 2.8 there is lack of information about opportunities for research in corporate organizations, governments, etc among media and communication researchers leading to poor collaboration between the town and gown. The researcher therefore recommended that university-based researchers should cultivate the habit of approaching organisations to help fund their research thereby leading to a better town-gown relationship.

Keywords: Assessment, Town-Gown Relationship, Media, Communication Research

Introduction

Most developed countries in the world have academic environment that are already at home with the idea of the “town and gown” relationship. The academics in these countries are flourishing due to the synergy that exists between the University (gown) and the professional/practicing environment in the society (town). It is this synergy that exist between the town and gown that brought about the whole idea of “town and gown” relationship.

Emphasising on the need for this collaboration in Nigeria, Dr. Yemi Ogubiyi, the Chairman of the Obafemi Owolowo University Council notes that universities in Nigeria must work hard to bridge the gap that exist between the “town and gown”. He noted that the relationship between the “town and gown” should be modelled after the seventy (70) years relationship between Bayer Pharmaceuticals (Olukotun,2019). There are many other universities in developed countries that have continued to enjoy this type of “town and gown” collaboration. For instance, the Harvard University in the United State of America opened its gate to Shegun Adeniyi, the former Chief Press Secretary to the late President Umaru Yaradua to help boost their journalism programme, due to the wealth of experience he displayed when he was in office. This is another model of collaboration (Olukotum,2019).

According to White (1991), there is need for universities to have relationship with the communities where they are situated. It is this relationship with the community that explains the idea the “town and gown” relationship. Although she quickly adds that different people have defined the “town and gown” from different ideological perspectives. This has further given different perspective to the “town and gown” ideology. One basic thing she stated that seem to be constant in all cases is the fact that the “town and gown” ideology is a journalistic phrase used to explain the nature of interaction between the university and the community or society at large.

Elumunor (2018) gives two different views to the model of collaboration in the “town and gown” relationship. To him, the “town and gown” relationship should include the university being of help to the community by providing workforce/labour and community service, which is one aspect of the model. The other model is for the university to collaborate with other universities within the same environment in terms of research and project development. Following the first model of Elumunor (2018), the Western Delta University, Oghara, Delta State, sent her students to Oghara community to harvest plastic containers to be studied and recycled by the Environmental Management and Toxicology Department of the university. This means that the university has what it takes to go after the sachet water and plastics that deface the Nigerian community. The second model of the “town and gown” relationship is contained in the relationship between tertiary institutions. For instance, Harvard, MIT, Boston University, Boston College and Suffolt University all collaborate in the area of research, and students can access the lecture notes of Professors in other institutions within the same community.

The African Council for Communication Education (ACCE), in most of its conferences, encourage both the academics and practicing professionals in the field of communication to come together on yearly bases to share research thoughts. This, however, has not deepened the “town and gown” relationship in the area of research because individuals come with their various research works. This lack of synergy is worrisome. Olutokun (2019) notes that it is a shame that Nigerian Universities are yet to develop beyond the structured modalities they received from Britain. Unfortunately, Britain has since moved on embracing the “town and gown” ideology both in the area of research and community interaction.

In Nigeria, generally, the research aspect of the field of communication seems not to have enjoyed collaboration from the community. This, no doubt, has affected in some ways the quality of research output from communication discipline. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that this study sought to assess the “town and gown” relationship in media and communication research in Universities in South-east, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, most communication studies overseas by academics have enjoyed the sponsorship of corporations or professional body outside the academic environment. This sponsorship they have received through grants from grant giving bodies or sponsorship from corporations within the community of the institutions. One will realise that companies quote in their annual financial year report, the amount of money they have given to researchers for the advancement of knowledge and to better the lot of humanity. Research institutes overseas especially in developed countries have also benefited from these grants most times.

