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Public Relations Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/pubrev

Citizens' political public relations: Unpacking choices, and emergent and deliberate strategies in building trust and relations among groups in conflict

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Choices
Citizens' political PR
Football
Public diplomacy
Political violence prevention
Political public relations
Relationship building
Strategy
Trust

ABSTRACT

In this manuscript, we integrate work on political public relations research, strategic management, and multi-track diplomacy (from international relations scholarship) to advance the concept of citizens' political public relations (PR), defined as *strategies and choices devised by organized, local citizens to enhance inter-group and/or intra-group relations among conflicting groups*. We demonstrate citizens' political PR in action, using a case study to show how one activity planned by a group of organized everyday Ghanaian citizens, a football (soccer) tournament, helped promote better relationships among conflicting communities. We articulate the impact of not only a deliberate strategy devised by the group, but also of an emergent strategy that became evident through the choices made by the citizens in organizing the tournament. Theoretical implications of this new integrative conceptualization of citizens' political PR for public relations scholarship are discussed.

1. Introduction

That public relations and/or communication as an organizational function is gaining increased legitimacy around the world is indisputable. Indeed, recent reports indicate that not only are organizations in North America recognizing the importance of public relations (Penning & Bain, 2019), so too are organizations around the world, including in Asia (Kim, Krishna, & Plowman, 2018), South America (Alaimo, 2016), and Africa (Nsehe, 2015). Such growth in the practice of public relations around the world has been paralleled by the development of a robust academic discipline, with conceptualizations and articulations of different theoretically driven and grounded models of public relations. From normative, systems approach-based models (e.g., Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002), relationship-centric models (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998), and dialogic models (Kent & Taylor, 2002), to critical explorations of public relations practitioners being activists within the organization (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002), public relations scholars have contributed extensively to our understanding of what public relations practice is and what it should be.

However, one enduring criticism of public relations scholarship continues to be the ethnocentrism of North American-dominated models of public relations. For years scholars have called for further models of public relations and its practice that are informed by the

cultures and societies in which they are set rather than applications of models from the West (e.g., Sriramesh, 2003; Half & Gregory, 2014). To this end, scholars have offered insights from and examples of public relations practice from around the world, including the Middle East (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018), South Africa (Venter, 2010), India (Patwardhan & Bardhan, 2014), Ghana (Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2009), and Colombia (Pastrana & Sriramesh, 2014) among many others.

Notably, however, few models and examples exist of public relations strategies in action in Africa, particularly West Africa. Although a rich body of knowledge exists on public relations in South Africa (e.g., Benecke & Oksitycz, 2015; le Roux, 2014), fewer examples of public relations in other parts of Africa, particularly West Africa, have been forthcoming. To address this gap and answer the aforementioned calls for diverse models of public relations practice, we present one example of public relations strategies in action from Ghana, West Africa, and, in so doing, articulate the concept of citizens' political public relations (CPPR). We draw upon strategic management, political public relations, and diplomacy literatures to define citizens' political public relations as strategies and choices devised by organized, local citizens to enhance inter- and/or intra-group relations among conflicting groups.

CPPR as defined above differs from traditional public relations in three key ways, i.e., who enacts it, on whose behalf, and for what goals. First, CPPR as conceptualized here is enacted not by professional

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communicators or those with specialized knowledge of PR, but by everyday local citizens who come together as an organized unit. Second, rather than being enacted on behalf of a formal organization, i.e., a corporation, non-profit, or a government, CPPR is enacted by everyday citizens on behalf of and toward communities and groups in conflict. Third, while public relations is typically concerned with building “mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (“About Public Relations,” 2012), the goal of CPPR is to utilize public relations strategies and choices to build inter- and intra-groups relations among conflicting groups.

As we demonstrate in this manuscript, this concept is particularly relevant to post-conflict nation-states as well as regions with groups in conflict, including the United States, where competing political interests manifest in ways that threaten people’s livelihoods and lives (e.g., armed conflict and other forms of political violence). CPPR contributes to existing work on political public relations by locating the design and enactment of purposeful strategies at the community level, among a particular set of actors – organized, local citizens¹ – and within choices (e.g., a football tournament) that directly address the purposeful strategies. In so doing, we contribute to public relations theory specifically and communication theory generally by (a) presenting CPPR as a theoretically integrative conceptualization drawing from political public relations, strategic management, public diplomacy, and relationship management, (b) extending the local leadership model of peacebuilding, and (c) explicating strategy and choices in PR practice.

2. Literature review

2.1. Public relations strategies, tactics, and choices

A central question in public relations literature is what (public relations) strategy is and what its outcomes are (Steyn, 2003; Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009). Kim and Krishna (2017) sought to answer this question with a discussion of two public relations strategies, i.e., bridging and buffering, both of which aim at fostering better organization-public relationships. Typically understood to be “a deliberate conscious set of guidelines that determines decisions into the future” (Mintzberg, 1978, p. 935), the term strategy has been central to several scholarly discussions over the years. Mintzberg (1987), however, distinguished between deliberate, i.e., intended, and emergent strategies, advancing a definition of strategy rooted in consistency over time. Mintzberg (1978, 1987) defined strategy as “a pattern in a stream of decisions,” and noted that a strategy maker may formulate a strategy that results in actions and outcomes with that guideline in common, or an unintended (emergent) strategy may become evident through actions undertaken and outcomes derived over the course of a series of decisions. In public relations literature too, definitions of strategy mirror Mintzberg’s definition, but limit them to deliberate strategy. For example, Botan (2006) defined strategy as “the campaign-level decision making involving maneuvering and arranging resources and arguments to carry out the organizational grand strategies” (p. 199). While deliberate strategies receive much attention in public relations literature and practice, unintended, emergent strategies tend to receive less attention. Identifying emergent strategies may help improve future public relations practice by making the process of strategy development more reflexive. This study, therefore, considers both deliberate and emergent strategies and their impact.

