# Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

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The current issue is the third of the ninth volume of the *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications (AJMMC), published by the Mass Media & Communication Unit* of ATINER.

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# Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida: Examining his Speech Style through Sociolinguistic Lens

### By Shoji Azuma[*]

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has been Japan's top political leader since October 2021. Following the terrible assassination of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in July 2022, Kishida strongly condemned the violent act. Yet, the media's coverage has tended to emphasize the controversial close ties between Abe's and Kishida' LDP bloc and the Unification Church. Many Japanese citizens continue to criticize Kishida's connections with the Church as well as his government's justification for holding a state funeral for the late prime minister. The present paper examines how Kishida has been dealing with the recent overt criticism of these political and domestic issues. One finding shows that both Kishida's "speaking" and "listening" skills are deficient. While initially appointed to Japan's leadership due to his talent for "listening to others" (*kiku chikara*), Kishida now seems to have diminished, at least in his political speeches, in his communicative abilities to "kiku" (listen) and "hanasu" (speak). This study analyses Kishida's skills within the theoretical framework of "involvement strategy" and the rapport-talking style in conversation.

*Kewwords:* emotion, involvement, Japanese prime minister, speech style, rapport-talk

## Introduction

Fumio Kishida (1957-) is a Japanese politician currently serving as Japan's prime minister and president of the leading Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) since October 2, 2021. Kishida has been described as an ideological moderate within the LDP and has stated that his government will focus on a "new model of capitalism" (*shin jiyuu shugi*) by implementing redistributive policies to expand the Japanese middle class (*chuuryuu kaikyuu*). Regarding foreign policy, he plans to continue revitalizing the Quad Security Dialogue in pursuit of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy with Asian countries and the U.S. (Akimoto, 2021). Kishida served for four consecutive years as Japan's foreign minister, the longest anyone has served in that post during Japan's postwar period. For example, Kishida was involved in arranging for U.S. President Barack Obama's historic visit to the city of Hiroshima, the site of one of the atomic blasts which ended World War II. A Hiroshima native, Kishida has consistently advocated for Japanese diplomacy to promote nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament within the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (*Kaku heiki fukakusan jyooyaku*) (Johnson, 2022).

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In his first year as prime minister, Kishida has faced many challenges, both international and domestic (see Figure 1). Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Kishida actively joined G-7 political leaders in imposing economic sanctions on Russia in the form of oil and wheat exports, among others. Although Kishida pledged a "new form of capitalism" for Japan, his agenda has hardy moved forward. His cabinet has been weighed down by the daunting economic problems of inflation, the yen's plummeting value against the dollar and the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Asahi Shinbun, 2022f).

*Figure 1.* Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida Speaks to the Media (Taken from Reuters, 2022a)



But more acutely, Kishida has faced political headwinds over the dubious ties between his ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Unification Church. Due to growing public frustration over this issue (Takahara, 2022), the government's decision to move ahead with the state funeral for former prime minister Shinzo Abe, as well as inflation and other politically controversial issues, the Kishida Cabinet approval rating has dropped to around 35%, its lowest level, according to some media reports (e.g., The Mainichi Shinbun, 2022a; The Japan Times, 2022b; Josei Jishin, 2022; Tokyo Shinbun, 2022; Yomiuri Shinbun,2022b; Nittere News, 2022c).

In particular, the Cabinet's handling of the Unification Church issue has not been received well by the general public of Japan. As a result, Kishida has ordered the education ministry to "investigate" the Unification Church concerning its "spiritual sales" tactics, the first time the government has exercised its authority (*shitsumon ken*) under the "Religious Corporation Law," which allows governmental

investigations of religious organizations suspected of wrongdoing (e.g., Asahi Shinbun, 2022b; Kyodo News, 2022a; Yomiuri Shinbun, 2022a). "Spiritual sales" refers to the sales techniques used on Japanese consumers to coerce the buying of purportedly "supernatural" products at exorbitant prices.

The Unification Church came under greater scrutiny following Shinzo Abe's assassination. The alleged assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, believed Abe had strong ties with the religious group. Yamagami reportedly suffered severe financial hardship due to his mother's donations of more than 100 million yen to the Unification Church, essentially bankrupting the household. Although clearly not justifiable, the assassination appears to have been strongly motivated by the hardship experienced by Yamagami, which, in turn, had been influenced by the Unification Church's activities. The horrific incident of Abe's public assassination by Yamagami using a homemade gun has created public outrage and vows of defiance by politicians and the media in Japan (e.g., Azuma, 2022b).

The impact of the assassination is better understood against the backdrop of current Japanese societal norms and values. For example, it is important to note the setting of the assassination. Abe was killed out in the open, near a crowded Kintetsu Line train station as he was delivering a campaign speech for parliamentary elections. The setting represents a democratic value cherished by most Japanese citizens and is something the public takes very seriously. Furthermore, the collective public outcry is magnified by the fact that crime itself is so rare in Japan. It is not uncommon to see cellphones and purses lying unattended in cafes. Gun attacks are extremely rare, especially in recent years and even more so in public settings such as this one. The shockwaves from Abe's assassination have resonated across the globe. As one Japanese newspaper put it, "a bullet pierced the foundation of democracy" (Asahi Shinbun, 2022a).

Political specialists analyzing the Kishida Cabinet's performance have provided varied commentary. A well-noted political expert, Prof. Izuru Makihara of Tokyo University, stated "[the Kishida Cabinet] was too late in realizing the impact of the Unification Church issue on public opinion and the Cabinet was not prepared to deal with the issue." Continuing, he notes "Kishida seems to emphasize the importance of foreign affairs. But, due to the yen's plummeting value and the economic crisis in Japan, Kishida should pay more attention to domestic issues inside Japan" (NHK, 2022).

Another specialist, Prof. Kooji Nakakita of Hitotsubashi University, argues "it is crucial to have some form of public agreement to keep and maintain 'consensus building' among Kishida's LDP members, the opposition party, and most importantly, Japan's general public. Can we really solve the Unification Church problem? This is a critical moment for the Kishida Cabinet and may determine whether or not it stays intact, and whether or not Kishida continues to be our prime minister" (e.g., NHK, 2022). The current economic, social and religious challenges facing Kishida and his Cabinet are daunting. The continuation of Kishida and his Cabinet in power, as the current leader of Japanese politics, is a pertinent question.

In this paper, let us examine Kishida's treatment of various political issues in his speeches at formal press conferences and at House Steering Committee meetings. Do his speeches attract and persuade his fellow politicians and the

general public to adopt his views? How successful are his speaking skills? Furthermore, let us compare Kishida's speaking skills with the speaking skills of other political leaders. How should we analyze Kishida's speech style from a linguistic perspective? What are the necessary strategies Kishida needs to acquire?

### Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework will focus on the concept of "involvement" in speech. According to well-known sociolinguists such as Tannen (2007) and Chafe (1982), involvement in speech can be defined as "an internal, even **emotional** connection individuals feel which binds them to other people as well as to places, things, activities, ideas, memories, and words." Tannen (2007), citing Gumperz (1982), states that involvement is "not a given but an achievement in conversational interaction." Gumperz (1982) argues that involvement "describes an observable, active participation in conversation." Goodwin (1981) calls it "conversational engagement" and Merritt (1982) calls it "mutual engagement." From these comments, we may surmise that the key component for us may be what Bakhtin (1981) describes as "all language use is dialogic" (i.e., in the form of dialogue).

In essence, the concept of involvement in speech is something both speakers and listeners **jointly** produce. They both must recognize and understand speech in a very active and cooperative manner. It is not passively transferred from the speaker to the listener in a unidirectional manner. It is an active participation involving both speaker and listener. A speaker can be a listener and a listener can be a speaker simultaneously. It is indeed "dialogic" as Bakhtin has suggested.

To put this in another way, we can say that a speaker needs to be listener-oriented (as well as speaker-oriented) when he/she speaks. The speaker always needs to think of other listeners and pay close attention to them when he/she speaks. Thus, involvement requires an "emotional" element in speech, in addition to an objective, factual element or report-oriented speech. As Bateson (1972) as well as Tannen (1986; 2007; 2021) point out, speech "sends a metamessage of **rapport** between the communicators, who thereby experience and share communicative conventions and inhabit the same world of discourse."

Tannen (2021) provides an example from her own life dealing with her father who currently resides in New York, but who is originally from Poland. Tannen recounts how she told her father about a play she had written about her father's life in Poland, using his own words, and based on a trip she and her father had taken to Poland. When she finished sharing the play with her father, his reaction, to her surprise, was negative. Yet, the next day, her father conveyed his true feelings of **deep appreciation**. Let me cite below what Tannen has described.

I've written a play about his life, full of his words, and he doesn't seem to care. The next day he hands me a letter in which he tells me how moved he was and explains that he changed the subject because he didn't want to show his **emotion**. I'm sure he means he was afraid he'd cry. Wanting to write his feelings rather than speak them shows how strongly he feels about --- and how deeply he

appreciates --- my putting stories of his childhood into a play. (Tannen, 2021, p. 29, emphasis added)

Tannen's example shows us how **emotion** can play a significant role in speech. Her story, in the end, jointly produced a communicative experience, building rapport between her father and her. Indeed, her father was very appreciative of the story. It created, in this sense, a form of **rapport talk** for her father as well as Tannen herself. Her father listened to unspoken messages of rapport in the story. Incidentally, among others, Tannen (2007) argues that generally speaking, there are two types of talking styles. One is called "rapport talk," which is a style of communication that promotes social affiliation and **emotional** connection. The other type is called "report talk," which is a style that focuses on exchanging information with little emotional import.

To summarize, we can say that involvement strategies are dialogic, active, mutual and emotional. Taking an involvement approach will create the sense of dialogic and mutual participation between a speaker and a listener, on equal terms. In other words, while a speaker is actually speaking, a listener may not just be listening, but may also, at the same time, be "speaking" to himself/herself in an active manner. That a speaker is speaking and a listener is listening may only be one sense of speaking and listening. A speaker may also be listening simultaneously and a listener may also be speaking simultaneously, in his/her own mind. Each of them may be self-speaking or self-listening at any given time.

Incidentally, the idea of affective power of words/discourse has been postulated by other sociologists. For example, Prof. Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi of UC-Santa Barbara seems to argue for the "aesthetics of political power" in Mussolini's Italy (Falasca-Zamponi, 2000). She comments on the boundaries between official history and people's lived experience by focusing on the affective nature in politics. She argues that memory, linguistically created by words/phases, plays a far more power role than historical facts. She further argues that collective memory through linguistic expressions is crucial for our understanding of historical events.

Let us retain the important theoretical framework discussed above as we examine Kishida's speeches. First, we will observe his speech style in the press conference held on August 31, 2022 (the citation will use an English translation provided by the Prime Minister's Office of Japan (Shushoo Kantei, 2022). Then we will examine his speech style during a Diet session speech on September 9, 2022.

## Methodology

The methodology of the present study will use video-tape recordings of Kishida's speeches during a press conference and a Diet session in Japan. The review of relevant linguistic literature will also be examined. Our focus will be on involvement theory, which will comprise repetition, empathy, and rapport talk style in conversation including Gumperz (1982). Comparisons from African American speeches will be also discussed, including speeches by Jesse Jackson and Martin Luther King Jr. Furthermore, various newspapers, magazines, and internet media

will be consulted regarding Kishida's and other Japanese politicians' talking styles. Such reports will be taken from a variety of newspapers and journals including Asahi Shinbun, Japan Times, Jiji, NHK, Nikkei Asia, Sankei Shinbun, and Tokyo Shinbun. Thus, this study will adopt an observation-oriented approach (e.g., Kishida's prepared transcripts) as well as a library and internet-oriented approach using a sociolinguistic conversational analysis (e.g., Tannen's books). Our primary aim is to explore political speeches in contemporary Japan and comment on significant sociolinguistic findings (e.g., Azuma, 2022a; Azuma, 2022c). We seek to answer questions such as: How do political speeches not just communicate to people but move them emotionally? Is a political speech strengthened by an emotional and psychological connection or **interpersonal involvement** between a speaker and a listener?

## Kishida's Talking Style in Speeches

As mentioned in the theoretical framework section above, the involvement aspect of political speech requires the politician to pay close attention to his/her listeners. As will be seen in the press conference example below (Shushoo Kantei, 2022), Kishida's listening skills could be improved. Let us examine Kishida's statements at the press conference (for the sake of clarity, the English translation version of the press conference is used here).

> Kishida: *Looking back now, it was one year ago that, harboring a desire to uphold Japan's democracy and the conviction that there can be no government without the trust of the people, I ran in the Liberal Democratic Party presidential election.*

Kishida starts by expressing his strong hope that "there can be no government without the trust of the people," which, in Japanese, is "*shin nakuba tatazu.*" The statement raises the fundamental question of whether or not the general public should trust Kishida's government. Kishida continues his statement as follows.

> Kishida: *That said, I regard it as a very serious issue that right now, to speak frankly, the people's trust towards politics has been shaken. Returning to last year's starting point when I made the decision to run in the LDP presidential election, I must once more stand at the fore and work to restore trust in politics. I have renewed my determination to pursue politics of trust and sympathy.*

Kishida's statement that he has decided to "pursue politics of trust and sympathy" is noteworthy, if he really means what he says. Yet, his past actions do not match his words. Any Japanese citizen listener will ask themself whether he/she can trust Kishida to accomplish such a task, especially since Kishida is not currently doing what he said he would do.

Kishida's response to the media's question concerning the government and LDP's close ties with the Unification Church, underscores the difficulty Kishida faces in gaining the trust of the general public. Kishida offered the statement only after consulting with the LDP Secretary General.

Kishida: *As the president of the LDP, I offer my apologies with the utmost sincerity.*

Though appearing sincere, Kishida did not offer any substantive response to the question, and he replied only after consulting with the LDP Secretary General. Many senators and citizens were left with a negative impression that Kishida did not care to address the question and could not be trusted on this matter. This polite but evasive viewpoint is reflected in Kishida's other replies to questions at the press conference. Surprisingly, Kishida used the word *teinei* (polite) at least **six times** in his answers. The Japanese text (with English translations) of some of his comments are listed below. The word *teinei* is presented in bold letter.

Kishida: *Kokumin no minasama kara hikitsuzuki kenen ya ginen no koe o itadaite orimasu.*
*Jimintou soosai to shite sochoku ni owabi o mooshi agemasu.*
"I continue to receive comments of concern and doubt from the people of Japan. I sincerely apologize as the head of the LDP party."

Kishida: *Seiken no shoshin ni kaeri,* **teinei** *na setsumei ni zenryoku o tsukushite, kokumin no minasama no gorikai o enagara, kokusoogi o toriokonatte ikitai to omotte orimasu.*
"Returning to my first point, I would like to do my best to give a polite explanation, and while gaining the understanding and support of the people, I would like to carry out the state funeral."

Kishida: *Kokkai no ba ni oite watashi jishin hikitsuzuki* **teinei** *na Setsumei ni zenryoku o tsukushi kokumi no minasama no gorikaii o enagara, kokusoogi, toriokonatte ikitai to kanngaete orimasu.*
"I will continue to be polite and confident in the Diet [House of Parliament], and do my best to explain myself, while receiving support from the people of Japan. I would like to proceed with the state funeral."

Kishida: *Kokumin no minan no samazama na goiken ya gohihan ni taishite, seifu to shite,* **teinei** *na setsumei ni zenryoku de doryoku o tsukushite ikitai to omotte orimasu.*
"In response to the various opinions and criticisms from the people of Japan, representing the Cabinet of the Kishida government, I would like to do my best to provide a polite explanation."

As the above examples show, Kishida appears to be polite and courteous, yet his intentions lack clarity and are ambiguous. He is good at reporting his plans in a way to show his willingness within the form of "report talk," but his speech lacks any affective, psychological and mental message, due to the absence of any specific details. In other words, Kishida seems to be good at "report talk," but not so good at "rapport talk."

Next, let us examine Kishida's speech during the September 9, 2022, Diet proceedings. Once again, we will notice that Kishida uses a "report talk" style as opposed to a "rapport talk" style. Similar to his speech at the press conference, his frequent use of the word *teinei* (polite) stands out. The regular reference to being polite contrasts starkly with the absence of any practical or detailed plan of

Kishida's agenda. The lasting impression is that Kishida is feigning courteousness, perhaps hoping it will superficially cover for his and his Cabinet's lack of progress on their political agenda. Let us observe some of the examples from Kishida's speech before the Diet.

> Kishida: *Kokumi no koe o kiku, mata seifu kara samazama na kono kankei shoochoo no setsumei o ukeru, sarani wa senmonka, yuushisya no iken o kiku, koo shita **teinei** na Giron o tsumi kasanete seisaku o kettei shite orimasu. Ichibu no kono dantai no iken ni furimawasareru koto wa nai to shinjite orimasu.*
> "[We] listen to opinions from the general public, our government receives explanations from related sectors, in addition, [we] listen to opinions from specialists. Through these varied and polite discussions, we have decided on our political plan. I believe that we will not be swayed by the opinions of this group [i.e., Unification Church group]".