In Nigeria, researchers have also won grants from several grant giving bodies overseas to carryout research in specific areas. In some cases, corporate organisations seem to have approached researchers in the academia to help them conduct research that will benefit the company or organisation. However, in the field of media and communication research, most researchers seem not to have enjoyed the “town and gown” relationship or collaboration in carrying out their research endeavours. Most research endeavours appear to have been sponsored by the researchers rather than sponsorship from the industry (town). This seems to have made many research results in the media and communication field to be on the decline and research results unused by the industries and professionals in the “town”. One argument could be why would they use research results, when they did not sponsor the study? How did the gown know what the problems of these corporations are without necessarily talking with them in that area? Could it be that the research problems and findings have nothing to do with the problems of the media organisations and corporations? Or could it be that researchers do not seek such collaborations and sponsorships from the “town” when engaging in their research endeavours in media and communication?

It is in view of these, that this study sought to assess the town-gown relationship in media and communication research in selected universities in southeast, Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study asked the following questions:

1. To what extent do media and communication researchers approach corporate and grant-giving bodies to identify their problems before engaging in research endeavours?
2. To what extent do University researchers, in the field of media and communication studies, approach corporate bodies outside the university for sponsorship and collaboration?
3. To what extent do communication researchers think that the problem they want to solve will benefit the corporate sector or media organisations?
4. What are the challenges that hinder media and communication researchers from approaching media, corporate and grant-giving bodies to sponsor or collaborate with them in their research endeavours?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Town and Gown Relationship Defined

The relationship between town and gown is as old as the history of the university system. Most historians have revealed that universities of Timbuktu and Alexandria among others predated those of continental Europe (Okoko, 2012). In spite of the overwhelming evidence in support of this claim, however, western scholars still trace the origin of the university system to the Academy, founded by a Greek philosopher, Plato in 389 BC. Plato's 'the Academy' is said to have been founded as a sacred sanctuary of learning outside the city walls of Athens where it flourished for nine centuries until the year 527 AD when it was closed down along with other 'pagan' schools by Emperor Justinian (Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, 2011). The academy provided the foundation or character of the modern university system, particularly the individual

centres of learning which sprang up in the 12th century AD beginning from Italy. They all existed outside the city walls and had little or no contact with town people. The medieval universities were structured as guilds of masters (scholars) and students operated along the same pattern with the European medieval guilds. Once a scholar or master was able to obtain charter which served as a form of licence for him to operate a university or centre of higher learning, he was granted a municipal authority for a space outside the city wall or a lecture facility. He attracted students from far and near and became independent financially and legally of municipal authorities.

He was exempted from any kind of taxation and no other authority interfered with the operations of the universities. The universities thus enjoyed relative autonomy and a range of privileges. According to Okoko (2012), students were exempted from the jurisdiction of municipal authorities and resumed studies whenever or if ever they so desired. These privileges constituted grounds for conflicts with the local people who saw the scholars and students as arrogant. The relationship between town and gown was not however, always conflictual. There were periods of relative peace. That peace was sustained after the 15th century until the municipal authorities took the responsibility for payment of salaries of university workers. Indeed, within a short period of time, municipal authorities took the responsibility to establish and run universities, thereby gradually bridging the gap between town and gown.

This trend appears to have assumed global dimensions. For instance, in Nigeria, universities and municipal authorities are increasing collaboration on security matters. This has become imperative in view of the large number of staff and students who now live off campus. It is also necessary due to the increasing proximity of a number of university campuses to town people. Partnership between universities and town people has also become imperative due to the changing character of the university system (Okoko, 2012).

Town-Gown Relationship as synergy for National Development

The most immediate impact of the university on its local community is in its role as an employer of labour. Government policy that university recruits the majority of junior employees from the immediate locality has further ensured closer and mutual relations with the community. In some cases, universities are the largest employer of labour in their immediate environment. Quite an appreciable proportion of staff in some of these institutions reside in the immediate community. The presence of universities in communities has facilitated provision of infrastructure in their immediate community, including industries and economic activities (Ojo, 2006). As of today for example, the University of Port Harcourt according to Koko (2012) has a population of more than 35,000 students and almost 2000 teaching, non-teaching and casual staff. As the university grows and expands, so do the host communities. This development has led to the economic transformation of the hitherto, Aluu, Rumuosi and Rumuekini communities from rural villages to urban and semi-urban towns. Take for instance, the rural Choba market, which now competes with the big markets in Port Harcourt, attracts suppliers from as far as Aba and Onitsha, all targeting the huge population of the students and staff of the university.