Furthermore, Mintzberg (1987) argued for the dropping of the term “tactics” from strategic management literature altogether, for what counts as a tactic or strategy is dependent not only on the perspective of

the individual (or entity) making the assessment, but also when the assessment is made. As Rumelt (1979) observed, “one person’s strategies are another’s tactics—that what is strategic depends on where you sit” (p. 197). The similarities between the terms strategy and tactics and the blurred lines between the two terms have often been discussed in public relations practice and scholarship (e.g., Wood, 2014). Typically understood to be specific activities that are designed and implemented based on deliberate strategies, tactics are considered the day-to-day inputs from practitioners that are guided by strategy. However, not only does such a distinction bind tactics to those that are rooted in the deliberate strategy, and therefore ignore emergent strategy, what counts as a tactic or strategy evolves over time. A classic example offered is that of General Motors’ tactic to sell cars in colors other than black, which Henry Ford refused to do, which is now, in retrospect, looked upon as a key strategy from GM (Mintzberg, 1987).

To eliminate the confusion between the arguably blurred lines between a strategy and a tactic, this study draws inspiration from Mintzberg (1978), and uses instead the terms strategies and choices. Mintzberg (1978) advocated for the use of the terms strategies and decisions, where decision, is defined as “a commitment to action, usually a commitment to resources” (p. 935), rather than tactics. However, to avoid conflating our work with that of decision-making scholarship, which focuses on the psychological processes of decision-making, we use the term choices to denote commitment to action. The term choices, we argue, enjoys two key advantages over the term tactic. First, a choice is not bound by a deliberate strategy, thereby opening up the possibility of emergent strategy. Second, unlike tactics a choice does not imply action; instead, it represents a commitment to undertaking an action, a series of which may form what is traditionally considered to be a tactic. For example, in planning a public relations-driven event like a product launch or a press conference, a series of choices are made that determine how the event will move forward. We follow Mintzberg’s (1987) proposition that a pattern in these individual choices, rather than the holding of the event itself, are what contribute to strategy implementation.

The next question, then, is what the outcomes of public relations strategies should be. To understand this, we turn to Ferguson’s (2018/1984) foundational piece in which she argued for public relationships as the central focus of public relations scholarship. Rather than studying organizations and their publics individually and together, public relations scholarship should concern itself with understanding “different types of public relationships” (Ferguson, 2018/1984, p. 173), particularly in conjunction with the impact of these relationships on society at large. Utilizing relationships as a central unit of analysis opens the doors for these relationships being not only predictors, but also outcomes of public relations campaigns and activities. Szondi (2008) too advocated for relationships to be the central focus of public diplomacy and nation branding, an area of research that has received much attention among public relations scholars (Vanc & Fitzpatrick, 2016). This study, therefore, adopts relationship development as the central goal or desired outcome of public relations.

2.2. Everyday citizens as enactors of public relations

The notion of involving everyday people in public relations is not new. Specifically, in defining political public relations, Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2011) acknowledged the role that individual actors, such as everyday citizens, may play in the political public relations process. They defined political public relations as “the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals” (Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011, p. 8). In conceptualizing CPPR, we focus on one aspect of Strömbäck and Kiouisis’ (2011) definition of political public relations, as being enacted by *individual actors*.

¹ These local actors may choose to initiate contact and collaborations with regional and national level actors who are related to the conflict in question; indeed, locally led peacebuilding work also involves regional and national entities (Connaughton & Berns, 2019).

Arguments for everyday citizens, in our case informally organized, enacting public relations, especially diplomacy, are not new; diplomacy manifesting as “citizen diplomacy,” – individuals acting as “diplomats” (Bhandari & Belyavina, 2011, p. 1) – opens the doors for differentiated types of relationship connections being tapped as part of relational diplomacy (Yun, 2012), including between and among individuals, groups, and communities.

Furthermore, diplomacy literature outside of public relations (e.g., peace studies, political science, international relations) also considers political violence prevention as one of the goals of diplomacy (e.g., MacDonald, 2003; Nygård & Gates, 2013). This literature focuses not only on inter-state or international states and governments, but also on intra-state, non-governmental actors, such as everyday citizens, using communication strategies to promote mutual understanding in intra-state conflict situations and to avoid escalation (e.g., MacDonald, 2003). Such efforts are termed second track or citizen diplomacy (Davies & Kaufman, 2003; Diamond & McDonald, 1991), and emerged primarily as a result of the perceived failure of traditional diplomacy, i.e., government-to-government efforts in de-escalating conflict. Second track diplomacy seeks to involve differentiated and diverse voices in the peacebuilding process by encouraging interactions *among private citizens* (not government officials) involved in and affected by a given conflict situation. Second track diplomacy rests on the assumption that official, state actors alone cannot affect change in conflict situations (Wehrenfennig, 2008) – private citizens affected by the conflict are key to helping address the conflict.

Integrating these literatures’ research on intra-state, non-governmental actors with political public relations and diplomacy research would build theory in productive ways, helping broaden the scope of what counts as political public relations and who may enact it. Doing so also helps address criticisms of public relations scholars neglecting existing knowledge and scholarship on diplomacy outside of public relations (e.g., Gilboa, 2008).

2.3. Conceptualizing citizens’ political public relations

Some features of second track diplomacy warrant further discussion, particularly keeping in mind conceptualizations of public diplomacy and political public relations. Most operationalizations of second track diplomacy rest on formal organizations (e.g., governments, institutions, NGOs) regularly organizing forums and workshops for private individuals to communicate and interact. The Dartmouth conference, often cited as a classic example of second track diplomacy, was organized annually with the endorsement of President Dwight D. Eisenhower and supported financially by various NGOs including the Ford Foundation. This limited operationalization elicits criticisms of second track or citizens’ diplomacy being temporary and unsustainable (Yun, 2012). We believe that such criticisms of second track diplomacy stem from two inherent pre-suppositions in the conceptualization of second track diplomacy – that formal organizations will have sustained interest in the effort to continue to fund and organize such events, and that private, everyday citizens affected by conflict require intervention from “outsiders” (in the form of workshops, forums, organized by formal organizations) in order to continue interaction and communication after the initial contact.