In the above example, Kishida maintains he will listen to the input from various perspectives, yet he simultaneously claims to remain unaffected by the opinions of the Unification Church group. Most importantly, he does not offer any detailed plan of performance or operation. In essence, Kishida is good at reporting what he plans to do, but he is weak in providing a workable, feasible and persuasive plan. Again, he may be a good "report talk" speaker, but he is not a good "rapport talk" speaker. Let us observe another example from Kishida's speech.

> Kishida: *Jimintoo no ariyoo ni tsuite, **teinei** ni kokumin no minasan ni setsumei shinakereba ikenai to iu koto de, samazama no, sorezore no tenken sagyoo nit suite ima toritome o okonai, setsumei sekinin o shikkari hatashite ikoo to iu sagyoo o susumete iru tokoro de arimasu.*
> "Regarding the nature of the LDP, we believe we need to explain it politely, and due to this, we are at the stage of planning our explanation and organizing our procedure carefully.

Again, Kishida attempts, in a polite explanation, to provide detailed information for his audience, however, he fails to actually provide any workable plan. He also does not address in any easy-to-understand manner, any of the topics of the session (COVID-19 cases, the state funeral plan, the Unification Church issue, the plummeting Japanese yen, wages, etc.). All Kishida does is offer tangential references to issues without any practical solutions. Let us observe yet another example from Kishida.

> Kishida: ***Teinei**, setsumei ga, **teinei** de wa nakatta n deha nai ka, fujyuubun, dewa nakatta ka to iu koto ni tsuite wa, seifu to shite kou shita handan wo suru koto, mochiron, daiji de arimasu ga, kokumin ni taisuru setsumei rikai ga jyuuyoo de aru to iu koto mo machigai naku jyuuyoo da to omoimasu.*
> "With respect to the viewpoint concerning my insufficient or impolite explanation, our government decided this approach [of offering the state funeral]. This is of course very important. I think that a clear understanding for the Japanese people is absolutely important."

In the above statement, Kishida is addressing the government's decision to offer the state funeral for the former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, which decision received significant criticism from the people. After referencing several marginal justifications – that many foreign dignitaries will visit Japan and that Abe was the longest serving Japanese prime minister (8 years) – Kishida still offers no clear reason for holding the state funeral and seems to accept the people's criticism. While the state funeral decision could have been taken up for discussion by the Diet, since many people thought an LDP sponsored funeral (i.e., party funeral) would be sufficient, Kishida makes no mention of this. Kishida seems to have purposefully side-stepped the issue and offered no explanation for the decision. Kishida's treatment of this issue left the general public, and many members of the media, unconvinced and distrustful of the prime minister and his government. Kishida says that "a clear understanding for the Japanese people is absolutely important", yet he offered no understanding at all to his listeners. Again, Kishida seems to be a good "report talk" speaker, but not a good "rapport talk" speaker.

Some media have amusingly commented that Kishida should be named *kentooshi* instead of "prime minister" because he often uses the Japanese word *kentoo* (think about) (e.g., Nittere News, 2022a; FLASH, 2022). This association implies that Kishida only "thinks about" many things without taking any concrete action. The inference carries a negative connotation.

In contrast with Kishida's speech style, former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi was known for having an emotional "rapport talk" style. In a press conference held on August 8, 2005, the same day the Diet discarded Koizumi's proposal for privatization of the postal service (e.g., Shinbun Akahata, 2005), Koizumi addressed the general public and asked, with powerful conviction, if they wanted to really discard his proposal. Koizumi passionately defended his proposal directly to the Japanese citizenry. He was willing to speak openly to the people of Japan in an emotional "rapport-talk" style. Using such an involvement style in his speech he ultimately prevailed in getting the proposal approved by the Diet in October of that same year.

**Involvement Strategy of "Repetition"**

As discussed briefly in the Introduction section, Tannen (2007) argues for what she calls "involvement strategies" to attract listeners. One of the strategies she suggests is "repetition" which means repeating a phrase throughout a speech in an effort to entertain, educate, and attract listeners. This repetition strategy is carefully examined by Davis (1985) in a study of African sermons. In his study, Davis (1985) discusses a series of repeated phrases he calls a "narrative formulaic unit" which is rhythmic and has a rhetorical crescendo. Fanselow (1983) discusses this same concept using his analysis of the talking styles of public school teachers with reference to repetition.

In her repetition research, Tannen (1986) cites one of the most renown influential speeches made by Jesse Jackson during the 1984 US Democratic

National Convention held in San Francisco, California. The speech was followed by a standing ovation by audience members with thundering applause (Tannen, 2007). I only cite below a small portion of Jackson's lengthy speech which was delivered with enthusiasm, passion and conviction.

> Workers, You fight for fair wages
> You are right
> But your patch labor, It not big enough
> Women, You seek comparable worth and pay equity
> You are right
> But your patch Is not big enough
> Women, Mother, Who seek Head Start, And day care, And prenatal care
> On the front side of life, Rather than jail care and welfare, On the back side of life
> You are right
> But your patch Is not big enough
> Students, You seek scholarships
> You are right
> But your patch is not big enough
> Blacks and Hispanics, when we fight, For civil rights
> We are right
> But our patch is not big enough
> Gays and Lesbians, When you fight, Against discrimination, And a cure for AIDS
> You are right
> But your patch, Is not big enough. (Tannen, 2007, pp. 179–180)

The repeated segments shown above provide an excellent example of how political discourse can create rapport, psychological cohesiveness and ratify an interlocutor's contribution to his or her audience. In this instance, the cohesion between speaker and listener is clear from the standing ovation and fervent audience applause.

In another example, Tannen (2007) refers to the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. A master of poetic oratory, he excelled in the delivery of political speeches. His oratory vividly displays the amazing power of repetition. One of his most famous speeches was "I Have a Dream." The last section of the speech utilizes eloquent repetition. In the citation below, pay attention to the repeated phase "let freedom ring" and the parallel references to mountains and hills in a variety of US states across the nation.

> And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.
> So let freedom ring
> From the prodigious hill tops of New Hampshire.
> Let freedom ring
> From the mighty mountains of New York.
> Let freedom ring
> From the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.
> Let freedom ring
> From the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado.
> Let freedom ring
> From the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that.
Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.
From every mountainside,
Let freedom ring. (Tannen 2007, 89-90)

We can see in King's speech the use of the repeated phrase ("Let freedom ring") as a linguistic involvement strategy which attracts voters and the general public. The repetition of sounds, words, phrases, and the naming of various states (e.g., New York, Colorado, California) unites the listeners together to experience and feel the same way as King. Repetition as well as the evoked imagery causes the audience members to connect and mutually participate (both as speaker and listener) in sense making.

In contrast with Kishida's "report talk" style, we can clearly see the effect of involvement strategy in Jackson's and King's speeches. Evidence of such rhythmic repetition and crescendo cannot be found in Kishida's speeches. The strategy of repetition can be a powerful tool for politicians in persuading people to accept and move towards a common goal. Repetition and involvement strategies create clear-cut imagery, connection and meaning with listeners and can help establish positive relationships between politicians in Japan and the Japanese people.

## Concluding Remarks

Prime minister Fumio Kishida is currently facing many political challenges. Some of the most pressing political issues which require his attention (e.g., Jiji, 2022), include:

(1) Energy and the environment
(2) National security concerns with China, North Korean and Russia
(3) Wage increases and investment in human resources
(4) Plummeting Japanese yen

Each of these issues is an enormous political challenge for Kishida. At present, it is unclear how Kishida plans to handle them and whether he will be successful as he navigates political leadership in Japan. Aside from his political challenges, Kishida has linguistic challenges which need improving. How he speaks to politicians and the general public can be vastly enhanced. When he became prime minister of Japan a year ago, Kishida was known for his listening skills (*kiku chikara*). It was said he excelled at listening to others and paying attention to their viewpoints, even those with negative opinions. In a recent campaign speech on September 17, 2022, Kishida stated: "It has been said that I am a boring speaker, but my strength lies in my ability to **listen**. I am the leader that this era requires" (Nikkei Asia, 2021). When Kishida reached his 100th day in office, he apparently hoped to show the public his self-touted skills of listening to

people and the swift government action on coronavirus measures (The Japan Times, 2022a).

Nevertheless, as we have noticed from studying his political speeches, including the press conference and his speech to the Diet, Kishida is not a **talented communicator**. Initially, he may have hoped that his listening skills would have helped him, but unfortunately, his speaking skills remain inadequate and he, apparently, is not an adept listener either. He is merely speaker-oriented and not listener-oriented. He speaks about his vague political plans and what he wants to accomplish, yet he avoids speaking about what his listeners want to hear: a detailed, well-explained and easily understood plan for the Japanese people. Kishida needs to better understand that effective communication and understanding by his audiences can be achieved through the creation of a shared world of images (shaped through expressions) and the **mutual** contribution of both speaker and hearer in an **interconnected** participation of positive sense-making. How is this accomplished? It is very simple -- through strategies of involvement (e.g., repetition).

At the October 2022 funeral service for the slain former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Abe's wife, Akie Abe, spoke of her and her husband's fondness for their home prefecture, Yamaguchi. Akie made the following public statement (Asahi Shinbun, 2022d). "My late husband really loved Yamaguchi prefecture. I love the prefecture as well. Because of this affection, I firmly assure you that I will do whatever I can to take good care of this prefecture. Will you please help me to accomplish this task?" By this statement, Akie communicated her commitment to support the people of the Yamaguchi prefecture. By publicly declaring her formal tie she expressed solidarity with the people. Linguistically speaking, Akie has publicly shown us her emotional and psychologically attachment to the Yamaguchi residents, as well as the Japanese public. Speaking for the first time since her husband was killed, her comment was her own "rapport talk" style.

In related remarks at a Diet session, ex-prime minister Yoshihiko Noda gave a farewell speech to Abe. He described Shinzo Abe as a politician who was "fearless and would never give up." Akie, who was sitting in the Diet gallery section, was moved to tears through Noda's "rapport talk"-oriented speech (e.g., FNN Prime Online, 2022; Sankei Shinbun, 2022b; Nittere News, 2022b).

"Rapport talk" makes listeners feel appreciated in a positive way. Prof. Atsushi Aikawa of the Tokyo Gakugei University states that expressing the phrase "thank you" becomes more effective if we pay attention to its psychological impact (Asahi Shinbun, 2022c). He suggests adding a comment as to why the "thank you" is meaningful to the speaker. It is not enough to just say "thank you." The additional explanation creates critical thinking (e.g., a practical reason for the expression). Making a clear and detailed comment (in addition to offering the appreciation) helps listeners understand, appreciate, and respond positively to the speaker's utterance.

In the context of Kishida, his providing a very practical and detailed explanation would be like adding a comment to a "thank you." Just saying "thank you" alone would be equivalent to Kishida's "report-talk" style. "Rapport talk" for Kishida would require an emotional touch to words and phrases rather than his

simple and superficial expressions in a "report talk" style. There is no guarantee that if Kishida makes adjustments linguistically to his speaking style, he would be able to right the government ship. He may not be successful in creating a decisive moment that stirs public sentiment about his speech style.

Recently Kishida's cabinet has had problems. When Kishida appointed his own son, Shotaro Kishida, as his executive secretary, it triggered a backlash from the opposition bloc (e.g., The Japan Times, 2022c; The Mainichi Shinbun, 2022b). In addition, Kishida recently accepted the resignation of his economic revitalization minister, Daishiro Yamagiwa, the first person to resign from Kishida's government since he took power last year (e.g., Reuters, 2022a; All Nippon News Network, 2022; Asahi Shinbun, 2022b; Sankei Shinbun, 2022a; Sankei Shinbun, 2022c). His quitting is likely to further damage Kishida, whose approval has tumbled to record lows after the Unification Church controversy (President Online, 2022; Suponichi, 2022; Asahi Shinbun, 2022e; The Mainichi Shinbun, 2022c). Recent media reports have stated the following:

> "The Kishida cabinet does not listen to the voice of the people, and it makes a fool of them."
> "The cabinet does not understand relevant issues and it has not solved any issue."
> "Kishida is not considering the national sentiment of the people." (Suponichi, 2022)

As recent as November 11, 2022, another minister, Yasuhiro Hanashi, the minister of justice has stepped down, becoming the second minister to leave Kishida's cabinet. Hanashi succumbed to widespread criticism over uncomfortable comments he made regarding his duties. He referred to signing off on executions (*shikei*) as a "tedious" task (Reuters, 2022b; The Mainichi Shinbun, 2022d; Asahi Shinbun, 2022g; Kyodo News, 2022b. An additional minister, Minoru Terada, the minister of internal affairs and communications, resigned on November 20, 2022, in connection with a funding scandal. At present, this is the third cabinet member to leave in less than a month in a severe blow to Kishida's already shaky cabinet.

Despite Kishida's domestic political problems, at a recent U.N. General Assembly in New York, Kishida urged the world to reaffirm the importance of the rule-based international order and **unity** amid the ongoing war in Ukraine. He also criticized Russia for threatening the possible use of nuclear weapons in the conflict (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2022). It is unclear whether the world will reach some sort of **unity** as admonished by Kishida.

Whatever the outcome may be, internationally or domestically, Kishida's biggest political misstep so far might possibly be failing to bring unity to his country. For Japan's future, we have to wait and see whether Kishida adopts a possible "rapport talk" style to accompany his leadership role.

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# A Study on the Role of Internet Emoticons in Business Communication from the Perspective of Symbolic Interactionism

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Emoticons break down the traditional text communication and spread quickly across the Internet, becoming an indispensable network communication tool. They make up for the lack of non-verbal information in Internet communication, dispel the communication gap between the disseminator and the audience. Along with the advancement of information technology, many a business communication has changed from the traditional offline face-to-face communication to the virtual online kind. In daily life, due to the ritualistic, profit-oriented and transactional characteristics of business communication, emoticons in the customer service communication of the e-commerce platform are somewhat different from personal one. This paper selects 4 typical conversation texts from Taobao customer service to support the present case study. According to Mead and Blumer's symbolic interactionism, it analyses the role of emoticons used in business conversations as well as people's motivations behind. On the basis of analyses, it attempts to summarize the role of emoticons in business communication and the problems existing in emoticons usage. The results demonstrate that emoticons can show professionalism and business etiquette, construct a communicator's business self-image, influence interpersonal mutual understanding so as to improve the accuracy and efficiency of business communication, and enhance group identification.

*Keywords:* role of emoticons, non-verbal expressions, symbolic interactionism, business communication, customer service

## Introduction

The Internet has enriched people's intercommunication and become a real catalyst in the use of emoticons. Besides text communication online, Chinese people, especially young individuals, are addicted to using emoticons to express their views and emotions. Netizens communicate each other with emoticons in chat software like QQ, WeChat or in internet forums like Baidu Post Bar and MicroBlog. Emoticons have gradually become an indispensable part of social network. In April 2015, Tencent released "The Emoticon Report of Chinese Netizens" that QQ sent more than 533.8 billion emoticons in 2014, and more than 90 percent of the 800 million QQ users used emoticons in chatting. Emoticons are not only popular nationwide, but also attract people's increasing attention abroad.

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According to Adobe's Emoji Trend Report released in July 2019, 65% of users agree they feel more convenient in expressing emotions by means of emoticons as opposed to verbalising them in phone conversations. Therefore, emoticons are widely used in virtual communication.

This paper contains 5 parts which support the author's points of view. Thus, the first part presents the research background, and announces the aims and the significance of the study; the second part looks into theoretical research models, like Mead and Blumer's symbolic interactionism, both emoticons study and business communication study; and the third part briefly presents the research methodology. Furthermore, while including conversation texts of Taobao customer service, the fourth part makes up the main body of the paper which discusses the role and significance of emoticons used in business conversations as well as people's motivations behind to finally round off with the fifth part which summarizes the role of emoticons in business communication, and brings forward problems and suggestions on the use of emoticons in business communications.

## Research Background and Significance

### Research Background

With the rapid development of the Internet and social software, emoticons have gradually turned into diversified, complex and dynamic structures, which meet the various needs of people of different ages surfing on Internet. The first category of emoticon development is static emoticons represented by character emoticons, kaomoji and emoji. The history of emoticons can be traced back to 1982 when Professor Farman in Carnegie Mellon University used the ASCII character ": -)", a smiley, to represent agreement on an electronic bulletin board. This smiley placed 90 degrees counterclockwise becomes the first character emoticon, which breaks away from the restriction that only language can be used in online communications. However, due to the limited types of combination of the keyboard characters, character emoticons can't convey complex nonverbal information. In 1998 a Chinese Dou Weiwei created the multilingual, horizontal symbolic combination of emoticons called "kaomoji". Kaomoji spread widely due to its vivid imitation of human expressions, richness of expressing information and creativity, and developed into the first generation of extremely popular emoticons. In 1997 Japanese Shigetaka Kurita developed "emoji" in NTTDOCOMO, and emoji became known to the world in 1999. At first, Emoji were only used on docomo501i series mobile phones. In 2012, Au company and DoCoMo company unified the style of Emoji. Later, Emoji started to be widely used around the world when Android and iPhone began to use Emoji. Unlike the previous kaomoji, emoji no longer rely on characters, but convey a group of visual and nonverbal information in the way of picture.