Empirical Review

White (1991) carried out a study on town and gown, analysis of relationships and it was revealed that both the town and gown have good collaboration and if maintained will greater success can be achieved. **Okah (2013) did a study on town and gown relationship towards national development and it was found** that the synergy that exist between both entities is rapidly increasing just as it is seen the use of some common facilities. He quickly added that institutions for higher learning should pattern their policies according to the needs in the host communities. **Massey (2014) on the other hand conducted a study on how town-gown relations impact local economic development in small and medium cities.** It was revealed that to build on experimental relationship between both entities, there should be adequate employment opportunities by small and medium cities in Canada to retain its graduates. **Aderogba (2018) carried out a study on town and gown relationship and sustainable community development and it was found** that there is a significant relationship between both entities and it is solely on the stakeholders to make it thrive. **Bruning (2006) conducted a study on Town-gown relationships and how it foster mutual relationship between university members and community members and it was revealed that** the university programmes are only appreciated by those who exposes themselves to it. **Omeire (2016) did a study on town and gown interface: assessment of Nigerian federal universities and employment of indigenes of host communities and it was found** that the employment rate amongst federal universities is imbalance and quickly add that the apex regulatory body (NUC) ensure this need is met. **Olusanya (2017) carried out a study on creating a partnership between town and gown** department of employment relations and human resource management. It was revealed that an improved relationship between both entities and good educational policies will in no doubt skyrocket both educational system and economy sectors. **Akintayo**

(2013) carried out a study on town and gown in Nigerian educational system with emphasis on industrial arts and design and finding reveals that there is no significant relationship between both entities even though they're meant to be interrelated. This led to high unemployed youths in the country. Emma-Ogula (2020) conducted a study on town and gown relationships for Sustainable national development n tertiary institution and it was revealed that the relationship between both entities have contributed immensely to the growth and development of the nation. Foley (2016) carried out a study on town and gown relations: Finding equitable prosperity for neighborhood resident stakeholders. The study expands the limited knowledge base on attitudes of neighborhood resident stakeholders in college towns. It was found that collaborative projects between a municipality and university can also prove beneficial to a cooperative community. Outreach tactics to increase interaction of residents with Rowan University officials, and students can be increased to improve current attitudes.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the social exchange theory propounded by sociologist George Homans in 1961. The theory explains the nature of relationship that exists between two groups of people or bodies. Cherry (2020) defined the social exchange theory as the exchange process which creates social behaviour; adding that the “purpose of this exchange is to maximize benefits and minimize costs” in the relationship. Most relationships are “made up of a certain amount of give-and-take, but this does not mean that they are always equal. Social exchange suggests that it is the valuing of the ? benefits and costs of each relationship that determine whether or not we choose to continue a social association” (Cherry, 2020).

Exchange theorists maintain that people are attracted to each other for variety of reasons that propel them to establish social relationships. Once the initial ties are established, the rewards that they provide to each other serve to lubricate and solidify the bonds. The opposite situation is also possible. With insufficient rewards an association will weaken or break. Rewards that are exchanged can be intrinsic (for example love, respect) or extrinsic (for instance money, handshake) (Ritzer, 2008).

According to social exchange theory, a person will weigh the cost of a social interaction (negative outcome) against the reward of that social interaction (positive outcome). These costs and rewards can be material, like money, time or a service. Each person wants to get more from an interaction or relationship than they give. When a relationship costs a person more than it rewards them, they end it. But when a relationship provides enough rewards, they continue it. What is or isn't enough depends on various factors, including a person's expectations and comparisons with other possible interactions and relationships (Online MSW Programs, 2020).