To address these issues, we draw upon our prior work on political violence prevention to propose an alternate operationalization of second track diplomacy as not just the act of citizens meeting to strategize and discuss potential solutions to their respective conflicts, but also them organizing and then designing and engaging in strategic actions to help address these conflicts. This is what we have termed the local leadership model of peacebuilding (LLM; Connaughton, Kuang & Yakova, 2017; Connaughton, Linabary, Krishna, Kuang, Anaele, Vibber, Yakova & Jones, 2017; Connaughton & Berns, 2019). We have been empirically examining this approach and have been involved in its development in West Africa and other parts of the world since 2013.

In the present study, we further refine the LLM and integrate the notions of political public relations, second track (citizens’) diplomacy and public diplomacy to propose the concept of *citizens’ political public relations (CPPR)* as part of the broader LLM framework (Connaughton & Berns, 2019). We conceptualize CPPR as *strategies and choices devised by organized, local citizens to enhance inter-group and/or intra-group relations among conflicting groups*. This conceptualization of CPPR complements that of political public relations. First, it explicates a specific political purpose for which political public relations (or diplomacy) is being enacted (to enhance relations among conflicting groups, and in the example we present below, also to help prevent political violence). Enhancing relations among communities in conflict, we argue, constitutes what Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2011) referred to as “political purposes” adopting the definition of “political” as being competition over power, resources, or interests (Connaughton, Kuang et al., 2017). Second, CPPR is also a conceptualization that is non-normative and descriptive, explicating the impact of communication and action. Finally, and most importantly, CPPR also envisages individual actors (local citizens) as engaging in public relations (diplomacy) activities for political (e.g., relationship building; violence prevention) purposes.

In this paper, we operationalize CPPR as deliberate and emergent strategies enacted by a group of organized local citizens to enable increased interaction among communities in conflict and, in so doing, promote better relations among them. For this study, we focus on one particular event that local citizens organized that facilitated relationship enhancement: a football tournament, and the choices made by the local citizens in the organizing of this tournament that spoke to both deliberate and emergent strategies. We present an analysis of choices made by the group, discuss a strategy that emerged from our analysis in addition to a deliberate strategy, and report how the two strategies together helped contribute to better relationships among communities and groups in the area. The following research questions guide this study:

RQ1: What choices did the local citizens make to help implement their deliberate strategy? What emergent strategies are evident from local citizens’ choices?

RQ2: How do citizens’ deliberate and emergent strategies help enhance relations among communities in conflict?

2.4. The Purdue Peace Project

The inspiration and data for this paper came from our involvement in the Purdue Peace Project (PPP), an externally funded project aimed at reducing the likelihood of political violence, and based at a large Midwestern university in the United States (Connaughton, Linabary, et al., 2017; Connaughton & Berns, 2019). Drawing on what is referred to in the peacebuilding field as locally led peacebuilding (Linabary, Krishna & Connaughton, 2017; Connaughton & Berns, 2019), the PPP convenes local citizens in conflict-prone areas of the world (including the U.S.) to engage in dialogue around issues that threaten to provoke political violence in their communities and creating space for them to then implement the political violence prevention strategies that they themselves design. Our approach, which we term the local leadership model of peacebuilding (LLM; Connaughton, Kuang et al., 2017; Connaughton, Linabary, et al., 2017; Connaughton & Berns, 2019), is grounded in the belief that local citizens have knowledge and experiences that enable them to design and implement (political) violence prevention efforts (Dutta, 2007) and that local citizens can, and should, be leaders and agents of social change (Connaughton & Berns, 2019; Basu & Dutta, 2008; Dutta & Pal, 2010). In Ghana, these locally led projects were facilitated by the PPP’s Ghana-based West Africa Program Manager (WAPM), a women’s development and human rights advocate with over thirty years’ experience coordinating various development projects in Africa. Importantly, per the LLM’s philosophy, those of us located at the U.S. university do not export existing PR strategies to Ghana, nor do we give formal trainings to Ghanaian citizens on

relationship building or other PR concepts. Instead, we convene representatives of conflicting groups in such a way that catalyzes dialogue among them, and as is discussed in this paper, sparks the design and enactment of strategies to help build relationships (for further discussion of the LLM, see Connaughton, Kuang et al., 2017; Connaughton, Linabary, et al., 2017; Connaughton & Berns, 2019).

The authors for this paper have been involved extensively in this collaboration since its inception. The first and third authors have been research assistants for the PPP and the second author is the PPP's principal investigator and founding director. All authors have worked closely with local citizens in Noyari (pseudonym), Ghana, throughout the duration of the collaboration. We went to Noyari several times to work with local citizens and were in regular weekly contact with the WAPM, who, as an employee of Purdue University reported directly to the second author.

2.4.1. CPPR in action

In 2013, the PPP's WAPM initiated conversations with Noyari (pseudonym) citizens about whether or not PPP should collaborate with them to help prevent violence related to land disputes. Nestled in the Upper West region of Ghana, the Noyari district is a collection of several farming communities. For a district where 78 percent of the population is dependent on farming (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012), disputes about land and land ownership often mean loss of livelihood and sustenance. After being invited to do so, the PPP eventually convened a meeting of citizens from various constituencies including elders, chiefs, religious leaders, and women.² Most participants were everyday citizens from various sectors with no official status, who were attending in order to help better understand the conflict(s) and strategize on how to resolve the conflict(s). This meeting, which the PPP refers to as an actor meeting, corresponds in some ways with traditional operationalizations of second track diplomacy in that an existing body from outside the local context (a U.S. university) helped convene a group of private, local citizens to discuss conflicts facing them. PPP's approach, however, differs from traditional second track diplomacy initiatives in that the questions of who gets to be a part of the initial actor meeting and what issue(s) they discuss is driven by local community members themselves.