The second category is dynamic emoticons with mixed picture and text, marked by the appearance of GIF. On December 1, 2006, Wang Maomao, an animation major student of Communication University of China, created the "Tuzki"

series of GIF, which is considered to be the earliest GIF. "Tuzki" quickly went viral on the Internet after its launch, sparking a trend of producing animated GIF.

Then came the meme, which can be still pictures or animated GIFs. Netizen's self-made memes are mostly made from pictures of popular celebrities, cartoons and movies, and some match with words to express specific feelings. The pictures are mostly funny and ironic, and the words that the Netizens put on the pictures tend to be like hitting the nail on the head, which can skilfully summarize people's emotions.

The commercialization of emoticons is the sign of its maturity. With the popularity of emoticons, the commercial platform developing emoticons has attracted increasing attention, therefore providing a good space for the production and dissemination of emoticons. Taking WeChat as an example, Tencent launched WeChat emoticons open platform in July 2015. Everyone can upload self-designed emoticons and users are encouraged to pay for the use of emoticons by rewarding the authors, which greatly attracts professional designers and even design companies to involve in the creation of emoticons. In turn, the maturity and development of the emoticon industry chain has also contributed to the prosperity of the emoticon culture to some extent.

The form and content of emoticons are developing towards richness, inclusiveness and customization, and their value is gradually changing from non-profit to commercialization. In addition, with the development of the Internet and modern communication tools, the range of emoticon use has been expanding. On the Internet, emoticons will appear in any place where Netizens communicate with each other, like in comments and posts in micro-blog or in text messages in QQ or WeChat. Besides, emoticons are also used in business communication. People use emoticons at work in enterprise applications like Dingding and Tencent conference. Emoticons are also frequently used in customer service communication on e-commerce platforms such as Taobao and Jingdong at home or Amazon and eBay abroad. However, there are many differences between the use of emoticons in informal chat and in business communication. Business communication, as the name suggests, implies any act of communication between business organizations and individuals in business activities. Influenced by the professional, transactional, profit-oriented and ritualistic nature of business communication, the characteristics and principles of the emoticon use in business communication as well as people's motivation for using them are in some way different from those in the personal chat.

The customer service communication means that the customer service personnel uses online chat tools (WeChat, QQ, etc.) to communicate with customers, to provide services for customers, to deal with customers' complaints and doubts so as to achieve successful transactions. The quality of customer service communication determines whether a business organization can operate smoothly and achieve business success. The customer service is usually divided into three categories: pre-sale customer service, in-sale customer service and after-sale customer service. The kind of customer service directly offered to consumers is one of the important criteria to determine whether the service quality of e-commerce is qualified or not.

Taobao is one of the best-known e-commerce platforms. Shopping in Taobao online stores has become a daily commercial activity for most people. This paper takes Taobao customer service as an example to study the role of emoticons used in customer service communication. From April to May in 2021, a survey was conducted on the use of emoticons in Taobao customer service among college students in some universities in China by disseminating an online questionnaire. A total of 331 questionnaires were released to college students from Dalian University of Technology, Dalian Maritime University, Central China Normal University and other universities. 331 questionnaires were collected with a recovery rate of 100% and 330 valid questionnaires were selected with an effective recovery rate of 99%. Through this survey, the data of 330 questionnaires were analysed, and the required data were visualized. The questionnaire shows the top three emoticons most commonly used by customer service are 🤠😵🤩, while college students most often use 😂🤝🙂. And the other 4 aspects of emoticon usage are shown in the following charts:

*Figure 1.* Frequency of College Student Using Emoticons
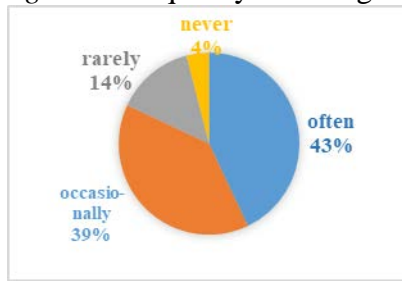


Figure 1 shows that 43% of college students often use emoticons in communication with Taobao customer service, and 39% of college students occasionally use emoticons.

*Figure 2.* Frequency of Customer Service Using Emoticons
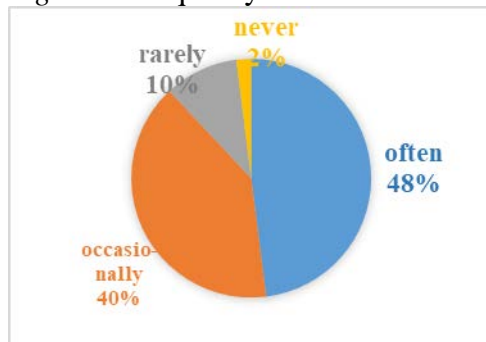


As shown in Figure 2, 48% of college students think that the customer service often uses emoticons in communication.

*Figure 3.* Effect of Customer Service Using Emoticons
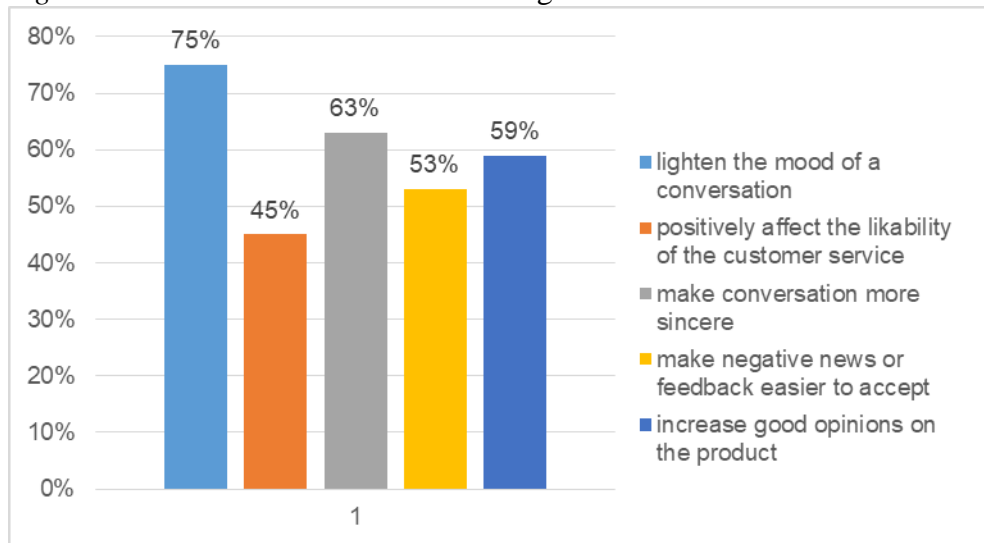


As shown in Figure 3, 59% of college students think that when emoticons are used in customer service communication, they will increase customers' favourable impression of the product, and 75% of them think that the use of emoticons makes the atmosphere of communication more relaxed.

*Figure 4.* Wrong Emoticons Investigation
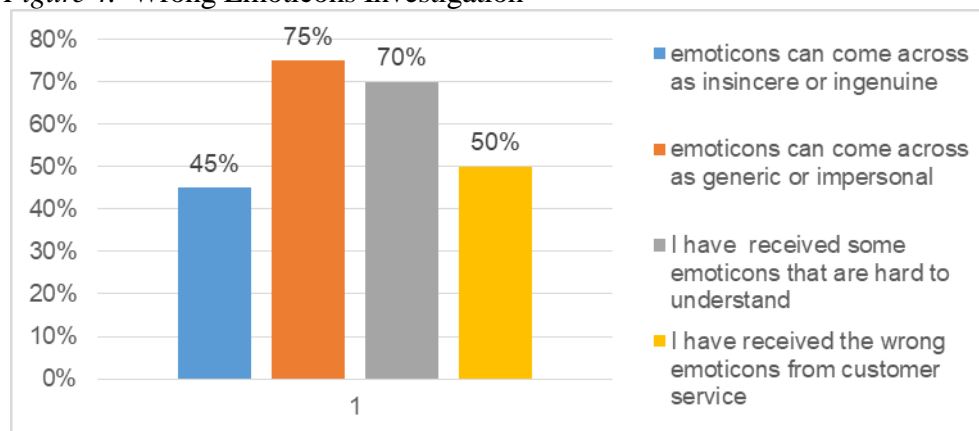


As shown in Figure 4, about 50% of college students have ever received the wrong emoticons from customer service.

**Research Purpose and Significance**

Domestic research on the function and significance of emoticons is mostly focused on the perspective of linguistics, journalism and information communication, while there is little research on the function of emoticons in business communication. Therefore, we aim to study the specific features of emoticons usage in professional communication. Besides, with a view to improving

communication efficiency and avoiding cases of misuses, it feels necessary to study how to use emoticons effectively. The research has its own significance both theoretically and practically in the hope of gaining some useful insights into the study of emoticons in Chinese business communication. Theoretically, this study analyses the use of emoticons from the perspective of the combinations of social linguistics, social psychology and business communication. It employs Symbolic Interactionism as effective and appropriate theoretical foundation. What's more, it puts emphasis on business communication, e-commerce in particular. The research of natural online conversations among Taobao customer service would further compensate for the scarcity of research on emoticons in business contexts. Practically, by pointing out the role of emoticons as well as the misuse of emoticons, it can arouse people's awareness of the appropriate emoticons use in business communication and assist people to effectively and successfully communicate in business situations. Besides, the study of the misuse of emoticons and the suggestions of reducing the misuse can also bring some enlightenments to successful business communication in practice.

## Literature Review

### Overview of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism as a concept was formulated by Herbert Blumer, but founded by George Mead. From a socio-psychological perspective, it focuses on small-scale interpersonal relations, the nature of interaction, the dynamic patterns of social action and social relationship. Symbolic interactionism is any interaction between human beings via symbols such as words, definitions, roles, gestures, rituals etc. Whatever the form of interaction takes, there emerges a particular situation. In this theory, individuals are viewed as active constructors of their own conducts to interpret, evaluate, define and map out their own actions rather than being passive receivers influenced by outside forces. This approach stresses on the process by which individuals make decisions and form opinions.

### *Basic Principles of Symbolic Interactionism*

 (1) *Mead's Early Views*
According to Mead (1962), human thought, experience and conduct are essentially social. Symbols impose particular meanings on objects and these meanings are constructed and reconstructed in the process of social interaction. Symbolic interaction is necessary since man has no instincts to control his behaviour. He is not genetically programmed to react automatically to particular stimuli. In order to survive he has to find a medium of interaction with others and symbols fill the lacuna. Meaning is imposed on the world of nature via symbols, and human interaction with is therein made possible. Mead defines a symbol as the stimulus whose response is given in advance. He argues that the individual develops a concept of self by the process of role taking. By placing himself in the

position of others he is able to look back upon himself. Mead claims that the idea of a self can only develop if the individual can get outside himself in such a way as to become an object to himself.

### (2) *Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism*

Blumer (1969) argues that the theory of symbolic interaction is based on the fact that group members use the same set of symbols and can understand the interactive meaning of these symbols. Blumer also puts forward the three premises of the classical "symbolic interactionism". The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings of things have for them; the second premise is that the meaning of these things is assigned to people through their interactions with other members of the society; the third premise is that the meaning of things is modified and supplemented by repeated social interactions.

### (3) *Ten Elements of Symbolic Interactionism*

Not only does Symbolic Interactionism have the root in social sciences, but it also contains the genes of human science. It is a comprehensive product touching on sociology, psychology, semiotics, pedagogy, philosophy and other disciplines. It is a theoretical collection covering a wide range of disciplines. They always try to interpret a particular situation rather than a set of general situations.

There are 10 elements to help us interpret particular situations: 1. The construction of people's own actions which are deliberate, intentional and creative. 2. The attribute and constructed meanings of people's situations and behaviours; imposed meanings on situations. 3. The subjective meanings and the symbols, together with their systems (e.g., language and communication), by which they are produced and represented. 4. The understanding of individuals' definitions in their terms, i.e., in any situation there are many definitions of a situation's multiple realities; the self is a social product, constructed through the interaction with significant others, which occurs in relation to multiple "reference groups". 5. The negotiation process by which meanings are constructed. 6. The natural, social context/ environment/ setting in understanding meaning and meaning construction. 7. Unique and idiographic situations and individuals. 8. The nature of a career—the moving perspective in which people regard their own and others' lives, based on the meanings which are being formed; a career includes notions of commitment and identity. 9. Rich and detailed accounts of the situation and participants' intention and behaviour. 10. "Emic" rather than "etic" analysis - generating meaning through participants' subjective constructed accounts.

## Overview of Emoticons

### *Definition and Characteristics of Emoticons*

At present, there is no unified explanation on the definition of emoticons in academic circles. Based on literature reviews and previous research results, this

paper makes the following conclusive remarks on the concept of emoticons: An emoticon refers to a new symbol that appears and spreads widely on the Internet, and that typically represents a facial expression or suggests an attitude or emotion. It exits in various variants like character emoticons, kaomoji, emoji, stickers and memes, etc. The characteristics of emoticons include intuitiveness, ambiguity, vividness, communicativeness, and productiveness.

(1) *Intuitiveness.* The emoticons used in social media are patterned and symbolic human expressions, such as happiness, shyness and sadness. When it comes to expressing a sender's feelings, emoticons are more intuitive than words. For example, an emoticon 🌷 can make others easily understand your feeling of gratitude or affection. And you can also make others understand you are frightened by sending a certain emoticon 😱 instead of typing any words.

(2) *Ambiguity.* The linguist Saussure believes that the things represented by language symbols and the forms of the symbols themselves can change with the passage of time, so language is constantly changing and developing. As a kind of symbol, some emoticons are made by using a variety of rhetorical methods such as metaphor, satire and pun, so they are somewhat complex for some people to understand. When emoticons are used by the public, their primary meanings may be distorted and changed. The users may interpret emoticons according to their cognitive experience, cultural background and existing knowledge. The meanings of emoticons are not always the same. For example, there are some controversies in the use of emoticon 🙂. At the beginning, it was used to express "smile" and conveyed the meaning of "friendship". However, it gradually evolved to be an equivalent for "apathetic, disapprove, nothing to say" and "I don't want to talk to you any more".

(3) *Vividness.* Emoticons have been changing from simple to complex, from one-fold to diversified. They are able to express feelings vividly and have more artistic appeal. For example, the emoticon "laughing out loud" 😂 expresses a set of complex emotions, including impotence, self-mockery, ridiculousness and embarrassment, which is difficult to be rendered by our facial expression. In addition, the first emoticon ": -)" must leave a novel and interesting impression on people to tell the meaning of agreement. Nowadays if people want to express "agreement", they can also send a simple emoticon 👌. The "ok" gesture has more equivalents with the development of emoticons, like a cute bear or rabbit or other animated characters, which offer conversations more interesting and lovely sense. Therefore, emoticons have a powerful, visual and vivid impact, and make dialogues more interesting and lighten the mood of a conversation.

(4) *Communicativeness.* Emoticons are usually auxiliary means of language, they help the expression be more accurate and in agreement with people's true feelings. For example, in a conversation between lovers, the girlfriend says, - Do you think I'm wrong? Do you really disagree? The boyfriend says, - You are right. I always take your words as the truth, there is no disagreement 🐶! Without doge emoticon, we might think the boy agrees with the girl. However, with a doge emoticon, the meaning is just the opposite, because the doge emoticon means irony and - Just kidding. Don't take it seriously. This emoticon uses humor to express irony or the opposite meaning literally. With the help of the doge emoticon, the boy expresses

his disagreement humorously and also conveys —although we have different opinions, I like you and you are adorable. From this we can see that this emoticon can reduce embarrassment when rejecting others or giving an undesirable feedback, and also make others more willing to accept the negative news or feedback. Therefore, emoticons can help communication and make it go smoothly.

(5) *Productiveness*. The production of emoticons is becoming more and more popular, and possible for any Netizens to create and publish their own emoticons. Some designers create emoticons of celebrities or cartoon characters according to the latest events, and they upload them in the official emoticon market of WeChat, QQ and other chat software. At the same time, some chat software users can create their own emoticons as well. For example, the latest version 7.0.3 of WeChat adds a self-created emoticon function. Users can take pictures of themselves and mix their pictures with words to produce their customized emoticons.

### Pragmatic Functions of Emoticons

Verbal symbols are the leading factors in communication, while the non-verbal symbols are important aids to the verbal one. Non-verbal symbols in social communication, such as facial expressions, gestures and actions, can express people's emotions, and are of great value and significance for any act of communication and interaction. According to the research of American psychologist Albert Mehrabian, only 7% of verbal information transmission is effective in social communication, and nonverbal information transmission accounts for 93%.

Emoticons are a commonly used auxiliary means for verbal language in current internet communication, which, to a great extent, play the role of body languages communication (Yu and Qin, 2011), create a space similar to any face-to-face environment, to make up for the lack of non-verbal information in social media. They effectively integrate verbal communication with non-verbal communication in the virtual world, and eliminate possible misunderstandings between the sender and the receiver and strengthen the emotional interaction with each other.