The social exchange theory explains the nature of relationship between universities and their host communities. When the 'town' perceive that they will receive the maximum benefit in a sponsored research or collaborative research, the more likely they are willing to sponsor such research. On the other way round, if the gown is able to produce quality research for the benefit of the town, they will also receive more sponsorship and collaboration.

This theory is relevant to the study because it reveals that where there is maximum benefit between the town and gown, then the relationship between the town and gown will continue to flourish. This implies that the university academics, in the field of communication studies, will enjoy more sponsorship and collaboration in their research endeavors from grant giving bodies and cooperation.

Research Methodology

This study adopted the survey method. Survey research method was used in this study because of its appropriateness for behavioural research. Wimmer and Dominick (2000) identify certain advantages of survey in communication studies to include, the ability to collect large amount of data with relative ease from variety of people, and this allows researchers to examine many variables and use multi variate statistics to analyse the data (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

The population of this study comprised five selected universities in the southeast that offer media and communication studies in their postgraduate programme as well as the lecturers in these selected institutions that engage in research for their academic promotions. These selected universities with the estimated population include, Abia State University, Uturu – Abia State -345; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka – Anambra State -367; Ebonyi State University, Abakiliki – Ebonyi State -291; University of Nigeria, Nsukka – Enugu State - 315; and Imo State University, Owerri – Imo Sate - 361. Totalling 1,670 estimated population of the researchers in these Universities (Final year students, Postgraduate Students and Lecturers) as presented by the secretaries of these Departments of Mass Communication are presented below:

To determine the sample size of this study, the Wimmer and Dominick online calculator was used to generate a sample size of 313 from the population. The researcher adopted the multi-stage sampling technique. We used cluster technique first to divide the population into clusters: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states. **Stage 1:** From the five states in this zone, the researcher purposively selected one government owned University to represent the entire universities in each of the state. In all, five universities were selected namely: Abia State University, Uturu – Abia State; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka – Anambra State; Ebonyi State University, Abakiliki – Ebonyi State; University of Nigeria, Nsukka – Enugu State and Imo State University, Owerri – Imo Sate. **Stage 2:** From these selected universities, the proportionate sampling was used to allocate the number of respondents to be studies in each University.

Abia State University, Uturu – Abia State -	-	-	345/1679 x 313 = 64
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka – Anambra State	-	-	367/1679 x 313 = 68
Ebonyi State University, Abakiliki – Ebonyi State-	-	-	291/1679 x 313 = 55
University of Nigeria, Nsukka – Enugu State-	-	-	315/1679 x 313 = 59
Imo State University, Owerri – Imo Sate	-	-	361/1679 x 313 = 67

Stage 3: In these universities, the researcher purposively ensured that the lecturers and postgraduate students constitute 90% of the respondents sampled for this study.

The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. Data obtained were analysed quantitatively using frequency tables, simple percentages and numbers. The researcher also used mean analysis to present data where likert scale was used.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section deals with the analysis of data collected from the field. The researcher distributed 313 copies of the instrument to respondents out of which 292 (93.2%) where returned and used while 21 (6.7%) copies were lost in the field.

Table 1: Respondents view on whether they approach cooperate and grant-giving bodies to find out their problems before engaging in research endeavours

Option	Frequency					Total	Percentage
	ABSU	UNIZIK	EBSU	UNN	IMSU		
Very High Extent	10	1	1	0	2	14	4.8%
High Extent	5	10	5	10	10	40	13.7%
Moderate	5	2	5	5	5	22	7.5%
Low Extent	10	4	20	10	10	54	18.5%
Very Low Extent	30	46	20	30	36	162	55.5%
Total	60	63	51	55	63	292	100%

Source: Field survey, 2021

Analysis of data in respect to table 3 revealed that to a very low extent, 55.5% of the respondents are of the view that they do not approach cooperate and grant-giving bodies to identify their problems and areas of challenges before engaging in research activities. The implication of this finding is that researchers engage in several research activities without necessarily finding out from the organizations, cooperate bodies or social system whether the problem they intend to solve is actually the same with the problem they intend to investigate.