Out of this meeting emerged a group of local actors, all everyday citizens of Noyari, who volunteered to implement the ideas they brainstormed in the meeting and formed a local peace committee. This local peace committee assumed leadership to ensure that the ideas brainstormed during the actor meeting were put into action. The citizens' commitment to building peace in their community is particularly noteworthy in that these citizens voluntarily met together regularly over a few years. Importantly, the peace committee did not require regular events and workshops to be organized by the PPP for them to continue to meet and strategize; they sustained their efforts without being prompted by the PPP. The PPP's overall approach to doing engaged scholarship (the relationally attentive approach) is further discussed elsewhere (Connaughton, Linabary, et al., 2017). It is important to note that, in line with the LLM of peacebuilding, after the initial actor meeting, the PPP did not facilitate any further meetings among the peace committee members. Members met independently, strategized among themselves without any consultation or prompting by the PPP members. The PPP's role in the facilitation of the peace committee's activities was limited to providing monetary and logistical support (when asked for) and conducting research around the process and impact of the activities.

Over time, these local citizens in Noyari designed and implemented several activities to achieve the goals of CPPR. In this manuscript, we focus on the activities of a youth³ organization that spun off from the

original local peace committee, which called itself the YNP (pseudonym) and engaged in additional CPPR efforts. The YNP too met regularly and deliberated on strategies to help achieve their goal of enhanced inter- and intra-group relations.

2.4.2. The site of CPPR

Although the YNP engaged in many activities as part of their multi-year peacebuilding efforts, one activity emerged repeatedly as helping achieve their goal of building better relations between communities. This activity was the organizing of a football (soccer) tournament between communities in conflict. Community support for the tournament was evident in several ways. First, the matches grew in popularity and were attended by crowds of diverse community members, including elders, youth, and women. Second, community members donated funds, jerseys, or other items in support of their teams and to the tournaments broadly. At the end of the first football tournament, the district chief executive of Noyari kicked off the final match and donated a trophy to recognize the tournament's "Most Disciplined Player." The YNP continues to organize matches among Noyari communities, which have become regular events in Noyari. For these reasons, we chose to focus on and highlight the relational outcomes of the football tournament specifically in the manuscript, even though the YNP organized several other activities as part of their CPPR efforts.

3. Method

To address our research questions, this paper adopts a case study approach drawing on qualitative data collected in Noyari. Case study approaches allow for investigating a phenomenon within its 'real world' context and are well suited to efforts that seek to explain *how* and *why* a phenomenon occurred (Yin, 2018). More specifically, using multiple qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, and observations, to examine the case of the YNP's football tournament allowed us to understand *how* the YNP's efforts manifested into perceived and actual enhanced relations among communities in conflict and *why* local citizens viewed their strategies to be effective in achieving that goal and beyond. Qualitative methods such as those employed in this study are also culturally appropriate within a context where storytelling is a key medium for information sharing and meaning making (Naaeke, 2009), and have been employed in other work published based on the PPP's collaborations with local citizens.

3.1. Participants

Participants for this study were YNP members and members of communities within the Noyari district. Eleven YNP members, both former and current, participated in the data collections. Participants have various occupations, including teachers, nurses, farmers, a radio manager, and a Catholic priest. Members are between 25–60 years old. All were actively involved in CPPR activities during the time periods in which data were collected. Community members were from three communities in the Noyari district, Zoti, Loti, and Bigel (pseudonyms). Participants included both men and women, and were chiefs, elders, queen mothers, market women, and farmers.

3.2. Data collection and procedures

This paper includes qualitative data collected at multiple time points. Multiple time points allowed for understanding the strategies and the impacts over time as well as confirming findings from the prior visit (Patton, 1999). Data collection included focus groups, interviews,

² More on how these collaborations begin can be found in Connaughton, Linabary, et al., 2017.

³ Youth, in this context, may be individuals whose ages range from 18 to 40

(footnote continued)

years. No individuals under the age of 18 were involved in the data collection aspect of this work.

and observations. First, in September 2015, the first and second author conducted a focus group with six YNP members in Noyari. This focus group, lasting approximately 105 min, included questions about peacebuilding activities that had taken place and the (perceived) impact of those activities. Second, in May 2016, the second and third authors conducted one-on-one interviews with eight YNP members and six focus groups with community members in three Noyari communities. The one-on-one interviews lasted between 30 and 55 min and included questions about their involvement in YNP, the activities they have participated in, individual and community level impacts, the role of the football tournament in preventing violence, and next steps. Then, focus groups were conducted with members of three communities in the Noyari district; they lasted between 21 min and 36 min. In each community, the researchers conducted two focus groups, one with men and other with women. Each focus group included 3–5 participants. Focus group discussions included questions about the impact of YNP's strategies and the current status of peace and conflict in the community.

For all data collected, informed consent was obtained verbally, consistent with culturally appropriate practices approved by the Purdue University Institutional Review Board. On occasion, an interpreter was required to help facilitate effective communication between some community members and researchers, as none of us speak the local language (Dagari). In such cases, the local interpreter (fluent in both English and Dagari) translated and read the consent form line-by-line to help ensure understanding. All participants verbally consented to participating, and none terminated their participation. All focus groups and interviews with peace committee members were conducted in English. After receiving participants' permission to do so, all focus groups and interviews were recorded and were later transcribed by the PPP team.

In addition to interviews and focus groups, the research team also made observations that were documented through field notes during our travels to the research site, as well as documented weekly calls with the West Africa Program Manager. Observations included meetings of the YNP as well as football matches that we attended in person. During times we were not present at the research site, we engaged in weekly calls with the WAPM who would report on the discussions being held among the YNP and the ways in which they were going about organizing the football tournament. These data were analyzed to report the deliberate strategy adopted by the YNP, as well as to understand the choices they made in organizing the football tournament.