The first function of emoticons is to promote harmonious interpersonal relationships (Guo, 2019). Internet communication differs from face-to-face conversation, and the biggest difference is that in Internet communication, sometimes we will communicate with people we have never met. At this time, a cute emoticon can bring a relaxing atmosphere to the communication. A simple observation of the emoticons people use can help us make a preliminary judgement of their personality, which is beneficial for further conversation. Sometimes when it comes to sensitive topics, an emoticon can also resolve the awkwardness of both sides in communication. As we all know, good communication is based on cooperation. When there is disagreement or divergence of opinions, emoticons can help ease the tension in a gentle way. With the help of vivid and interesting emoticons, the relationship of the two sides can get along well with each other.

The second function of the emoticon is that it can help accurately express the sender's ideas and feelings (Guo, 2019). When people communicate with each

other, they usually discuss the same topic and exchange their ideas on the topic, but sometimes they can also associate with other things in their minds and generate their emotions which is not shown literally. In face-to-face conversations, we can help ourselves by a variety of para verbal elements, like hearing each other's voice, seeing each other's expressions, making judgments about each other's emotions. However, in Internet communication, we type words to communicate and we can judge people's emotions only through words and contexts, so it is difficult to judge correctly each other's true emotion only from contexts. In this case, the use of emoticons is just like the message sender's facial expressions emerging in the receiver's brain. According to the emoticons felt, the receiver can grasp the emotion of the sender and try to make an appropriate and decent answer to great extent.

The third function of the emoticon is that it can add joy to the act of communication (Guo, 2019). As we all know, humour can build a good interpersonal relationship. From the developing trend of emoticons, people tend to use humorous and cute emoticons to create a friendly and pleasant mood for a conversation. Emoticons are more expressive than words, bringing visual enjoyment to people and stimulating people's brain to make them happy. A cheerful mood also makes the conversation go smoothly. Therefore, emoticons imitate human body languages, and express the humour more vividly so as to improve inter-communication.

## Overview of Business Communication

### *A Definition of Business Communication*

Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages through verbal or nonverbal means, including speech, or oral communication; writing and graphical representations (such as infographics, maps, and charts); and signs, signals, and behaviour. Simply put, communication is said to be "the creation and exchange of meaning." James Carey, media critic and theorist defined communication as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed" in his book *Communication as Culture*, presuming that we define our reality through communicating our experience with others.

Communication is an essential element in the success of any business. The process of transferring information from one person to another, within and outside the business environment, is termed as business communication. The term business communication is derived from general communication which is associated with business activities. In other words, communication between business parties or people for business-related tasks is considered as business communication. Business communication is any communication used to build partnerships, intellectual resources, to promote an idea, a product, service, or an organization – with the objective of creating value for your business.

### *Characteristics of Business Communication*

Compared with personal communication, business communication has many different characteristics. First, business communication requires that both sides have expertise in what they communicate across. Professional background is a prerequisite for any effective act of business communication. Second, procedures for business communication usually have some customary practices or hard and fast rules. When conducting business communication, communication habits should be understood beforehand. Third, the purpose of business is to make a profit. In the process of business communication, all kinds of opinions and suggestions are included in the consideration of economic interests, rather than simply being analysed and elaborated from the technical perspective. Fourth, business communication is duty behaviour. People should reduce the adverse impact of personal background and emotion on business activities, and business communication should be based on the case rather than the person. Fifth, business communication emphasizes etiquette and image, and the use of business language. Sixth, in business communication, communicators do not communicate as individuals, but as agents of organizations. Communicators must agree with the organization's stand (Tan, 2016).

## Methodology

This paper mainly adopts the research methods of virtual questionnaires and text analysis.

### Virtual Questionnaires

The study targets 20 university students who use TaoBao as an online shopping platform. Snowball sampling as research path is used. The research method at the first stage is a virtual questionnaire according to different research purposes, e.g., the respondents' selection, the selection of conversation texts, etc., and 330 questionnaire replies are available.

More exactly this study adopts the virtual pastoral survey method and chooses the customer service represented by Taobao e-commerce platform as the research target. Taobao is an e-commerce platform with extremely high personal privacy. The communication information with customer service is confidential, only known between the customer and Taobao. In general, it is difficult for others to get personal communication records. Therefore, this paper mainly uses snowball sampling in the selection of respondents. That is, the respondents are selected according to the proposed research purpose, and then the respondents are interviewed and investigated. The respondents are selected among college students. Firstly, through the distribution of questionnaires, we obtain their basic information and their characteristics of emoticons usage. Then, we sort out respondents who are suitable for further study and add them as WeChat friends so

as to maintain a long-term and stable contact with them. According to age, gender and other criteria, 20 Taobao users are selected as respondents. After obtaining their consent, we collect their chat texts with Taobao customer service, and the follow-up interviews are conducted to obtain the first-hand information of this study.

Specifically, the questionnaire contains the following types of questions. Firstly, respondents' basic information, like name, gender, phone number, university and subject, is needed for follow-up contact. Secondly, we investigate their characteristics of emoticons usage in conversation with Taobao customer service representatives (CSR) including frequency and preferred emoticons. Then, we draw attention to the CSR's usage preference of emoticons and their frequency of usage. Finally, in an attempt to know the effects of emoticons used by CSR, we give them several choices involving both good side and bad side caused by mistaken usage, enabling them choose their appropriate ones. The results are shown in the first part, research background, of this paper in graphical forms.

The eligible questionnaire replies were identified according to the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

1) The data for further analyzing characteristics and effects of emoticons usage from respondents who have middle or high frequency of using Taobao and emoticon could be extracted.
2) The questionnaire studies university students aged from 18 to 23, focusing on their usage habits of and opinions on Emoticons in Taobao customer service communication. So no participants other than eligible undergraduate groups are included.

Exclusion criteria:

1) If the respondents skip more than 9 questions of the total 15 questions, i.e. 2/3 of the total, then the questionnaire should be invalid.
2) Questionnaires with continuously single option selected should be invalid. For example, select all B, or select half A and half B.
3) The selected options are regular, following a pattern like A, B, C, A, B, C should be excluded.
4) Trap questions are set in the questionnaire. If inconsistency happens in the results of the two questions, the questionnaire should be invalid.

**Text Analysis**

Text analysis refers to the analysis of the deep meaning behind the text content, and the in-depth search for the key information that can't be obtained from a surface reading. In this paper, symbolic interactionism is adopted as the theoretical guide for the text analysis. About 70 screenshots of TaoBao customer service conversations are obtained from 20 respondents. Through repeated analysis

and comparison, the 4 most representative ones are selected among 58 available screenshots of online conversation texts from 12 respondents. By the means of analysis, this study aims at exploring the role of emoticons used in business conversations as well as people's motivations behind their choices.

We choose 4 conversation texts, which present 4 different typical functions of emoticons usage in daily business communication. In each text analysis, it consists of Chinese conversation between the CSR and the customer, the corresponding English translation of the Chinese conversation and the detail text analysis, in which the theory of symbolic interactionism, the typical features of business communication and the non-verbal expression meanings of emoticons are integrated to analyze the typical function of each emoticon in the conversation. And for the choice of 4 typical Chinese conversations, we consider more about the proper length, the proper emoticon usage between the CSR and the customer so that those elements form the typical emoticon function together in business communication.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the characteristics of business communication, it can be inferred that the types of emoticons that can be used in business communication and the scope of emoticons usage should be limited — business people will also reduce the arbitrary use of emoticons, and the role of emoticons in business communication will be more targeted. This study selects 4 chat texts of online conversations between the customers and the customer service representatives (CSR). Under the guidance of symbolic interactionism, it analyses the roles of emoticons used in daily business conversations as well as their motivations behind. The texts below are all real and selected from about 70 screenshots of TaoBao shopping platform conversations provided by the 20 respondents selected.

**Emoticons that Show Professionalism and Business Etiquette**

例1. 客服：欢迎光临XXX店铺，有任何问题可以联系客服咨询哦。😄
      顾客：请问我的这个商品什么时候可以发货？
      客服：感谢您的订单
🥵！由于订单量巨大，仓库正在马不停蹄地打包商品，我们会尽快发货的哦！
      顾客：好吧，尽快哈！

English translation of Conversation 1:
The CSR: Welcome to XXX Shop！ What can I do for you? 😄
The Customer: Would you tell me when my goods will be dispatched?
The CSR: Thank you for your order 🥵. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting because our shop has been overwhelmed by the recent large orders. The goods are being packed quickly in order of payment. Your delivery

will be arranged as soon as possible.
The Customer: Okay. As quickly as possible, please!

In *Man and Society*, American sociologist Blumer explains that the basic principle of symbolic interactionism is that, in groups, people have a set of common symbols and common understandings of these symbols (Wolf, 1985). Only when people have common understandings of these symbols can they interact with each other socially. Therefore, the premise of people's mutual understanding is to have a common meaning background or cultural background.

A "happy smile" emoticon is one of the most basic human expressions, and people of all cultures will interpret it as a friendly expression without the risk of misinterpretation. The emoticon "happy smile" 😄 is one of the most basic emoticons online, which can be used at any time to reduce the seriousness of the tone and create a friendly atmosphere. The essence of the emoticon is an Internet auxiliary communication means with the function of facial expression, which is equivalent to body language in face-to-face communication. In Internet communication, we can't see each other, but through emoticons, we can associate what the other's emoticon is with of the specific type of emoticon it expresses. In this conversation, when the emoticon "happy smile" appears, the customer will immediately reflect in his mind that the CSR is smiling at him, and he can feel the warmth and respect from the CSR. Moreover, the emoticon "happy smile" can dissolve the serious and embarrassing atmosphere caused by unfamiliarity at the beginning of the conversation and make the customer have a good impression about the store.

As we all know, business communication needs to be professional and polite. Using such a smiling face can increase the professionalism of customer service. Since the main purpose of customer service is to serve customers and to solve their problems, it is necessary to be polite to customers and take into account of customers' feelings. The emoticon "happy smile" will make customers feel as if a polite and professional CSR were greeting them with a smile, and customers will have more trust in the professionalism of the service.

The emoticon "blowing kisses of love" 😘 is used in this conversation to express the gratitude of the CSR towards the buyer for having placed an order and paid for it. Like the emoticon "happy smile", this emoticon is also a basic and unambiguous nonverbal expression, which is an imitation of human's action to blow kisses. People will interpret this action as affection and gratitude.

The above example analyses the functions of the two emoticons in the business conversation. The emoticon "happy smile" expresses welcome and friendliness, thus creating a relaxing atmosphere. The emoticon "blowing kisses of love" expresses appreciation and love. The appropriate use of two emoticons has improved the professionalism of the customer service because the professionalism, politeness and sincerity has been sent to the customer through emoticons by the CSR. Therefore, one function of emoticons is to help words convey feelings, emotions and attitudes, and to regulate the atmosphere so as to show the professionalism and etiquette in business communication.

**Using Emoticons to Construct the Communicator's Business Self-image**

例2. *顾客发送链接*

客服：欢迎光临，有什么可以帮助您？

小美人~芭蕉衬雨秋生动 罗窗恼破鸳鸯梦~

纳米丝仿生毛+加厚铝管+树脂实木刷杆

触感轻柔不扎脸，14支刷型，一应俱全，为您打造精致妆容！😆

顾客：快递是什么呀？

客服：小美人~我们家快递随机发邮政和中通呢。

因疫情原因，云南省德宏傣族景颇族自治州瑞丽市无法收寄哈，以及新疆~西藏~内蒙古地区仅支持邮政哈。

顾客：好的，谢谢 🙏

客服：不客气小美人，么么哒.

客服：



English translation of Conversation 2
*The Customer sent a product link.*
The CSR: Welcome! Can I help you, sweety heart? This professional makeup brush kit contains 14 pcs made from nanowire synthetic hair, thick Aluminium tube and resin handle, which gives your face soft feeling, and creates exquisite makeup for you 😆.
The Customer: Which express company?
CSR: ZTO Express or EMS (Express Mail Service), little beauty~ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the city of Ruili, Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province cannot offer service. And Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia only allow EMS.
Customer: All right, Thank you 🙏!
CSR: You are welcome, sweety! Muah!
CSR: (Bit embarrassed!)



Mead, the founder of symbolic interactionism, claims that the interaction between people is essentially the interaction between social roles. When people

construct their roles, they give others "self" information through various ways and symbols in the repeated social interaction with others. The individual develops a concept of self by the process of role taking. Emoticons can be understood as a symbol representing the "self" behind the Internet. The type of emoticons that Netizens like to use can reflect the personality of "self" (Pan, 2020). The self is constructed through interaction with "significant others" which occurs in relation to multiple "reference groups". The emoticon "biting a rose" 😝 is to imitate the expression of western gentlemen's high-flown inviting beauties to dance, but here it creates a relaxed and funny conversation atmosphere with a sense of humour, meaning "see how good I am, praise me quickly", so that it presents the CSR a witty and humorous image.

This kind of image is deepened by the emoticon - feeling so embarrassed, used by the CSR. Actually the CSR does not have to feel embarrassed because it's routine politeness for the girl customer to say - thank you! To tell the CSR she's satisfied with his (her) service. However, using such an exaggerated expression gives the customer a sense of fun, thus externalizing the humorous and witty image of the CSR so that the customer is attracted. When the customer sees this emoticon, she should be amused and may have a good impression on the CSR, therefore encouraging subsequent satisfactory comments on the store.

Normally in business communication, the social relations between the two sides are different. Sometimes the two sides may have equal status, such as communication between colleagues, and sometimes they may have an inferior status, such as communication between superiors and subordinates. There are different communication modes for different social relations, but no matter which communication mode it may be, both sides of the communication act will have specific expectations. Only when the business communication meets these expectations, can it be accepted by both sides, and the business communication can proceed smoothly. In the communication between superiors and subordinates, superiors hope to be ingratiated with and looked up to by subordinates, while subordinates hope to be respected and recognized by superiors. Therefore, subordinates can use positive emoticons to build a positive image of themselves, showing gratitude, modesty, earnestness, diligence, etc., to euphemistically please superiors, while superiors can use emoticons to maintain their social status and create an image of caring for subordinates. Through the function of emoticons to shape one's self-image, communication can meet the expectations of both sides and promote the smooth progress of business communication. In the above example, the customer can be regarded as the superior, while the CSR as the subordinate. Both the emoticon "biting a rose" and the emoticon "feeling so embarrassed" used by the CSR function in constructing the CSR's humorous and witty self-image. The motivation to use them is to please the girl customer and win her favour so as to leave her a satisfactory shopping experience.

**Emoticons used to improve the Efficiency and Accuracy of Business Communication**

例3. 顾客：请问在吗？

客服：您好哈，小可爱！有什么可以帮助您的呢？
顾客：节后可以开始发货吗？
客服：
　　　亲，受疫情影响，节后需要根据疫情稳定后工厂进度、到货周期以及快递等进行沟通和判定，暂时没办法确定具体时间。一旦可以，仓库会尽快按订单顺序陆续安排发货的哦！
顾客：嗯嗯。等发货这么久，能多赠送个打气筒吗？
客服：
客服：不过看在老顾客的情分，我们可以给您本店优惠卷作为补偿
。
顾客：谢谢。好滴。

English translation of Conversation 3
The Customer: Hello! Anybody here?
The CSR: Hi, sweetheart! What can I do for you?
The Customer: Will my goods be dispatched once the Chinese New Year is over?
The CRS: We are not sure when to send packages now, honey . Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to change the schedule according to the changes of production and delivery circle. But once possible, we promise to send packages in order of payments as soon as possible!
The Customer: Well, since I have been waiting for such a long time, can you gift one more bicycle pump?
The CRS:
The CRS: As you are a regular customer, we can give you a coupon as compensation.
The Customer: Ok, Thanks!

The emoticon "comforting" is used together with words by the CSR to comfort the customer when he puts forward a requirement and service that the store cannot afford. When the customer sees this emoticon, he will definitely feel more comfortable, rather than feel total dissatisfaction. If the CSR uses inappropriate emoticons and words to express the refusal, it will inevitably give the customer a sense of disrespect. However, in this text, we can see that after seeing the emoticon—comforting, the customer is still bit unsatisfied and uncompromising, then asks an unreasonable requirement. The customer himself also feels he's unreasonable, so he delivers an emoticon "blowing kisses of love" to express his gratitude in advance. Therefore, the CSR sends back an emoticon —smiling peacefully to express his understanding and comfort to the customer. It shows that the CSR takes the customer' requirements seriously. Although the customer's requirement is a bit unreasonable, he tries to put himself in the customer's shoes, and has a sincere attitude to offer the customer a satisfactory service.