Table 2: Respondents view on whether they approach grant-giving bodies and cooperation for collaboration and sponsorship in their research activities

Option	Frequency					Total	Percentage
	ABSU	UNIZIK	EBSU	UNN	IMSU		
Very High Extent	8	2	1	2	2	15	5.1%
High Extent	12	7	5	6	5	35	11.9%
Moderate	4	12	8	10	10	44	15%
Low Extent	25	40	27	22	43	158	54.1%
Very Low Extent	11	1	10	15	3	40	13.7%
Total	60	63	51	55	63	292	100%

Source: Field survey, 2021

Analysis of data in table 4 reveals that to a low extent, 54.1% of the respondents indicated that they do not approach grant-giving bodies, cooperation and other community bodies for sponsorship or collaboration in their research endeavours. The implication of this finding is that researchers do not go to organisations and grant-giving bodies for sponsorship and collaboration in their research activities and endeavours.

Table 3: Respondents view on whether communication researchers think the problem they are investigating will benefit corporate organizations and grant-giving bodies

Option	Frequency					Total	Percentage
	ABSU	UNIZIK	EBSU	UNN	IMSU		
Very High Extent	22	8	11	10	20	71	24.3%
High Extent	20	39	30	23	30	142	48.9%
Moderate	12	11	6	13	8	50	17.0%
Low Extent	4	3	2	5	3	17	5.8%
Very Low Extent	2	2	2	4	2	12	4.0%
Total	60	63	51	55	63	292	100%

Source: Field survey, 2021

Analysis of data in table 5 reveals that to a high extent, 48.9% of the respondents indicated that the problem they investigate will be of benefit to grant-giving bodies and corporate organizations. The implication of this finding is that researchers think that the problem they investigate will be of high value to grant-giving bodies and corporate organizations, despite the fact that most teachers/researchers do not approach the grant-giving bodies or corporations to find out the problems they are facing. It means that teachers/researchers sit within the confines of the university to assume topics and that the research projects they intend to investigate are or will be relevant to the “town”

Table 4: Respondents view in the challenges they face when approaching media, corporate and grant-giving bodies (N=292)

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
It is not easy to meet up with the rigours of sponsored research	132	85	35	34	3.0	Accepted
I was not given the orientation to approach corporate bodies and grant-given bodies for sponsorship and collaboration	75	92	61	64	2.6	Accepted
I don't know the right body to meet for sponsorship in my research work	93	84	72	43	2.7	Accepted
The time -space given for academic work do not provide sufficient time to source for grant -given bodies and corporations that will sponsor my research	95	84	63	50	2.7	Accepted
Average Mean					2.8	Accepted

Source: Field Data, 2021

Data analysis from table 6 reveals that at a mean average of 2.8, respondents agreed that it is not easy to meet up with the rigours of sponsored research; they were not given the orientation to approach corporate bodies and grant-given bodies for sponsorship and collaboration; and they do not know the right body to meet for sponsorship in their research endeavour and that the time-space given for academic work do not provide sufficient time to source for grant-given bodies and corporations that will sponsor their research. The implication of this finding is that researchers face numerous challenges in establishing proper relationships with corporate and grant-giving bodies. This difficulty in establishing the proper relationship further hindered them from the needed collaboration that would have improved their research activities.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from data analysis revealed that to a very low extent, 55.5% of the respondents are of the view that they do not approach cooperate and grant-giving bodies to identify their problems and areas of challenges before engaging in research activities. The implication of this finding is that researchers engage in several research activities without necessarily finding out from the organizations, corporate bodies or social system whether the problem they intend to solve is actually the same with the problem they intend to investigate. The need for this collaboration is made known in the findings of Emma-Ogula (2020), who found out that relationship between the town and gown has gone a long way to contribute immensely to the growth and development of institutions and the society at large.