3.3. Analysis

The qualitative data collections resulted in approximately 180 single-spaced pages of text, including both the transcripts and field notes. The first author then analyzed the data using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), identifying themes specifically related to our research question (indicators of enhanced relations among communities in conflict). This process involved reading and re-reading the data, making notes of initial patterns and codes. Once initial codes were established, they were synthesized into potential themes. In our analysis, we regularly returned to the voices of the participants, using a constant-comparative method to review and refine themes with the data (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, the second and third authors also reviewed the themes for their resonance and consistency with the data collected and the research context, considered alternative interpretations, and engaged in group discussions as necessary to achieve consensus.

4. Findings

In this section, we address our research questions based on our analyses of the data. The first research question necessitated an examination of the choices made by the YNP driven by the deliberate strategy in organizing the football tournament to identify emergent

strategies. The second research question sought to understand how the football tournament helped promote better relationships among communities in conflict by discussing two key relational outcomes. We begin by addressing the first research question.

4.1. RQ1: what choices did the local citizens make to help implement their deliberate strategy? What emergent strategies are evident from local citizens' choices?

In order to answer this set of research questions we analyzed our field notes and the notes from our weekly calls with the WAPM. We did this to reconstruct the process followed by the YNP in organizing the football tournament in the form of implementing their deliberate strategy and how it guided their choices, as well as understand any emergent strategies evident through their choices.

4.1.1. Deliberate strategy

Early in the process, the WAPM reported that the peace committee members and the YNP had decided that their focus should be on providing community members with forums and opportunities to interact peacefully and without acrimony, and that this thought was guiding which activities they were looking to organize to achieve their overarching goal, i.e., enhancing relations between conflicting groups. We refer to this as the deliberate strategy adopted by the YNP, even though they may not necessarily use that language themselves. Therefore, the deliberate strategy adopted by the YNP was to *provide communities with opportunities for peaceful interaction*. The football tournament, then, was identified as a key activity to implement the deliberate strategy through the peace committee's and YNP's brainstorming sessions, as reported by the WAPM.

4.1.2. Choices

The YNP made several choices related to the organizing of this football tournament, as reported by both YNP members during field visits and the WAPM during weekly calls. First, the football matches were held on Sundays right after church to enable community members and players to attend them without having to lose a day of work. Football matches took place over a period of two and a half years. Second, the football matches were held on the grounds of the Basilica, very close to the town center. Since almost 85% of the population of Noyari identifies as Catholic (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012), this choice was crucial. It ensured that not only would the grounds be easily accessible to members of most communities, but also that churchgoers would be able to come to the grounds immediately after the services in the Basilica were over and either watch or participate in the matches.

Third, rather than pre-determining teams themselves based on communities, the YNP solicited participation by issuing a call to whoever was interested in forming teams either as a community or by joining hands with other communities of their choice. As will be reported later in the manuscript, some communities formed teams together with members of other communities. Fourth, at each match, local peace committee members and/or community elders and dignitaries delivered messages of peace to kick off the match. As the matches grew in popularity, the YNP chose to provide jerseys to the players to help foster a sense of team spirit among the teams, a move that was supported financially by the communities. Fifth, any disputes on and off the field about the match were resolved through meetings and dialogue between the players in question, the referee, and the YNP, who themselves represented several different communities in Noyari. Finally, at the end of every match, all players and community members, particularly the youth, were invited to sit together in a large circle, and offered refreshments while community members, dignitaries, and YNP members led the larger group in a discussion about various topics related to peace, mutual trust and respect, and non-violence. The YNP itself is comprised of representatives from the teams and communities involved in the tournaments, and members worked collaboratively on setting

rules, establishing a schedule, organizing the tournament logistics, and settling any disputes related to the football matches.

4.1.3. Emergent strategy

As discussed in the preceding sections, the YNP adopted a deliberate strategy, the influence of which was evident in the choices made by the YNP. These choices made by the YNP were driven by the one deliberate strategy guiding the work of the YNP, i.e., providing community members with opportunities for peaceful interactions. Organizing the football tournament and all the choices surrounding the organizing of the tournament were guided by this strategy. However, upon examination of the choices made by the YNP, another strategy emerged as being crucial, albeit unintended, corresponding to the conceptualization of a strategy as a pattern in a stream of choices. This strategy was *encouraging mutual respect and trust among the players and community members*. Several choices indicate this particular emergent strategy. For example, the YNP chose to issue a general call for participation in the tournament rather than reaching out to individual communities to form teams. For some smaller communities, putting forth a team independently would have proved difficult. Instead, the YNP's choice to put out a general call for football teams to participate and encourage communities to join forces to form teams resulted in smaller, neighboring communities, often those with ongoing disputes, coming together and forming a unified team. In playing on the same team youth from disputing communities were forced at least to try to get along and began to build mutual trust and respect for one another.⁴ Then, the way in which the YNP chose to handle disputes too indicated the overarching emergent strategy of building mutual trust and respect. On-field and off-field disputes were settled not by the YNP, but through dialogue between the teams in question and the match referees. Additionally, the choice to hold discussions on peace post-football matches too indicated the emergent strategy of encouraging mutual trust and respect, as many of the discussions revolved around topics of peace, the importance of mutual respect and trust, and non-violence.

4.2. RQ2: how do citizens' deliberate and emergent strategies help enhance relations among communities in conflict?

Our focus group data revealed that individuals from communities in conflict consistently referenced the football tournament as an activity that helped enhance relations between the communities. In order to answer the research question, we present quotations from various actors in the communities that display both the deliberate strategy and the emergent strategy in action through the organizing of the football tournament, contributing to the goal of enhancing relations between communities in conflict. All quotations are presented as transcribed, without correcting for word choices or grammar.