Symbolic Interactionism points out that the so-called meaning refers to people's understanding of natural or social things, the implication given to objects by people, and the spiritual content conveyed and communicated by human beings

in the form of symbols. Human beings have the ability to think, and people respond to social situations according to the meaning of things to them. Social interaction can be carried out smoothly only when both sides of the interaction can determine and understand their mutual situations and can communicate with each other by symbols. However, people must have a common understanding of the meaning of the symbols, and the understanding of the meaning of the symbols is generated during the interaction. That's to say, effective social interaction depends on understanding each other's situation. In this example, the CSR and the customer try to understand each other and establish a common meaning background, so their communication can flow smoothly, which leads to series of interactions with each other and the possibility of developing a further relationship. Through the interaction of symbols, together with words, certain meanings are resonated and mutual understanding is enhanced.

Mead believes that the human mind is not a fixed organism, but a process of continuous interpretation, reflection and judgment of experience. An individual responds to other individuals or objects because these people or objects have meaning for him, but these meanings are neither socially nor culturally fixed or determined. They can change in the specific context in which people interact (Xu, 2016). Mead's discussion of the open nature of meaning to some extent explains why the relationship between the customer and the CSR can develop smoothly in the end because they can understand each other, especially the CSR. With the development of their conversation, by using emoticons the CSR and the customer make each other understand the situation and each other's meaning accurately. Therefore, in business communication, when one side has to refuse the other side's request, he can use emoticons to express refusal - so as to reduce the embarrassment, and at the same time help each other catch the changing meanings with the conversation development, therefore improve the efficiency of the business communication. But at the same time, if two sides use emoticons wrongly or misunderstand the emoticons, they may fail to have the common meaning background and reduce their mutual understanding.

In the external business communication, such as the one between business organizations and customers or buyers and sellers, when they share the common understanding of the emoticons that they use, they can have a good mutual understanding. The mutual understanding between the two sides can lead to good communication results, that are mutual benefits and win-win results. If the buyer and the seller do not agree to make any compromise, it will lead to a deadlock. The more mutual understanding they have, the better they can take a win-win attitude to conduct business communication, and the better they can find a solution that satisfies the interests of both sides. Therefore, the use of emoticons in the business communication can influence interpersonal mutual understanding.

**Emoticons Used to Improve Group Identification**

例4.

客服：欢迎小主的到来，本店1212年货节，会员无门槛红包1

5元，满300减30，上不封顶! 😽

"神仙水"、"悦诗风吟"更有多重惊喜优惠!

客服：感谢您的购买! 小店会尽快发货的，请您确认订单信息。

顾客：收货地址写错了! 😂

客服：哦哦 😅 我这边可以帮您更改，您把新地址发我就好了。

English translation of Conversation 4

The CSR: Welcome to our shop! Have fun in double 12 New Year's shopping festival! Each one with our membership can receive a no-threshold red envelope of 15 Yuan! 30 Yuan off on consumption of every 300, there is no cap! 😽 "SK-II", "Innisfree" and other products have surprising discounts!

The CSR: Thank you for your purchase! We will send your express parcel as soon as possible. Please confirm your order.

The Customer: I wrote my delivery address wrong! 😂

The CSR: Oh! 😅 I can help you correct it. Just send your correct delivery address to me.

The emoticon "laughing out loud" 😅is one of the most commonly used emoticons, and it is also rated as the most popular emoticon in the world. In this context, the customer uses the emoticon "laughing out loud" to express his self-mockery and embarrassment. The CSR catches the customer's meaning and uses it again to represent his understanding and his other meaning of "it's ok." The emoticon "laughing out loud" can express a variety of emotions and appeals, including happiness, sarcasm, and goodwill. The current relationship among people is quite weak, and people feel it difficult to use words to express their very complex emotions. Psychologists say that the emoticon "laughing out loud" really reflects people's complex emotions like helplessness, self-mockery, etc. in their inner world.

The transmission pattern of this emoticon - laughing out loud 😅can also be explained by symbolic interactionism. Symbolic Interactionism holds that things or objects cannot influence individual behaviour by themselves. Instead, they can influence individual behaviour through their symbolic meanings, which is derived from social interaction. The meaning of emoticons is agreed upon during the interpersonal interaction. After having learnt the meaning of emoticons, individuals can conduct self-interaction and develop the "self", and then externalize the learning results in the next interpersonal interaction, so that individuals can gain higher recognition in the interpersonal interaction.

Specifically, when the customer and the CSR communicate with each other, the "I" of the customer chooses to use the "laughing out loud" under the internal coordination of impulsion and reason. On receiving the emoticon, the CSR will first produce the same interpretation result with the customer from the interactive context of two sides. Then, the behaviour of the customer forms a "me" image in the mind of the CSR, which is "humorous and follows the trend of the Internet". For the customer, if this - "me" image conforms to his psychological expectation,

the "me" image will be unified with "I" as "self", and tends to use emoticons more frequently in social media. For the CSR, if the "me" image of the customer causes him to have positive emotional experience, he will produce imitation behaviour out of herd psychology and also use the "laughing out loud" in his social behaviour.

The emoticon "cheering" is supposed to show the customer's support and praise for the product after the product is used by the customer, but the CSR sends the emoticon, which means that the CSR stands in the position of the customer and suggests that the product is popular among customers. When the customer sees this emoji, it is easy for the customer to be empathetic. Therefore, the emoticon "cheering" is used by the CRS here to express the unprecedented level of preferential offer, stimulate the positive emotion of customers, and make them interested in knowing about the preferential activities of other products. This emoticon is often used in Taobao customer service to recommend products. This emoticon transmission mode is so widely spread in customer service.

The emoticons "laughing out loud" and "cheering" are both widely used in social interaction because the symbolic meanings they represent are recognized and agreed upon by people from different backgrounds. Although each person has a different meaning and cognitive background, emoticons can interact effectively in different cultures and be endowed with the same meaning by different people, which is conducive for the establishment of people's common meaning or cultural background. Through the establishment of the common meaning background or cultural background, the amount of effective interaction between people will also increase, and it will also increase the sense of belonging and identity of the group.

Symbolic interactionism holds that society is not an objective entity, but a network of social members who interact with each other. Individuals give meaning to their own and others' actions through the use of symbols. Mead actually sees society as a phenomenon of composition, arising from the interaction between individuals, and because of this, society can be transformed and reorganized in the process of mind and self-activity. In short, Mead believes that society is the formation pattern of common activities, and maintains and changes its state by means of symbolic interaction (Xu, 2016). Therefore, the use of the same emoticons in the whole society is favourable to building people's common meaning background and increasing people's sense of belonging and identity.

In business communication, the wide use of emoticons will also bring about mutual understanding within or between organizations and build the same meaning background so as to enhance the sense of group identity and belonging or intensify the sense of identity between people or organizations. When members have a high sense of identity and belonging to the organization, internal business communication will be smoother, so as to achieve better teamwork and more harmonious interpersonal relationships and stimulate the creativity of members. When there is a better sense of identity between business organizations and business organizations, or between business organizations and consumers, the external business communication will be smoother, which can enhance the good image of the organization, expand the external communication of the organization, and provide a better development space for the organization.

**Conclusions**

**The Role of Emoticons in Business Communication**

From the above analyses and findings, it can be concluded that the functions of emoticons used in the 4 texts are to show professionalism and business etiquette; similarly, they shape one's self-image; promote interpersonal mutual understanding so as to increase accuracy and efficiency of business communication; and improve group identification.

First, emoticons can show people's professionalism and compliance with business etiquette. When people, as agents of their business organizations, use appropriate emoticons to express their caring for customers, the customers can feel the professionalism, politeness and sincerity of business organizations through the emoticons. Like the emoticon - happy smile in the first text, the receiver can associate the emoticon with the sender and a face-to-face communication with the sender in his mind. The positive meanings of the emoticons are endowed with the sender and when the receiver believes in the professionalism of the sender, he will trust the sender's organization as well.

Secondly, emoticons can construct people's different self-images for different social relations in business communication. The purpose of self-image construction is to meet the other side's expectation and achieve the purpose of smooth business communication. The essence of interaction between people is the interaction of social roles. Business communication is often accompanied by unequal status between the two sides, but in the democratic society, the relationship between superiors and subordinates is no longer one of command and obedience. When the person with higher status puts forward a request to the person with lower status, for example, when the leader asks the subordinate to do something, he adds a smiling emoticon at the end of the speech to show his respect for the subordinate, or he adds a "come on" emoticon at the end of the sentence to establish a clear image of consideration for the subordinate. Subordinates also use emoticons in the dialogue with their superiors, such as using the "thanks" emoticons to show the subordinate's image is polite, modest and sincere. When communicating with colleagues with equal status or between the CSR and the customer in Text 2, people often use cute and exaggerated emoticons to create a relaxed chatting atmosphere and present a kind and amiable image, or using trendy, humorous emoticons to shape a humorous and witty self-image.

Thirdly, the use of emoticons can help reach the efficiency and accuracy of business communication. Emoticons can accurately express emotions and meanings and avoid the ambiguous explanation caused by language. They can be a means of saving time for typing words. In the modern society, the relationship between people is weak, and it's difficult for people to understand many of each other's emotions in words, like embarrassment, it can be clearly expressed in the shortest time with an emoticon. In business communication, the proper use of emoticons can avoid language misunderstanding. For example, in Text 3 the CSR can't satisfy the customer's request, so they reply with emoticons "comforting" and "smiling peacefully" separately, together with words, to express that although the CSR can't

meet the customer's need completely, the CSR has tried his best. Therefore, by using emoticons, people not only save the time for mutual understanding, but also help increase the accuracy of mutual communication.

Fourthly, emoticons can enhance the group's identity. Symbolic interactionism points out that only when both sides can understand each other's personal situation and communicate with each other symbolically, can social interaction be carried out smoothly. People must have a common understanding of the meaning of symbols. People understand each other on the premise that they have a common meaning background or cultural background. However, in internal business communication, not all people have the same experience and background. Many of them have different backgrounds, ages, cultures and education, which leads to the situation that they cannot totally understand each other. However, people's thoughts will change by social interaction. When a symbol is given a common meaning in a group through social interaction, the group will have a resonance in meaning through such symbol interaction, promote a benign interaction, and increase the group's sense of belonging and identity. The high degree of organizational identification can lead to better internal business communication, so as to achieve the purpose of excellent teamwork, harmonious interpersonal relationship and continuous innovation. So the strong sense of group identity can also lead to smooth external business communication like in Text 4.

## Problems and Suggestions on the use of Emoticons in Business Communication

### *Unclear Boundaries of Emoticons*

A taboo in business communication is to use emoticons regardless of the receiver and the occasion. Many emoticons are entertaining, which is considered inappropriate and not serious in relatively serious occasions. One should send different kinds of emoticons to different people. For older communicators, they may not be so receptive to emoticons and may not understand some novel emoticons. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use the official emoticons in the chat software when chatting with them. In addition, one had better choose some emoticons with basic emotions and avoid using emoticons with rich connotations. For younger communicators, the use of novel emoticons is preferred. Secondly, some ambiguous emoticons, such as the emoticon "smiling" 🙂 containing both the positive meaning of "smile" and the derogatory meaning of "sneer and sarcasm", should be avoided in business communication because they will cause misunderstanding and failure to achieve successful communication. Finally, in business communication, it is advisable not to reply only with emoticons unaccompanied by words. Emoticons are only an auxiliary means of language expression, and cannot completely replace words. Properly written explanations can reflect a person's professionalism and their serious attitude.

### *Abuse of Emoticons*

In business communication, people usually use procedural language to show

their professionalism. However, if communication is carried out in complete accordance with the prepared script without any flexible adjustment to meet others' demand, it will not create trustworthiness and sincerity. If the emoticon becomes a perfunctory and polite tool, it will lose its value of expressing meaning. When others keep seeing the same emotions appear each time as expected, they will feel bored and rebellious. This situation often appears in the chat of Taobao customer service. The customer service has been using the same words and emoticons all the time. This will not keep customers, but it would rather create the feeling that the service is perfunctory and customers will eventually build a negative image of the store. Therefore, sincerity is the most important principle when communicating with others, and the same principle should be followed when using emoticons.

### *Ineffective Use of Emoticons*

In business communication, many employees still send emoticons at will, just like in personal communication. They always send some positive emoticons in any situation. The result is that the emoticons do not have any effect in sentences, but are redundant. A very important feature of business communication is profit-oriented, i.e., the purpose of business activities is to make profit. More specifically, the purpose of business communication is to achieve the pre-set goals through effective communication so as to enable the successful operation of business activities. Business communication has definite goals and should achieve the predetermined goals as quickly as possible. Therefore, when using emoticons in business communication, it is more necessary to pay attention to the purpose of using the emoticons and think about the most appropriate emoticon in the context. Don't say useless words and send emoticons with no specific purpose. At the same time, pay attention to the accuracy of the use of emoticons and don't send emoticons at random.

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# Harassed and Hushed: Bangladeshi Women Journalists' Experiences of Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassments

*By Priyanka Kundu[*] & Maliha Tabassum[±]*

A large number of Bangladeshi women journalists are facing gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. This is one of the contributing factors in excluding women journalists' voices from the public sphere. Drawing on the feminist approach of structure and agency theory, the study investigated the causes and consequences of workplace gender discrimination and sexual harassment. A mixed method of survey and in-depth interviewing were conducted, and the data were thematically analyzed. The findings outlined gender discrimination and harassment are evident in the media industries of Bangladesh, commonly maneuvered by both internal and external perpetrators. The situation causes frustration among women journalists. As a coping-up endeavor, they often remain silent due to their lack of trust in protection mechanisms e.g., sexual harassment prevention committee in workplace, and sometimes they withdraw from their responsibilities.

*Keywords:* women journalists, Bangladesh, media, gender discrimination, harassment, sexism, silence, withdrawal, free agency

## Introduction

Globally, gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace has been a growing concern. The problem has a resemblance to the collective outlook towards women. A United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) research suggests one in every three women faces sexual or physical violence in her lifespan (UNFPA, 2013). Many women have come up with their harassment experiences through the #MeToo campaign in last few years; that unfolded long untold stories of abuses starting from Hollywood actresses to school (Mendes et al., 2018). The situation is not any better for women working in the journalism industries. One in every two women journalists have gone through different forms of sexual harassment, emotional abuse, online nuisances, and other forms of gender-based violence during their work in a developed country like the USA (Ferrier and Garud-Patkar, 2018; Mendes et al., 2018). Ferrier and Garud-Patkar found the victims women journalists often remain silent because of a lack of trust in discrimination and harassment prevention authorities (2018). The situation has become grimmer in the networked age. Studies have found how women journalists

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regularly have been facing different range of sexualized attacks online (Kundu and Bhuiyan, 2021). Harassment and discrimination from both online and offline settings, plus from inside and outside of work cause adverse job environment for women in journalism; also, often cost their wellbeing and freedom.

Bangladesh, a South-Asian developing country, is no exception. Bangladesh is standing in a sorrowful situation in terms of ensuring security for journalists and the right to freedom of expression, where, for women journalists the situation is even worse. Since 1992, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has recorded the killings of 22 journalists (CPJ, 2021). Many other professional concerns for journalists are also in play. Enacted in 2018, the Digital Security Act (DSA) expanded the denial of freedom of expression and freedom of the press (Aljazeera, 2020). According to a police report from Bangladesh, 403 complaints were registered, and 353 arrests were made under the DSA Act within the first five months of 2020 (Abrar, 2021). Therefore, given the hostile legal conditions, along with professional threats of killing, harassment, and lack of stronger protection mechanisms (CPJ, 2021), Bangladeshi journalists are vulnerable of higher degree of risk (Human Rights Commission, 2021).

The working conditions for women journalists are harsher. Macharia (2015) suggests a significantly low participation of women in journalism leads to gender imbalance in decision-making positions, and gender discrimination in the media industries. Also, Article 19 (2020) found that women journalists have remained marginalized in Bangladesh's media industry, with only 15 percent of overall participation. This reflects an invisible restriction on their role in the Fourth Estate. Moreover, the lack of security against this violence makes the workplace harder for them (OAS, 2019; Habiba, 2018). The questions are how the female journalists are performing their roles in providing information and protecting people's right to freedom of expression, given the fact that the journalists themselves are not free. What is the state of their agency under the prevailing situation? This paper, therefore, raises the following research questions:

1. In what ways are female journalists in Bangladesh experiencing discrimination, sexual harassment, and threats?
2. What is the nature of the discrimination and sexual harassment?
3. What are the reactions and resilience mechanisms being used in such situations?

## Literature Review

### Women Journalists; Gender Discriminations, Harassments, and Violence

Safety, protection, and freedom of expression are necessary for journalists to perform their primary responsibilities. But globally, they are being denied to female journalists (Jamil, 2020). According to international feminist media analysts, women professionals face additional stress and dangers (Ross, 2009; North, 2013). Generally, physical, mental, sexual abuses, and discrimination

(Posetti and Shabbir, 2019; Robinson, 2005) are a day-to-day reality for women in journalism. A total of 11 women journalists were killed in 2017, which was the highest number after 2006- the year when the UN body started recording the number of journalists' casualties (UNESCO, 2015). Their experiences of sexual harassment, violence, and discrimination are also recorded in different countries' contexts (North, 2013; Jamil, 2020; Article 19, 2020). A fresh survey published by the Guardian in the UK showed that out of the 10 most abused writers in the online comments, 8 were women (Gardiner et al., 2016). Ross (2009) suggested three in every four women journalists in the British newsroom are exposed to sexual violence and harassment. Different other studies from USA, Norway, Caribbean Region, and Australia also depicted quite similar pictures (North, 2016; Idås et al., 2020; Opoku-Mensah, 2004).