Further analysis revealed that to a low extent, 54.1% of the respondents are of the view that they do not approach grant-giving bodies, cooperation and other community bodies for sponsorship or collaboration in their research endeavours. The implication of this finding is that researchers do not go to organisations and grant-giving bodies for sponsorship and collaboration in their research activities and endeavours. If researcher approach organizations, whose the benefits in their research endeavours, the chances of sponsoring such project are usually high. This is better explained from the stand point of the social exchange theory propounded by sociologist George Homans in 1961, which explains the nature of relationship that exist between two groups of people or bodies. Cherry (2020) notes that social exchange theory is the exchange process which creates social behaviour; adding that the “purpose of this exchange is to maximize benefits and minimize costs” in the relationship. Most relationships are “made up of a certain amount of give-and-take, but this does not mean that they are always equal. Social exchange suggests that it is the valuing of the ? benefits and costs of each relationship that determine whether or not we choose to continue a social association” (Cherry, 2020).

Communicating finding from data analysis revealed that to a high extent, 48.9% of the respondents are of the view that the problem they investigate will be of benefit to grant-giving bodies and corporate organizations. The implication of this finding is that researchers think that the problem they investigate will be of high value to grant-giving bodies and corporate organizations, despite the fact that the afore mentioned data result revealed that researcher do not go to these grant-giving bodies or corporations to find out the problems they are facing. It means that researchers sit within the confines of the university to assume topics and projects they intend to investigate. This is contrary to the findings of Foley (2016) which revealed that collaborative projects between a municipality and university can go a long way to prove beneficial to the cooperative community.

Data analysis indicated that at a mean average of 2.8, respondents agreed that it is not easy to meet up with the rigours of sponsored research; they were not given the orientation to approach corporate bodies and grant-given bodies for sponsorship and collaboration; and they don't know the right body to meet for sponsorship in their research endeavour and that the time-space given for academic work do not provide sufficient time to source for grant-given bodies and corporations that will sponsor their research. The implication of this finding is that researchers face numerous challenges in establishing proper relationships with corporate and grant-giving bodies. This difficulty in establishing the proper relationship further hindered them from the needed collaboration that would have improved their research activities. The findings of this study is supported by that of Aderogba (2018) entitled “The Town and Gown Relationship and Sustainable Community Development in Nigerian Contemporary Universities”, who found that there is a significant relationship between the “town and gown” and that stakeholders in the institutions and community are the ones expected to build this relationship and enable it thrive.

Conclusion

Considering the result from analysis of data, one can safely conclude that most researchers in the department of media and communication studies do not approach corporations, media organisations, institutions and grant-given bodies for collaboration and sponsorship before embarking on research endeavours/activities. This no doubt has made most research works to end in the shelves of academic lectures and libraries without

contributing anything to changes and growth in the society.

Further analysis also revealed challenges bedevilling academic researchers in the universities, which have hindered the town and gown relationship. It is important to conclude that student researchers are not given proper orientation to seek for collaborations with the town before engaging in academic research. Even the lecturers that are aware of the town and gown relationship do not make sufficient effort to pursue this relationship.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends as follows:

1. Given that 55.5% of the respondents are of the view that they do not approach grant-giving body and corporations to seek for the problems they would like to solve before engaging in research activities, it is recommended that researchers should be double sure of the problem they truly want to investigate by asking corporations and bodies in the town if that is actually the problem they are facing before engaging in that research.
2. Considering the fact that 54.1% of the respondents were of the view that researchers do not approach organisations and grant-giving bodies for sponsorship and collaboration, it is recommended therefore that this practice must change in order to foster a better town and gown relationship.
3. The fact that 48.9% of the respondents are of the view that the problem they are solving would benefit corporations and grant-giving bodies is not enough. It is recommended that researchers should not assumed problems on their own and later approach organisations for sponsorship. Such approach might discourage corporations from sponsoring the research.
4. In the area of challenges faced by researchers, it is recommended that proper orientation should be given to graduating and graduate students on the need to collaborate with sponsors or establish relationship with the “town” before engaging in the research.

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