4.2.1. Deliberate strategy: Weekly football matches as opportunities for peaceful interactions

The football tournament and the matches themselves helped enact the deliberate strategy, as was evidenced in statements from community members who repeatedly emphasized peaceful interactions between youth and community members in general as a key outcome of the tournament. A female community member from Zoti stated during one focus group that, "Through the football tournament the youth get familiar to one another and other communities. So when they meet somewhere the youth share pleasantries and interact cordially."

Interactions between the youth from disputing communities happened in various ways. One YNP member discussed the choice to institute dispute resolution mechanisms, i.e., mechanisms for players to air out any differences arising out of the soccer match, and how that

interaction impacted relationships among the players. He said:

You know how we do it is after every match we let the two communities sit together. Whatever problem in the course of the play that one might have with the other we try to bring it out. And it also brings different communities apart together... It will be difficult to mingle with other people so through this there have been friendship between different communities that can resolve the conflict if a person [in] these two or more communities have a problem. Because of the friendship that have been established through the football it can be resolved. So the youth are getting united through this that can prevent any [conflict].

Gestures of sportsmanship on the field between the players too were seen as instances of peaceful interaction, and as easily translatable lessons for the youth to carry into their daily lives. One YNP member summed up such interactions as follows:

The link here is that the football brings them together. Whilst they are playing they knock each other. Sometimes they get angry; they insult each other. But immediately after the game they go and hug each other, drink water. Sometimes, even while in the heat of the game when they bring water, an opponent player will open one and give it to another and drink.... So if you are able to translate this character into your normal daily activities this is how we live in peace. And any time you relate what they love so much that is football and you bring it back to them practically they easily understand.

Peaceful interactions are not limited to the youth playing football. Instead, community members noted changes in their own behaviors with individuals from communities their own were in conflict with due to the interactions during the football tournaments. A community member from Loti addressed this change, saying, "[We] used not to interact peacefully. But the football match has made [us] interact. When football is there, [we] meet one another, cheer one another, and celebrate the match." Part of this cordial interaction between communities in conflict may be attributed to the fact that football is a celebrated activity in Ghana, as one YNP member explained, "We are living in a country where some of us see football as a religion. Ghanaians worship football."

Furthermore, community members noted how Sunday matches had become sites for social interaction between communities, which in turn was helping reduce misunderstanding and conflicts among them. One Zoti community member stated:

The football match has broadened our socialization, and the youth in Noyari is like a group now. They know one another, at least each person will know someone in every community and because of that familiarity, it is difficult for conflict to settle between the communities because they come together and interact. You come together and you make friends.

The YNP too discussed how the football tournament served to provide a source of entertainment for individuals of disputing communities, and provided a neutral and organic setting for them to come together and interact peacefully. One member said:

You see two communities come together to watch. One, it's sort of entertainment – they enjoy the play. And as we watch the match we don't see any fight or any kind of quarrel among them. Practically there is cordiality. And every day or let's say every Sunday we see people coming up together naturally they will tend to develop friendship among one another. And that sort of extends our horizon of friendship in Noyari and if friendship spreads we sure it will be able to suppress enmity. So bringing people together they see as far as football is concerned, it will develop and facilitate great friendship.

Another woman from the Loti community summed up the impact of

⁴ This claim is further discussed and supported in the evidence provided for RQ2.

the inter-community interactions emerging from the football tournament, saying, "There is a great difference, very positive. There is cordiality."

Such peaceful and positive interactions, reported community members, helped heal the divides of the past, and helped improve relationships between conflicting communities. In a focus group with individuals from Zoti community, which historically had been in conflict with a community called Loti, a participant said the following:

Zoti, the youth as of the past, they used not to be in good terms with the Loti communities, the youth there. Every time they met, they would get in a fight. But through the football, they are now united, there is not more quarrel. They interact anyhow.

At the community level, a woman from Bigel community had the following to say, "The match has brought some kind of unity among them. Initially, every Sunday, you usually hear that this community and this community, guys are fighting. But that's because of the matches, it's no more there, it's calming down."

As evidenced by these statements, the weekly football matches emerged as a site for players and community members to interact with each other in ways that were unrelated to the various disputes among the communities, thus successfully implementing the YNP's deliberate strategy. The YNP's choice to hold an inter-community tournament offered communities weekly opportunities to interact with one another over a sport that they love, provide them all with an outlet for their energy and a way to spend their time on Sundays, and help lay the foundation of cordial relationships between individuals and communities. We know from evidence presented here as well as from other data that we have collected in Noyari that prior to the YNP's football tournament, interactions between conflicting communities, particularly the youth, were limited to arguments and fights over various disputes, stemming perhaps from lack of prior interaction, as noted by several community members. Sundays, in particular, noted some of our female participants, would be days when some men would be more likely to start fights at home or among communities, being under the influence of excessive alcohol. However, by organizing the football tournament, the YNP were able to help youth get to know others from various communities, thus broadening their horizons from beyond just their specific communities, and provide communities at large with a fun way to spend their Sunday afternoons. In this way, the YNP's choice to organize a football tournament emerged as site for peaceful and cordial interactions between individuals and communities, and laid the foundation for mutual trust and respect.

4.2.2. Emergent strategy: encouraging mutual trust and respect

The football tournaments also facilitated the development of positive relationships among communities in conflict by promoting mutual trust and respect among the youth, a strategy that was unintended yet reflected in the patterns of the YNP's choices. The opportunities afforded by the football matches for the youth to interact peacefully, as described in the previous section, helped lay the foundation for mutual trust and respect among them. As noted by many participants, building trust and respect among the youth was essential to prevent violence because as one participant articulated, "The youth... are the tool for violence in our communities."