Gender discrimination and sexual harassment are being faced on the most recent online platforms as well. A great number of women journalists encounter online threats of rape, murder, sexual harassment, stalking, cruel comments, sexism, and much more (Sutton, 2016; Pitcher, 2019; Kundu and Bhuiyan, 2021). The International Women's Media Foundation (2018) found that 63 percent of women respondents had been abused online at least once. And another survey of 1,200 media professionals throughout the globe, conducted by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and the UNESCO in 2015 outlined that 73 percent of women reported experiencing online abuse, harassment, threats and attacks. Findings of other similar studies also echoed the same results (IWMF, 2018; IFJ, 2017; UNESCO and ICFJ, 2020).

Generally, misogyny both off and online is a substantial threat to women's participation in journalism and public communication. Alongside the developed and democratic countries from the West, the South-Asian developing nations such as India, Nepal, and Pakistan, also displayed a parallel image. Jamil (2020) argued that women journalists of Pakistan are suffering in silence after getting harassed and discriminated and sometimes even leaving their jobs. In India, threats, discrimination, and violence against women in the professions are significantly higher. Bodily violence coupled with online abuses has taken a dreadful look there (Kathuria, 2018). A similar situation has been identified in Nepal. For example, Koirala (2020) found that 70 percent of their women journalists encountered online abuses, along with the existence of offline harassments and discriminations.

So, the aforesaid discussion outlined that regardless of developed or developing societies, women in the journalism profession are facing widespread discrimination and harassment. Therefore, in a country like Bangladesh, where the political system is not democratic in the true sense (Riaz, 2019), societal outlook and opportunities are not equal for women (Nasreen, 2009) and the media industry is considerably unrepresentative and discriminatory in respect of gender and class (Macharia, 2015; Kundu, 2019). Women journalists go through the harsh and hostile situations in routine. According to Nasreen (2009, p. 57)-

> "The main reason of this problem is the legal position of female is still ruled by religious laws when it comes to legacy, marriage, divorce, and child custody. Religious laws are privileged over constitutional guarantees, working against the interest of female journalist…Attitudes in society still stand against gender equality.

Very often female are not aware of their rights, even when they are, female who depend on male protection are convinced that it's not in their best interests to claim those rights."

However, there remains a dearth of comprehensive academic research in this context. Therefore, the article has examined Bangladeshi women journalists' experiences of workplace gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

## Women Journalists; Effects, Reactions and Resilience Mechanism Towards Discrimination and Sexual Harassments

The international scholarships have been discussing the effects of discrimination and sexual harassment of women as well as investigating the victims' reactions towards it for a long. A study by Barton and Storm (2014) showed harassment and threats put a long-term psychological and mental scratch within the sufferer women journalists. Ellao et al. (2021) found in Philippines, many women journalists are being sexually harassed by colleagues and sources but have chosen not to report due to fear of being judged and facing vengeance from the accused. Other reasons for silence were uncertainty about how their employer would respond, worry of losing connections, and concerns of being alienated from colleagues. Several studies (Posetti et al., 2021a; Zalnieriute, 2021; Ferrier and Garud-Patkar, 2018) have found that this fear has a chilling effect. Along with the mental and emotional effects, these types of attacks made women journalists feel chilled. It makes them hushed, limits their freedom of expression, and creates psychological discomfort (Ferrier and Garud-Patkar, 2018).

Besides offline issues, reactions towards online harassment and threats are also concerning. The global picture suggests that the impact of online harassments results in anger and frustration in journalists (RSF, 2020). Even they are experiencing burnout, exhaustion, and a desire to leave the industry (Holton et al., 2021). As a result of the added burden, many journalists have already switched or left their jobs, e.g., in Australia (North, 2013).

The work environment of Bangladeshi women journalists is somewhat similar. For instance, Safa and Akter (2015) conducted a multi-method study to determine the challenges faced by women journalists in Bangladesh. A poll of 100 women journalists and six in-depth interviews revealed that women journalists are leaving their profession due to gender-stereotyped attitudes, discrimination, harassment by male coworkers, and job uncertainty. However, a number of studies outlined coping-up actions such as changing dress-up, ignoring the problem, and so on from women journalists. For example, Ross (2014) found, British women journalists have chosen to modify their dress-up for work. While many other journalists are made to believe that "it is a part of their job" (Opoku-Mensah, 2004). Some women journalists altered their behavior towards others, including not making eye contact, not attending work social functions (Barton and Storm, 2014). In some worse cases, many journalists reported the events, but in most of the cases, they remained unsatisfied with the steps taken (North, 2016; Ferrier and Garud-Patkar, 2018).

Resilience mechanisms should not be an individual concern; rather, it should be a collective and networked approach, Martin (2018) proposed as a solution. Gendered violence and discrimination should be addressed as a multilevel internet governance issue rather than merely a personal safety concern, with improved assistance from peers, employers, and socioeconomic and regulatory institutions. Martin and Murrell (2020) recommended resilience training for both male and women journalists. Journalists should be empowered with a better oriented to collective care as well as self-care to prevent online and offline harassment.

This study offers stories of gender discrimination and harassment of women journalists in Bangladesh, and outlines its consequences on individual journalists, along with its impact on larger pledges of a free public sphere in the country.

## Theoretical Framework

The study will attempt to interpret the findings in light of Structure and Agency concepts in Socialist Feminist Theory.

### Structure and Agency in Socialist Feminist Theory

In sociology, agency is commonly demonstrated as the capacity of a social being to act freely and to manufacture his/her choices unrestrictedly. On the contrary, structures are the dynamics that create stimuli such as the concepts of social class, gender, religious systems, social customs and norms, ethnic identities, and so on, which help to control or edge an agent's decision, self-perception, actions, and reactions (Barker, 2003). In recent years, debates have raged over the significance of structure over agency as the starting point for social theory. The validity of structural theories and the extent to which social explanation must involve some conceptions of the informed, purposeful social actor are at stake in these discussions (Abrams, 1982). Approaches that emphasize either structure or agency are increasingly seen as inadequate in comparison to approaches that strive to combine both dimensions.

Feminist scholars in the '90s started relating gender analysis with the structure and agency theory where they attempted to showcase the structure as "gendered". Consequently, the gendered structure affects the free agency of women. None of the socialization process, social organization, and perception such as family, educational institutions, law, religion, social norms, relations, and other ideologies reproduction units are beyond the idea of gender (Wharton, 1991). Gendered interests and identities are embedded in every principle of social life which in long run benefited those who have the hold on the power of the structure (Hurrelmann, 1988), suggesting, the structure has the capacity to mold, construct, and reconstruct agency of an individual.

Wharton (1991) examines the changing nature of social theories on power, explaining the emergence of a new perspective that differs from the Marxist school, which emphasizes that capitalism governs all social relations. In her article, *Structure and Agency in Social Feminist Theory*, she examined several

theories of social feminism, one of which is a dual system approach that incorporates both structure and agency. The foundation of this ideology is patriarchy and capitalism, regarded as two distinct discourses. This theory blends structure and agency approaches by augmenting capitalism's structural approaches with a patriarchal perspective that prioritizes gendered actors' agency and consciousness.

Hartman (1976) described this idea as a "partnership" between capitalism and patriarchy, where her point of view implicitly integrates structure and agency viewpoints. For her, capitalist economic processes establish roles within labor divisions, and patriarchal relations decide whether men or women fill them. Patriarchy is a type of male solidarity that allows men to rule women by controlling women's labor, according to Hartman. One major flaw found by Wharton (1991) in this approach is that it connects capitalism and patriarchy in such a way that these two social connections are treated as separate and distinct entities, rooted in two distinct realms. Capitalism is viewed as a structure that exists outside of individuals, limiting their activities, but patriarchy is viewed as largely working via the actions of men and women. Gender dominance thus becomes a resource or capacity of men in comparison to women, rather than a feature of the larger organization. According to Wharton (1991), it is challenging yet necessary to conceive capitalism and gender from a standpoint that acknowledges these social relations as a motivator of action as well as a structural positional property (p. 3).

The media industry is not beyond the concept of "structure" as defined above. In Bangladesh, the discriminatory nature of the media towards women, society's reactions to them and the gendered safety mechanism- all can be described under the idea of the structure. As well as, how women act and react under the gendered media structure. Most importantly, how their sense of "free agency" is affected after being discriminated against and sexually harassed. This study intends to extend the existing theoretical perspectives by analyzing Bangladesh perspectives.

## Methods and Sampling

Two research methods- survey and in-depth interviews- have been adopted between Jan 2021 to August 2021 at Dhaka. To find survey respondents, a random sampling method is used. To our knowledge, there has no complete updated list of women journalists available in the country. Therefore, we took help from the member lists of two noted journalists' association- Bangladesh Press Club (an association of journalists all over the country, regardless of gender identity) and *Bangladesh Nari Sangbadik Kendra* (Women Journalists' Center, Bangladesh), and make a primary list of around 500 women journalists. These two associations are the most prominent with the highest number of members, although their digital member list is also not fully updated. The primary list was random, and was not organized alphabetically, or not made based on media house category. From the primary, every 10th number member was tried to be communicated for survey. For example, we called/emailed member number 1, then 10, then 20, and so on. In case of failure in establishing contact to the number 10 journalist, the 11th number

member in the list was communicated. Through this process, we managed to survey 47 women journalists (around 10%) from the primary list. All the respondents signed an informed consent agreement before their participation. The survey was conducted by Google Forms. In the survey, we asked for opinion on whether the respondents were open to participating in in-depth interviewing. We received 12 respondents interested in participating in the in-depth interviews. From that list, we managed to finally conduct eight interviews within our project timeline. The in-depth interviews were piloted through the Zoom video conferencing, face-to-face interaction, and phone calls, based on the convenience of the participants.

*Table 1.* Description of the Survey Sample

| Position | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Sub-Editor, Staff-Reporter/ Equivalent | 22 | 47% |
| Senior newsroom editor/ senior reporter/ equivalent | 10 | 21% |
| Special correspondent/ equivalent | 5 | 11% |
| Joint News Editor & Bureau Chief | 5 | 11% |
| Chief Reporter | 2 | 4% |
| Others | 3 | 6% |
| Total | 47 | 100% |

The survey questionnaire contained 35 questions divided into five thematic areas including general information (e.g., age, work experiences, workplace, position, etc.), experiences of gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment within and outside of the office, their opinion about the safety-mechanism and their reactions and coping mechanisms. Answering all the questions was "required" in the Google Form; as a result, all the 47 participants answered every question. The survey form did not ask for any identification information, such as their name, workplace name and so on. However, to get in-depth interviewing with participants, we asked them to write their email address. After getting the responses, the responses were anonymized in a separate Excel document. Later, only interested respondents were contacted for in-depth interviews through email.

The in-depth interview questioner contained six open-ended questions on working conditions, rights to practice freedom of expression, the effects of discrimination, and their coping mechanisms. Some recommendations were also sought. A total of 40 to 45 minutes was the average timeframe for each interview. We recorded the interviews on our devices (mobile and laptop), and later anonymized them as Subject A to Subject H. Only the audio form of the interview recordings is stored for further analysis. The language of the interviews was Bangla and afterward, translated and analyzed in English.

To formulate and design the survey and interview questions, the study has taken assistance from the analysis and findings of the several similar studies done by Kathuria (2018), North (2016), Koirala (2020) and Jamil (2020).

## Research Findings

Finally, for presenting and analyzing the responses, the data (both survey and interview) are divided into three thematic areas- (i) Nature of gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, (ii) Impacts of gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment (iii) Resilient mechanisms in the unsuitable working conditions.

### Ways and Nature of Gender-Based Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

To understand the nature of gender-based discrimination and harassment this study found two major themes. Theme 1. Discrimination and sexual harassment faced by women journalists in their newsroom and Theme 2. Discrimination and sexual harassment faced by women journalists outside the newsroom.

In theme 1, seven sub-categories (SC) have been identified to analyze the nature of discrimination and harassment. The survey reveals that a significant number of Bangladeshi women journalists encounter an alarming level of discrimination and sexual harassment inside the newsroom (see Tables 2-3). To summarize the results well, the first two level of responses (never and occasionally) are categorized as "Insignificant" and last three (Sometimes, Often and Always) as "Significant".

In terms of "inequality in responsibilities and decision-making," the statistics indicated that the majority (40.4 percent) of respondents experienced inequalities in their workplace at some point. Only 21.3 percent of people have never faced such challenges in their careers. Salary discrimination based on gender occurs sometimes also. But differences have been found in SC 3. Majority of the respondents indicated that they worked in a discriminatory environment in sub-category (SC) three on "discrimination in other facilities" with a percentage of 28.8% (Categorized as "Often"). The last four subgroups (gender stereotypes, professional successes being judged by gender identities, increased attention for gender identities, and receiving sexist comments) likewise.

*Table 2.* Gender-Based Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in Newsroom

| Theme 1 (a): Discrimination and sexual harassment faced by female journalists in their newsroom | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Insignificant Level* | | *Significant Level* | | |
| **Sub-categories (SC)** | **Never** | **Occasionally** | **Sometimes** | **Often** | **Always** |
| SC 1- Inequality in responsibilities and decision-making | 8.5% | 10.6% | 40.4% | 19.1% | 21.3% |
| SC 2- Discrimination in salary | 27.7% | 6.4% | 31.9% | 17% | 17% |
| SC 3- Discrimination in other facilities (increment, promotion, leave, bonus etc.) | 19.1% | 8.5% | 23.4% | 28.8% | 19.1% |
| SC 4- Faced gender stereotypes | 17% | 17% | 29.8% | 25.5% | 10.6% |

| SC 5- Professional achievements are being judged by gender identities | 29.8% | 8.5% | 31.9% | 12.8% | 17% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SC 6- Faced discrimination/extra attention for their appearances and gender identity | 14.9% | 17% | 36.2% | 17% | 14.9% |
| SC 7- Encountered sexist comments, sexual abuse, or/and abusive comments in office or by colleagues | 25.5% | 8.5% | 36.2% | 19.1% | 10.6% |

Along with the office environment, journalists were questioned if they faced harder situations outside of work. According to the survey, the majority of women journalists faced difficulties, harsh comments, and/or discouraging statements from their community/family/friends since they selected journalism as a career. Almost 44.7 percent of all respondents stated they had faced these types of situations "Sometimes." From SC 2 through SC 5 (Facing sexist insults, being physically and mentally harassed, and facing gender-based violence offline and online), the responses have been decoded to occur "sometimes," not frequently or constantly. SC 6 and SC 7 produced some unusual findings. The majority of respondents (in both sub-categories) stated that they were neither threatened to get raped or killed nor faced any direct violence. The outcome suggests that, however, the situation has not yet gone out of hand.

*Table 3.* Gender-Based Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Beyond Newsroom

| Theme 1 (b): Discrimination and sexual harassment faced by female journalists out of their newsroom | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Insignificant Level* | | *Significant Level* | | |
| **Sub-categories (SC)** | **Never** | **Occasionally** | **Sometimes** | **Often** | **Always** |
| SC 1- Faced barriers and/or negative comments and/or discouraging remarks from your community/ family/ friends about your professional identity | 10.6% | 8.5% | 44.7% | 21.3% | 14.9% |
| SC 2- Faced sexist comments | 12.8% | 21.3% | 27.7% | 27.7% | 10.6% |
| SC 3- Physically or mentally abused | 27.7% | 25.5% | 34% | 8.5% | 4.3% |
| SC 4- Faced gender-based violence and/or sexually abused (offline) | 36.2% | 21.3% | 31.9% | 10.6% | 00% |
| SC 5- Faced online violence and abuse | 25.5% | 25.5% | 34% | 10.6% | 4.3% |
| SC 6- Threatened of being raped and/or killed | 68.1% | 17% | 12.8% | 2.1% | 00% |
| SC 7- Encountered directed violence(s) (e.g., beaten, raped etc.) | 85.1% | 8.5% | 2.1% | 4.3% | 00% |

**Sexual Harassment and Discrimination: Impacts, Reactions, and Resilience**

As several journalists have to go through the discriminatory environment, in this section, the researchers wanted to know how they reacted to the discriminations. Under this category the SC 1 revealed that when a women journalist faced with office discrimination (in salary, leave, increment, responsibility distribution and decision making and so on) for her gender identity, it made her feel depressed and thought of resigning in some cases. According to the data, almost 30% percent of total respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the sentiment.

SC 2 asked respondents if they had changed their lifestyle as a result of discriminatory and sexist settings (e.g., compelled to wear long dresses, hijab and/or stopped going for reporting, etc.). According to the responses collected, women journalists in Bangladesh are strong enough to face every criticism with their heads held high. The data indicated that 27.7 percent of them "strongly disagreed" with the statement.