Themes of friendship, unity, and relationships noted in the previous section speak to the development of mutual trust both at the individual and community levels, as trust is one of the key indicators of relationship development (Huang, 2001). For instance, a member of a community called Bigel, who was part of a focus group from her community, said the following about the relational impact of the tournaments:

The matches have built some kind of relationships among the youth. Initially there were not meeting, so they didn't know each other. But with the football, now, the entire, every Sunday, and eventually they

have built some kind of relationship that will never allow them to quarrel again, or fight.

From Loti, a participant talked of the community-level relational impact of the football tournament during a focus group, saying, "Now there is good relationship among the communities... They relationship is good and they support each other."

The development of respect also emerged in several ways. First, playing football during the tournament was seen as encouraging youth from various communities to develop respect not only for rules, but also for each other. A man from Loti said, "Football also brings respect. When the youth gain respect they show respect to one another, and even to the rules they show respect." The change in past behaviors was emphasized in the following quotation from a Loti community member, who said:

In the past years, the youth, one will go and kick in another. But in football match if a player accidentally or intentionally kicks the opponent down he also tries to help the person up. That is the football rules they play by. And they just reconciled, and this kind of spirit is being developed in the players and the youth as well. If you go and you accidentally hit someone you can easily reconcile with that person.

Second, respect among communities was evident not just through play, but also from the fact that communities were coming together to play. A YNP member gave the example of two small communities, Loti and Nople, where a land dispute had driven a wedge between the citizens. Being very small communities, they could not raise a team individually. Therefore:

Because they wanted to be represented, they were forced by the fact that [they] also wanted to be seen, they also want to come to town and play and enjoy, to merge the two villages to form a team... Apparently they didn't know that through football they are merging, and from there we got to realize that the tempo or the hype of the disagreement between them has come down. Because the youth that will be used as the tool to do that they have come together to form a team and they have been training together.

Finally, discussions about the positive impact of the football tournaments also included how the respect and trust among the youth was setting an example for community members at large to emulate. Members of the YNP spoke about how the friendship and cordiality visible among the football players set a positive example for the spectators. One male member stated:

I think YNP also impacted in the way that if we were able to bring two communities that were fighting among themselves together so what else will the others who were not even fighting do, they will also join. So once the spectators realized that these were the communities having the conflict and now they are coming together so what should they also do, they should also avoid conflicts; eventually it will also die down. If people were thinking of fighting one another but they will see that these people are coming together there is no need for us to also fight.

Everyday community citizens too had noted the communities at large followed the example set by the youth. A woman from community Loti stated:

After the [foot]ball [match] they embrace each other and greet each other, and express their happiness. They see the happiness. The footballers and even the village that is competing. They will run against each other and just be embracing them. That is always very exciting. So that's what [we] see among the villages after the [foot]ball. [We] are happy that this thing is introduced in Noyari and it is promoting the good hearts of the people.

YNP members gave a specific example of how an entire community

cheered for another community with which it had been embroiled in a contentious land dispute. Community members from Zoti cheered on their traditional rivals from Piita as the latter played in the final of the tournament. A YNP member described it as follows:

Indirectly they didn't know that because of the football they are bridging the gap, and that day it was just fun. The Zoti people went and met with Piita people, who used not to see eye-to-eye, they were singing, they were dancing, jubilating, and they didn't know that they were bridging the gap.

Thus, by organizing the football tournament, the YNP were not only able to provide communities with opportunities to interact peacefully with one another, there was clear evidence of communities using those opportunities to develop closer relationships, trust, and mutual respect with other communities. As with any public relations strategy, the success and impact of CPPR depends on how publics, in this case, community members, respond to the strategies. In this particular situation, the football tournament helped individuals and communities build mutual trust and respect each other. Statements from community members, such as the ones reported above, point to the effectiveness of the YNP's football tournament strategy in helping to enhance relations among communities in conflict.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this manuscript was to propose the concept of citizens' political public relations (CPPR) as strategies and choices devised by organized local citizens to enhance inter-group and/or intra-group relations among conflicting groups, particularly relevant in post-conflict and conflict-prone settings. Furthermore, this study sought to demonstrate the impact of emergent and deliberate strategies in action in helping achieve these goals as part of a CPPR initiative. To do so, we drew on one example from Noyari, Ghana, where local citizens organized voluntarily to devise and enact strategies to enhance inter-community relations and, in doing so, contributed to political violence prevention. In other words, they embraced and enacted CPPR.

Although this group organized several activities as part of their CPPR efforts, the one activity that was discussed repeatedly in focus groups with everyday community members as enhancing relations among communities in conflict was an inter-community football tournament. Not only did the football tournament implement the YNP's deliberate strategy, i.e., to provide community members with opportunities for peaceful interactions, but the YNP's choices in the organizing of the football tournament also revealed an emergent strategy evident as a pattern in their choices (Mintzberg, 1978). A thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups with community members and a youth group that organized the tournament revealed how the deliberate and emergent strategies helped achieve the goals of CPPR. In the paragraphs that follow, we discuss how research contributes to public relations scholarship.

5.1. Advancing the concept of citizens' political public relations

Efforts made by everyday citizens to enhance relations between groups in conflict would rarely be considered a context for public relations research, perhaps due to core definitions of public relations as the management function of maintaining and cultivating organization-public relationships (e.g., Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000). However, we believe that integrating such diverse voices in our scholarship is key to its continued enhancement. Public relations scholarship has come a long way from the traditional, corporation-centric research, now including non-corporate contexts (e.g. Sweetser, English, & Fernandes, 2015) and addressing issues of national and international importance (e.g., Taylor, 2000). Indeed, public relations scholars have established an admirable body of literature examining public diplomacy as the communication activities governments undertake to build relationships

and trust with foreign publics (e.g., Lee & Jun, 2013).

This paper contributes to this body of work by advancing the notion of citizens' political public relations. CPPR, presented here as an integration of concepts from political public relations, diplomacy, and multi-track diplomacy, helps articulate the conceptual convergences between these bodies of literature and explicates a concept that helps address the relational goals of all. Parallel to Taylorös (2000) theory of nation building, which addresses how governments use communication to build relationships with and among diverse and divided domestic populations, CPPR identifies and explicates ways in which local citizens enhance relations among groups in conflict. Taylorös (2000) claim that "Campaigns should allow participants to control their own development, develop trust, and encourage attachments among people" is embodied in the concept of CPPR (p. 205). We build on Taylorös (2000) work by underscoring that local citizens themselves may design and enact the strategies that help their respective communities, rather than just formal organizations doing so.

Furthermore, we present in this study an example of public relations strategies in action in a relatively under-studied part of the world, i.e., Ghana, West Africa. In so doing, we help respond to Half and Gregoryös (2014) challenge to public relations scholarship to provide more examples and models of public relations in non-Western contexts. In designing and theorizing this work, we are indebted to and inspired by prior work on global public relations, including that of Sriramesh and Vercic (2009), Freitag and Stokes (2009) and Taylor (2000) to name a few, and build on the foundations for such work set by these scholars. More diverse examples of public relations in action help to both expand and deepen our understandings of what counts as public relations, who may enact it, and on whose behalf.

5.2. Extending the local leadership model (LLM) of peacebuilding

The LLM is a theoretically grounded approach to peacebuilding that is centered on the belief that everyday citizens involved in and affected by political violence have the knowledge and the capability to devise and implement strategies in order to address conflicts and reduce the likelihood of violence in their communities (Connaughton, Linabary, et al., 2017). The concept of CPPR as conceptualized and illustrated in this manuscript helps refine and extend the local leadership model of peacebuilding by unpacking the nuances of the central component of the LLM, i.e., strategy. As discussed in this manuscript, strategy is not only planned and deliberate, but also emergent as a pattern in the choices made by the implementers of the strategy. Additionally, this study helps refine the LLM by locating the enactment of strategies and choices among organized everyday citizens. This study demonstrated empirically that citizens can put themselves into an organizing form (local peace committee) and build relationships and trust among fellow citizens. Further conceptual and empirical investigations of the intersections between strategic communication and peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and diplomacy at large may help contribute to not only scholarly conversations on the subjects, but also to a more peaceful world. Investigating how academia, non-governmental organizations, and corporations can work together to achieve peace in the world especially through the use of purposive communication may be a worthy area of research.

5.3. Explicating strategy and choices in public relations practice

In presenting the concept of CPPR, this study also helped address a central question in public relations praxis, i.e., what is public relations strategy (Steyn, 2003; Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009)? To conceptualize CPPR we drew upon public relations and strategic management literatures, locating strategy development among organized everyday citizens, and as being both deliberate and emergent patterns visible in the implementers' choices, with the goal of enhancing relations. In so doing, this study not only helps address a gap in our understanding of

strategy as being not just deliberate but also emergent, but also demonstrates deliberate and emergent strategies in action to help address the goal of public relations, relationship development (Ferguson, 2018/1984). The findings of this study call upon public relations scholars to not only focus on deliberate strategies as part of their assessment efforts, but also to examine their choices in the organizing of public relations activities to identify patterns in those choices that may indicate emergent, unintended strategies, thus enriching public relations scholarship and practice.

Furthermore, this study follows Taylor (2000) lead by examining not just organization-public relationships as being important for public relations research, but also inter-group relationships (Taylor, 2000). In so doing, we complicate the traditional notions of “relationships” as only constituting organization-public relationships, and encourage scholars to also consider inter-group and intra-group relations as a context for public relations research. We encourage scholars to investigate the processes by which various inter- and intra-group relationships such as community building may function from a public relations perspective.

5.4. Centralizing relationships and trust in public relations

The concept of CPPR further helps centralize the role of relationships and trust in public relations. As demonstrated in this study, the central goal or political purpose of CPPR is and should be improving relations and trust, echoing Ferguson’s (2018/1984) foundational argument. In addition to centralizing trust conceptually, this study also demonstrated how mutual trust can be built among a specific set of publics, i.e., conflicting groups, by providing them opportunities to interact peacefully, and making conscious choices to seek to do so. In so doing, this study contributes to literature on trust and dialogue by explicating strategies and choices that can be enacted in order to enhance trust and relations among groups in conflict.

5.5. Limitations and future directions

Two limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, although we would have preferred to have gathered data more systematically with a greater number of community members to ascertain the communities’ perceptions of the impact the football tournament had on community relations and violence prevention over time, we were limited in our ability to do so due to time and other constraints. Greater systematization of our community-related data collection may have yielded more robust, nuanced findings about impact. That said, we observed emergent trends in the data we did collect that speak to the perceived impact the tournament had. Future research should develop ways to systematically track the impacts of CPPR efforts at multiple levels – individual, group, and community – and at multiple points in time.

Second, this study focuses on one activity used to enact what we term CPPR – an inter-community football tournament. Although local citizens reported this strategy to be one of the most successful activities in cultivating peace and enhancing relations in their communities, it is just one of several communicative and behavioral activities that the YNP designed and employed. A discussion of the activities embarked upon by the YNP in conjunction with the football tournament is beyond the scope of this present article and warrants a separate manuscript to do it justice. One wonders, however, if there may have been additive effects from other activities organized by the YNP that contributed to the impact the football tournament was described as having. Our research design did not account for the potential additive influence of several activities taken together. Despite this possibility, our data convincingly demonstrate that the deliberate and emergent strategies as enacted through the football tournament were perceived to enhance relations between communities and in so doing, contribute to violence prevention. Future research should interrogate further the ways in

which these efforts cumulatively contribute to, or detract from efforts to enact CPPR, and further advance its utility and conceptualization in conflict prone settings and beyond.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by Milton Lauenstein through a gift to the College of Liberal Arts at Purdue University.

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