The experiences of gender discrimination, harassment, and violence had a significant impact on many women journalists of Bangladesh. Many of them became more self-conscious and refrained themselves for several journalistic works (e.g., stopped or decreased covering sensitive issues, appearing on the screen, etc.) which were unfolded in the SC 3 and SC 5. 51.1% and 36.2% respectively agreed upon imposing self-censorship in their personal and professional spheres. As a result, many journalists, according to accounts, have withdrawn themselves from public debates (e.g., stopped/decreased posting or sharing your works on social media, removing bad comments, etc.) (see SC 4 in Table 5). The data also supported the claim as 27.7% "agreed" with the account and 19 percent "strongly agreed".

The SC 6 and SC 7 are mainly opinion-based. In SC 6 women "strongly" (46.8%) agreed upon the existence of a hostile environment which severely restricts their freedom of expression. Women journalists have to cope with an unbalanced and hostile atmosphere that has a substantial impact on their freedom. Majority (27.7%) agreed to the statement that sexual harassments and discriminations affect 'free agency' of the women journalists.

*Table 4.* Consequences, Reactions, and Resilience of the Women Journalists

| Sub-categories (SC) | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SC 1- When I faced office discrimination (in any aspects like salary, leave, increment, responsibility distribution and decision making and so on) for my gender identity, I felt depressed, and/or thought of resigning | 8.5% | 23.4% | 12% | 29.8% | 25.5% |
| SC 2- After hearing sexist comments/ getting harassed verbally or physically, I became more self-conscious about my way of life and works (e.g., complied of wearing long dresses, hijab and or stopped going for reporting etc.) | 27.7% | 19.1% | 21.3% | 19.1% | 12.8% |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SC 3- I became more self- conscious about my journalistic works (e.g., stopped or decreased covering sensitive issues, appearing on the screen, etc.) | 21.3% | 23.4% | 14.9% | 36.2% | 4.3% |
| SC 4- I withdraw myself from public debates (e.g., stopped/decreased posting or sharing my works on social media, removing bad comments, etc.) | 8.5% | 25.5% | 19.1% | 27.7% | 19.1% |
| SC 5- Imposing self-censorship for avoiding unnecessary  problems | 8.5% | 6.4% | 17% | 51.1% | 17% |
| SC 6- 'Women journalists must | 10.6% | 10.6% | 17% | 46.8% | 14.9% |

**In-Depth Interview**

In the in-depth interview session, the researchers examined the nature of sexual harassment and discrimination, the consequences, the anomalies, their reactions and resilience strategies more descriptively.

The nature of our country's male-dominated journalism sector was stressed by the majority of women journalists. Patriarchy served as a root cause in this circumstance. Things are changing, but not at a fast enough pace, according to them. The overly controlling approach of the authority in the house hinders women from rising to leadership positions and generates a stigmatizing attitude about their abilities. In the in-depth, one senior journalist (Subject E) pronounced,

> "…in daily work routine, harassments, and gender-based discriminations became a part and parcel of our life…. Coming to journalism means, we have (women journalists) to accept the truth that they have to face these issues…. 'I am a middle-class and male' – it is the default profile for journalism. And I think it needs to be changed as women should have the level-playing field for their work."

Many women journalists have accused patriarchal society of being responsible. According to certain interviewees, the underlying impulses of "girls cannot do this/that" popped up on a regular basis. This happens more when assigning big responsibilities. It leads to gender difference and demotivates women employees professionally. While the Subject A thought that,

> "Patriarchy tends to look upon women as a mere subject, not a person. Previously society couldn't think of women working as journalist, not even women themselves. That's why we couldn't see much participation in this field. Situation started to improve a little in 90s."

With the nature of the Bangladeshi journalism sector, women feel uneasy, ridiculed, and useless. One interviewee opined that "Overprotective attitude of the higher authority in the house is preventing women to reach top positions and it creates a demeaning/humiliating experience for the women".

Concerning difficulties, ladies discussed how easily their "character" could be judged. When women achieve any level of success, there is invariably a backlash:

they must be the spunky journalists, the dishonest journalists, or the beautiful journalists. "You'll have to make up for it in other ways" one said. Another interviewee, Subject D thought,

> "There are challenges for women in journalism as it is perceived in our society, by many, that an independent woman, as an example if one women journalist came home late, her surroundings start asking questions. She is perceived as a bad woman and her character is being scrutinized."

Some also discussed how they would react or cope with the issue. One said "men are like the ruler of this society so it is inevitable that they won't spare their portion of power, for women's freedom and that is happening in journalism." As a result, in consequences, women journalists self-censor themselves as the date in the survey suggests. Subject C said, "Sealing one's tongue is far better instead of facing unwanted problems." Another interviewee, Subject B said

> "I do my job for my interest in the profession, and it is also a necessity of mine. So, getting offended by the abuses and sexism in online and offline and leaving job will be a luxury for me. That is why, I am trying to cop up and survive."

However, it did not come without a cost because she chose to cover uncontroversial themes that would not leave her in a bad situation.

## Findings and Discussion

It is apparent from the data that societal gender stereotypes, chauvinism, and a patriarchal worldview pervade the professional realms of Bangladeshi journalism. This study, however, summarizes the whole data with some unique and significant discoveries.

### Exploring the Ways and Nature of Discrimination and Harassment

The results of the study revealed that women journalists in Bangladesh face a significant level of gender discrimination and harassment during their work inside and outside of their office. The discriminations included inequalities in work responsibilities and decision-making, discrimination in salary, gender stereotypes in the workplace, sexist comments or sexual abuses, and so on. Outside of their offices, they also face barriers such as abusive and sexist comments, physical or mental abuse, online and offline violence, and rape and death threats. The results are consistent with previous research from many western countries and other countries of South-Asia (Jamil, 2020; Koirala, 2019). Several insights are revealed by the overall results of the study. Women journalists in Bangladesh face different kinds of discrimination, harassment, and violence inside and outside of their workplaces. The survey found several ways of discrimination and harassment. They have to face different inequalities in their work responsibilities for their gender identity, encounter discrimination in salary and other facilities, fight

gender-based stereotypes and also have to go through sexist retorts, abusive comments. They face discriminations or sometimes extra attention for their gender identity.

It has also been observed by researchers from the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, France, Latin-American, Spain, Canada, Turkey and Arab World (Article 19, 2020; Chen et al., 2018; North, 2016). Findings in this study are consistent with other countries' research. However, compering the range of women journalists who are subjected to the harassments and discrimination with the world picture, it is found that the percentages are considerably higher here.

Some causes were disclosed during the in-depth interview session. Prime causes have been identified as patriarchy, masculine chauvinism, and the authoritative institution. Specifically in the workplace, gender-based discrimination and harassment for anyone's gender identity is a familiar issue since society is still in a profound patriarchal mindset (Nazneen, 2017). UN conducted a multi-country study to find the root causes of violence against women in 2013 where they found "while gender inequality, power and violent forms of masculinity may be understood as the root causes of violence against women", which are closely linked with individual, community, household and social causes (Fulu et al., 2013). The findings echoed the state of the country since it has been observing that women of all ages and all backgrounds use to get exposed to harassments and discriminations and causes might be deep-rooted in the social system.

However, the harassment has not been found to be extreme in nature. Women journalists are clearly subjected to prejudice and sexual harassment. The discrimination and harassment are "Significant," but not excessive. Also, it is reassuring that the majority of women journalists did not encounter direct violence or threats of being raped or killed (see Table 3). There is discrimination (albeit perhaps not at an extreme level), yet there is no danger to anyone's life.

**Findings on the Reaction and Resilience Strategies of Women Journalists**

The results of the study suggested that a significant number of women journalists among the respondents went through various levels of difficulties. These discriminatory and unhealthy environments harm their practice of freedom of expression. Respondents talked about several impacts, such as they imposed self-censorship, withdrawn from public debate, changed their way of life, and stopped/decreased practicing freedom of expression for avoiding extra problems (see Table 4). This denotes that the consistent encountering of gender discrimination and harassment made them try to raise their voices and practice their human rights properly. The result is also relevant with some literature discussed beforehand (Ross, 2014; Opoku-Mensah, 2004) where considering these harassments as "part of the job" or "becoming more conservative" were found to work as resilience strategies. Adapting appears to be a coping method.

In the interview session, women journalists revealed how they play it safe, tackling uncontroversial issues that would not get them in hot water. As a result, women journalists avoid controversial issues and become more easygoing in their

work life. As, being upset by abuses and sexism both online and offline, and quitting their job, will be a luxury for some of them. This result also echoes Martin and Murrell (2020) where they discussed the necessity for Australian journalists to develop a "thick skin" when it comes to dealing with interpersonal and coordinated violence online.

But why do they want to remain silent while refusing to fight back? Some of the answers in the in-depth interview are alarming. In Bangladesh, women involved in journalism have to go through these situations- is apparently a notion which is taken for granted. That is why, when they make formal complaints or take legal action, they do not get justice. Even a good number of women journalists said they cannot fully trust national and own-media house safety and protection system. That is why they deal with specific threatening environments with a weak protection and safety mechanism that restricts their work and/or has a disproportionate impact in the exercise of their freedom. Moreover, it has impact on the upcoming women journalists as one stated that "Misogyny, discriminations, online harassments, and sexism these have severe impact on the women in the professions and even on the upcoming journalists since these are red singles for their security and liberty of working freely." This fear and insecurity have been named as "Chilling effect" by several studies (Posetti et al., 2021; Zalnieriute, 2021; Ferrier and Garud-Patkar, 2018) and is also prevalent among Bangladeshi women journalists.

However, many journalists are still trying to survive bravely in the situation as they did not change themselves as others please. So, the good news is that, despite these challenges, the majority did not modify their perceptions, patterns of thinking, or lifestyle (see Table 4). This demonstrates the positive mindset of Bangladeshi women journalists.

## Discussion and Recommendations

In light of the theoretical framework, the findings of this study can be discussed. The frame of feminist approach to structure and agency theory outlined that discrimination and sexism in and out of the newsroom, which is truly a double-bend for the women in the professions, commonly prevent it from emerging as a "free agency". This free agency should be in its fullest exhibitions of self and free from any other external or systematic power or circumstances (Feinberg, 1989). However, according to the responses of the participants, the discriminatory media industry and sexual harassment are defining or trying to mold the women in their own way, and in the long run these glitches in the media's structure affect victim journalists' self-identity and agency. The patriarchal and male-dominated structure of the media industry (Macharia, 2015) as well as the overall society which is not ready to accept women in a profession like journalism. So the two forces combined and worked as a shield in the success pathway of the women. The study by Hasan and Wadud (2020) outlined that journalists (both males and women) in Bangladesh suffer from multiple layers of difficulties such as insecurity, state-sponsored pressures, the pressure of laws and media system

itself prevent them to work freely with significant impact on journalists' free agency. Narrowing down the sample to only women, the study found that in addition to the aforementioned difficulties of all the journalists, women are encountering gender-based violence and discrimination inside and outside of their office with substantial effect of their free agency.

This study uncovers that a major portion of women journalists do not have confidence the safety mechanism of their own houses and county's legal procedures. The survey data revealed that those who have lodged a formal or informal grievance are unsatisfied with the aftermath result. Women journalists are going through a considerable amount of silence as they do not have confidence in the legal framework as well as the protection mechanisms of their media houses (see Table 4). Moreover, the study also demonstrated the negative consequences of sexual harassment, gender-based discrimination and impunities on the personal and professional lives of journalists. Many women journalists started to believe that they have to seal their mouth, self-censor themselves or continue under the sexist environment or just leave the profession.

For combating with the odds, many journalists came up with recommendations to make the situation healed, since they think parting would not be the retort; rather surviving and, at the same time, endeavoring to craft a gender-friendly professional environment would be the better way outs. Subject C stated that "discrimination against women should be stopped and the society should uphold the human rights of women by creating gender sensitive laws." The participants of the survey recommended that "there should be strong policy at all media house to protect women journalists from sexual abuse. Complaints of sexual harassment must be ignored and action must be taken to prevent recurrence of such incidents." Another journalist said, "I have nothing to say, there is no solution to come out of this situation." Moreover, some other recommendations came for mending the sorrowful situation of media such as- encouraging more women in the profession so that women voices are heard more, calling the houses to address the issues, speaking out the harassment and discriminatory incidents instead of keeping silence which will help to prevent further instances and lastly pressuring the government to address the issue.

Women journalists in Bangladesh face a significant level of harassment resulting in severe consequences on their psychological and professional lives. The analysis has pointed out that this phenomenon is directly affecting their free agency and plurality of the voices in the media.

In this regard, addressing gender-based discrimination and ensuring a safe and respectful work environment for women journalists in Bangladesh, major structural reform is needed inside and outside of the media. Women also should come out of their den and keep their voices louder in the media. Elimination of discriminatory stereotypes and patriarchal sociocultural patterns. It is also recommended that proper safety training to the women journalists, psychological counseling facilities, complaint box in the office premises and strict measures against the perpetrators should be ensured by the media authorities. Therefore, the state should complement these measures with actions aimed at dismantling and

transforming patriarchal structures, systems, and practices that are sustained and reproduced in various spheres of society.

## Definition of Terms

### Gender Discrimination

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defined gender discrimination as 'any distinction, exclusion or restriction made based on sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the enjoyment of rights, on a basis of equality of men and women, and irrespective of marital status' (UNHCR, 2021). In this research, gender discrimination stood for the discrimination derived from gender perspectives for the women media practitioners in Bangladesh such as gender-based discrimination of salary and other facilities, opinion making, responsibility allotments and so one in and out their workplaces.

### Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is defined here as unwelcome sexual acts, requests for sexual favors or unconsented sexual conduct which would offend, humiliate, or intimidate the subject. It can be any form of sexual comments, assaults, threats, and attacks in any of the medium- physical, verbal or digital.

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# Stakeholders' Assessment of Fundraising as a Factor of Image Building in Public Secondary Schools in South West Region, Cameroon

*By Nengieh Lizzie Wantchami[*]*

This study seeks to assess fund raising as a factor of image building in public secondary schools (PSS) in the South West Region of Cameroon by evaluating whether excellence as well as school alumni is been celebrated in the schools with an overall evaluation of fundraising efforts of PSS in the SW region of Cameroon. The study made use of a cross sectional survey of students, teachers and parents of 12 schools in the rural and urban settings in the six divisions of the South West region of Cameroon. 1094 students, 48 teachers and 55 parents completed the survey. Findings reveal that students were significantly ($P<0.05$) more satisfied with school-alumni relationship in urban areas with a proportion of 44.6% as compared to 24.1% in rural areas. The study further concludes that PSS have not recognised the importance of fundraising for their institutions in both the rural and urban settings as assessed by students ($\chi2$-test: $\chi2$=123.53; df=1; P=0.000) and parents ($\chi2$-test: $\chi2$=37.50; df=1; P=0.000). This finding challenges Pistolis (2012) findings which reveal that schools in affluent neighbourhoods often raise more funds than schools located in lower socioeconomic neighbourhoods which expounds as a direct extension of their private life into the public school system. PSS in the SW region of Cameroon therefore need to recognise fundraising as a development mechanism for their schools.

*Keywords:* fundraising, image building, school community, rural and urban schools, Cameroon

## Introduction

The celebration of excellence and support of school projects are some of the basic activities that require external funding. The school community including school authorities, teachers, students, parents, the alumni and local authorities are some of the major stakeholders that either benefit directly or indirectly from activities carried out within the schools. They therefore need to collaborate with each other in order to build successful schools. The funding available to support school projects are often at the minimal hence these stakeholders need to support the schools in order for the schools to achieve their goal of teaching and learning in a conducive environment. The alumni and parents are the key stakeholders that desire not only institutional prestige for these schools but need to see their children and Alma matter achieve the goal of teaching and learning to enhance academic success. This study is relevant as it unveils the value ascribed to fundraising in

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public secondary schools in the South West region of Cameroon and points the need to involve the different stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, alumni) in school activities and projects. The study thereby seeks to appraise stakeholders' perception of fundraising activities as a factor of image building based on the following objectives:

1. To examine if public secondary schools (PSS) in the SW Region recognise excellence as a factor to foster their images with their stakeholders.
2. To evaluate students and teachers' assessment of school-alumni relationship.
3. To ascertain whether public secondary schools (PSS) in the SW Region recognise fund-raising as a factor for image enhancement.

## Literature Review

Cameroon being a developing country has faced numerous challenges in its educational system especially in the dawn of the 21st century where the global market is increasingly becoming competitive. The question now is if present structures meet the aspirations of institutions that contribute positively in sustainable activities in the country (Tanjong, 2008). The quality of the educational system determines the sustainability of other institutions within the society as there are the main sources of manpower. Despite the high competition in this sector stemming from the liberalisation of secondary education (Law No 2004/022 of 2nd July 2004) with resultant effects, an outrageous number of secondary schools in the country (both private and public), public secondary schools especially, have not realised the essence of communicating and/or publicising their core ideologies to their stakeholders in order to stand the competition demonstrated by their private counterparts, relevant for the production of responsible Cameroonians. This problem emanates from the lukewarm attitude expressed by public school administrators who believe that they do not need to communicate for good image to increase school enrolment, create strong alumni, and cultivate local linkages and partnerships with the community and with businesses since according to Jimenez et al. (1995) and Dronkers and Robert (2003) they are dependent on tax-supported government agencies, administratively dependent and are relatively cheap in terms of fees and therefore harness larger populations of students.

Also, many public school administrators, some quite renowned, consider it a superfluous and worthless expense in creating a Public Relations Office to cater for the image of the school. According to Carlsmith and Railsback (2001), Agyapong et al. (2013), school public relations is about establishing and promoting partnerships within the community, providing value to parents, employees, students and the public. Public relations therefore exist as an essential middleman between the corporation and its public, with a basic function to perform (Moore and Kalupa, 2007). They distribute newsletters containing information about campus events, and build and maintain ties with alumni, lecturers, staff and students (Agyapong et al., 2013). Most private secondary schools in Cameroon are distancing themselves from public secondary schools in terms of the image they

furnish to the public. Coleman et al. (1982) believe that private education can spur public schools to compete for students. Although there are many types of private schools, analysts have argued that they possess general characteristics that differentiate them from public schools. These characteristics include a greater flexibility in operation and funding, a direct accountability to those who use their services and a greater tendency for those in charge of individual schools to make critical educational decisions (Coleman et al., 1982).

Parents and especially those who send their children to public secondary schools, community, and alumni of these schools are somewhat detached from the activities and projects carried out by them (Wantchami, 2017). Jones (2008) laments that whereas parents were involved in their children's education at the primary level, perhaps helping out in class, listening to readers, supporting art projects, assisting at fund raising events, with the school gate a daily conduit for the transmission of information from parents to teachers and vice versa, when children reach secondary school, they acquire a sudden independence as parents are no longer welcomed, either by the staff or by the students themselves who regard parental presence as an embarrassment. Contact with the school becomes confined to the formality of parents' evenings and report cards (Jones, 2008). This detachment has a negative impact not only on the child's education but on the impressions parents sometimes have about public secondary schools (Wantchami, 2017) which dissuade them from supporting schools project.

In view of Cameroon becoming an emergent nation by 2035, there is need to develop human capacity, which is possible through the quality of education (Growth and Employment Strategy Paper – GESP, 2009) which can basically be reflected by the image the public holds about schools be it via symbolic, communicational or behavioural means. The Government attaches much importance to education as a priority sector (National Institute of Statistics, 2010). During the school year 2008/2009 (fiscal year 2009), the State allocated, only for the education sector, nearly 15.5% of its total budget, 357.609 billion CFA francs, an increase of almost 1.4% compared to the school year 2007/2008 [fiscal year 2008] (National Institute of Statistics, 2010). Although the government has prioritised this sector, Cameroon's allocation has been far below the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) recommended budget allocation of 26% for education (Besong, 2013). This is an indication that public schools may be inadequately funded (Pistiolis, 2012) and hence need to derive techniques to better enhance not only school infrastructure but other services that might damage the image of public schools. Pistiolis (2012) further asserts that the impact of fundraising in public schools is significant. Fundraising in schools has become the norm in attempting to meet growing educational demands (Rich, as cited in McCarthy, 2005, para. 9). These pressures make fundraising implicitly mandatory for schools as they seek to provide high quality education (Pistiolis, 2012).

ICTs have remained the backbone through which education is enhanced, but very few public secondary schools in Cameroon have a multimedia centre, not to mention accessible internet connections within their school campuses. Josué (2007) alleges that after the introduction of ICTs into education by President Paul

Biya in 2001, very few multimedia resource centres (MRCs) have been created in public secondary schools. He lamented that these projects rely mainly on external funding, thus calling their sustainability into question. Moreover, public secondary schools have poor purchasing power, and no budget has been allotted to support ICT-related activities in schools. Most computers used in schools are donations (Josué, 2007). Plomp et al. (2007) assert that people have to access knowledge via ICT to keep pace with the latest developments. ICT can be used to remove communication barriers such as that of space and time (Lim and Chai, 2004), and allow for the creation of digital resources like digital libraries where the students, teachers and professionals can access research materials and course materials from any place at any time (Bhattacharya and Sharma, 2007; Cholin, 2005). Such facilities allow the networking of academics and researchers and hence sharing of scholarly materials (Josué, 2007)) which helps increase the school's visibility and impacts its image. Public schools need to canvass for sponsorship and donations of ICT tools by creating partners in order to embrace the benefits of this technological innovation.

Also, the insufficiency of teachers in PSS especially in rural areas has been raised as a problem by Anglophone teachers' trade unions in 2017. Schools need the support of their educational community in order to emerge from the challenges they face. The composition of the educational community as stipulated in Section 32 of Law No 004/98 of 14 April 1998 comprise all individuals and corporate bodies that contribute towards the functioning, development and prestige of a school. It shall comprise the following members: the authorities, the administrative and support staff, teachers, parents, students, persons from socio-professional circles, regional and local authorities." Section 33 further stipulates that the members of the educational community shall be involved through their representativeness in the consultative and management bodies set up at the educational level, and at each level of decentralised territorial authorities, or of the national educational setup. The educational community therefore made up of citizens has as their responsibility to contribute towards the functioning, development and prestige of the school. This could be done only through effective participation in the running of the school. Hence, schools should design their goals with due recognition of their stakeholders because the stakeholders have a great role to play in the advancement of the school. Following Shaeffer (1994) definition of participation, the present practices of citizen participation in education include: at school level, the population as citizens intervene in seeing that schools are effectively run. According to the National Anti-corruption Commission, they are expected to report cases of corruption and malpractice in the school milieu. With regards to public contracts, they are expected to act as the eyes of the government and to report cases of abandoned and poorly executed contracts. They are also expected through the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) or as individuals, to contribute money, materials, labour, gifts, donations to help enhance the material and financial wellbeing of the Cameroon educational system. Furthermore, they are expected, through their participation in forums (for example, the National Educational Forum, 1995), in a consultative manner, in debates, and make

suggestions which will help enhance the smooth running of the educational system (circular No. 045/B1/1464/MINESEC/SG/DSAPPS of 13 September 1996).

At the managerial level, citizens, though not directly involved in the day-to-day running of our public schools in particular, could, through their participation in the PTA, and through their representatives in the School Management Boards, exert control and influence on the educational system. The School Management Boards, created by Decree No 2001/04 of 19th February 2004 act as arbitrators and regulatory organs on how schools are managed, and supervise the activities of external actors like the PTA. They have the responsibility of reporting any case of misuse of funds by school authorities or the PTA. The PTA acts as a forum for parents, as citizens, to intervene in the educational sector. Created by Law No. 95/53 of 19/12/1990 on the creation of associations, and modified by circular No. 045/B1/1464/MINESEC/SG/DSAPPS of 13 September 1996, the modalities of the functioning of PTA's in schools have undergone many modifications. However, the most recent circular No. 07/08/MINESEC/CAB of 25 February 2008, states that parents through PTA, could contribute funds which could be used to:

- Pay the wages of temporary teachers, security and maintenance staff;
- Construct and maintain school property: equipment, buildings, and instructional materials movables.
- Promote a healthy environment. Citizens, who are parents, are expected to exercise their citizenship by controlling funds for the development of the institutions harbouring their children or wards.

Part IV, line 2b of the same circular empowers them to "denounce any financial misappropriation that they may observe in the management of PTA funds.

At the investment levels, the recent law on decentralisation, in consonance with Section 32 of Law No. 004/98 line 2(f), recognises and empowers local councils to intervene in our educational sectors. These interventions, however, are not at the managerial level. Rather, local councils could sponsor construction projects, give gifts, and sponsor some school activities. Individuals and alumni on the other hand, could also participate by making donations (books, instructional materials) or sponsoring construction works in schools as part of their citizenship responsibilities, or by virtue of their Alma matter.

Manafo (2006) posits that successful outreach programmes can do wonders for the image of a school and for the quality of life in the community and public schools should cultivate local linkages and partnerships that could help in sponsoring programmes within the school. Manafo (2006) encourages public schools to solicit major gifts and endowments. Major gifts and endowment donations are not the exclusive domain of schools in the private sector. Manafo appeals that if you ask the right person and present a compelling case, those with resources will generally be pleased to assist. A public relations department of a school or organisation may help set up such programmes and then publicise them to the community (Arens and Bovee, 1994).

Manafo (2006) further urges public schools to create a strong alumni base in order to enhance their image. He asserts that there are a dozen good reasons for a school to track its alumni and to stay in regular contact with them. Many public schools are rather lax about following their graduates. Some public schools track graduates merely for the sake of organising traditional five-year class reunions. However, too many public schools abdicate all alumni functions. They simply pass them on to former class leaders and then wash their hands off alumni affairs. Manafo believes this is a golden opportunity wasted. When one considers the successful careers of many public school graduates, it is surprising that public schools generally have little interest in cultivating those who have passed through their portals. He urges the use of the entrepreneurial spirit of the internet to fill in for this shortcoming of public education.

Other research focused on studying the characteristics of alumni donors and non-donors. For instance, one study used data collected from seventy-three large, high-profile universities (Research I universities) from 1977 to 1980. The results showed that institutional prestige (age and quality of the university) tended to be the main predictor of alumni contributions, followed by donor recognition and social ties of alumni with the school (Leslie and Ramey, 1988).

Results of the study carried out by Pistiolis (2012) shows a positive correlation between fundraising amounts and academic achievement. The extra funds raised by affluent schools were used in various ways and provided many benefits. Funds were used for schoolyard revitalisations, sports, academies, transportation, technology, books, musical instruments, sports, equipment, field trips, extracurricular activities; special school guests that help teach the students, professional paid school performances, and other items. Results of this study further revealed that fundraised money frees up the school budget to make certain purchases and all the principals interviewed agreed that many of the items purchased through extra funds do increase student achievement.

Findings support that schools which fundraised large amounts of money overall experienced a higher level of student achievement. Principals provided their professional assessment on how the utilisation of extra funds does support and increase student engagement and learning. Fundraising in schools is a tool used to provide additional resources and experiences to students with the objective of increasing student engagement and achievement. The results of fundraising favoured schools in affluent neighbourhoods because they are able to raise more funds and therefore utilise these funds in more ways to support student engagement and achievement than schools located in lower socioeconomic neighbourhoods. For students attending a school in an affluent neighbourhood this often means an extension of their private lifestyle into the public school system (Pistiolis, 2012). "Kids in low socioeconomic schools should derive the same opportunities in a perfect world as kids in middle or high socioeconomic schools. Through school fundraising the rich kids are maintaining a level that they are already getting at home" (Principal #6, interview, July 28, 2011). This inequity suggests that students in low socioeconomic schools need fundraised resources and experiences more so than students in schools in middle or high socioeconomic neighbourhoods (Pistiolis, 2012).

All principals interviewed expressed the view that the results of fundraising impact student achievement positively, and their personal and professional experience in this area is supported by research in the education field (Pistiolis, 2012). For instance, while some people may think music, physical education, extracurricular activities and contact with nature are educational "frills", these opportunities are very important for all students. Lack of extracurricular activities in schools due to low generated funds significantly impacts a student's overall success (People for Education, 2011, p. 3). People for Education reports that "Arts and sports programmes play a key role in engaging students in school, yet the majority of elementary schools have no music teacher, and parent fundraising for the arts and sports continues to create inequities among schools" (People for Education, 2010, p. 3). The students most negatively affected are poor and visible minority students (TDSB Inner City Committee Advisory Committee (Fees and Funding Subcommittee), 2010, December, p. 12). Margaret Atwood insists on reminding people, not only is exercise an antidepressant – especially important for teenagers – but movement improves brain function. Like music training – shown to increase memory – it facilitates more efficient learning. It improves blood flow to the entire mind-body, thus aiding neural connectivity. But our education experts have tossed out not only music, but physical education. Also, the third essential mind-body patterning aid – contact with nature – has been severely cut back as well…Pay attention, taxpayers: music, movement and nature are not frills! (Atwood, 2010, pp. 22-23). Principals also pursue fundraising to ensure field trips take place because they are a very important piece to a student's education (Pistiolis, 2012)

Lack of adequate motivation in a system has negative effects on staff performance. In every organisation, activities and programmes are planned and executed for the purpose of accomplishing the goals and objectives of the organisation. The issue and problem of how to motivate teachers so that they work hard for the interest of the school and also raise their socio-economic status have occupied the attention of educational administrators. It is believed that hard work and commitment on the part of the teachers will bring about good job performance. Teachers will work hard and show high levels of commitment when adequately motivated (Akporehe, 2011). Motivation, according to Odor (1995), is the force or condition within the organisation that compels workers to work willingly for the progress of the organisation. Human beings generally require some sort of internal and external drives, incentives, encouragement and satisfaction of basic needs to get the best from them towards the accomplishment of the group goals and objectives (Odor, 1995).

Motivation according to Nwachukwu (1998) is an energising force that produces or compels and maintains behaviour. A good work environment therefore is that kind of environment where staff is highly motivated for hard job and commitment to bring about good job performance. Salaries and allowances are not as important to most staff as good job environment and job satisfaction. Several teachers leave the teaching profession not because of poor salaries but because of lack of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a function of the general aura of the work environment.

Good work environment is the type of environment that provides job satisfaction to employees. It is a situation where all the necessary conditions and facilities that will assist the teachers and school administrators to do their work well are provided. This includes good and well-furnished air conditioned offices with good communications and information technology network, teaching facilities and materials, good working atmosphere and open organisational climate. In these situations, the teacher will have a good image, high esteem, and will love his job and hence put in his best (Akporehe, 2011).

Akporehe (2011) further describes the moderate work environment as facilities that are in relatively good condition and the working conditions are just fair but not good enough for effective learning. Teachers and administrators under this condition are not very zealous about their performance on the job. The poor work environment is the type we have in most schools today where teachers' offices are either non-existent or very poorly equipped. Many schools lack chairs for teachers and students. Some schools are in such dilapidated conditions that teachers feel ashamed of being associated with them. They have low morale, no job satisfaction and are not willing to put enough efforts to achieve the goals of education because they lack motivation.

In encouraging accountability of funds as purported by Arens and Bovee (1994), Manafo (2006) insists that public schools should define what they are raising money for. Although annual giving and major gift funds often go directly into the general funds or endowments of schools, Manafo (2006), Body (2017) asserts that he favours earmarking funds for specific programmes or projects other than raising funds simply to subsidise the day-to-day operation of any school, public or private. Earmarked projects, endowed chairs, and brick-and-mortar campaigns are much easier to pitch to prospective donors. It is much more difficult to ask an alumnus or a local business for a donation for daily operations. Manafo (2006) suggests that public school alumni would be much more inclined to give to their alma mater if they knew exactly how their donation would be spent.

Once a principal has a school council, he/she needs to invest the time to articulate the needs of the school and to influence, motivate, coach and collaborate with the parents and staff to maximize fundraising efforts by identifying and limiting fundraising activities to goals that will most benefit the school by carrying out adequate background research. The principal's role is to sell "the physical and emotional benefits of what the fundraiser can do for the school" (Mabry, 2005, p. 3; Miller et al., 2020). Various variables are essential for fundraising effectiveness with the absence of scarcity of one or some of them reducing the overall impact of others, including: financial capability of constituency, a clear and strong institutional mission, personal relationship between donors and institution leaders, donors' engagement in institution's activities, institution's reputation, history and tradition, informed and committed constituency, predisposition of donors to give, society's confidence in the value created by the institution economic, political and social situation, tax policy in terms of state laws encouraging or not philanthropy. Academic and administrative staffs need to appreciate these variables in the fundraising efforts. Effective leadership of academics and administrative staffs to man fundraising efforts deals with; the willingness to be involved in the fundraising

process; abilities and skills in fundraising, effective management of the institutions; effort and commitment; moral integrity; fiscal vitality of the institution; effective planning; effective stewardship of resources; donors' confidence, and appropriate gratitude and recognition of donations (Madeo, 2022).

## Theoretical Framework

The Charitable Triad Theory by Chapman et al. (2022) is relevant for this study. The theory proposes that giving is triadic because of the characteristics of three actors – donors, beneficiaries and fundraisers – who influence charitable decisions. It further propound that the characteristics of each of the three actors may be necessary but not sufficient to promote giving and that giving is relational because interactive relationships between the triad determine charitable choices. This theory is relevant as it explains the need for schools (via the development office) to relate with the school community and study each of their stakeholders' characteristics to get them involve in fund raising efforts in order to support school activities and projects. The donor characteristics include: sociodemographic (gender, income and wealth, age, religiosity and education), emotions (guilt, compassion, gratitude, happiness, regret), people's identities especially when such an identity supports social norms, cost and benefit (Chapman et al. 2020). Beneficiaries are perceived more worthy when they furnish information in terms of identifiability and number of victims that needs support than in the abstract while fundraisers are characterised based on their legitimacy [trustworthiness, professionalism, accountability and so on] (Chapman et al. 2022).

## Material and Methods

### Research Design

Data for this study was gathered quantitatively in the form of a cross-sectional survey using questionnaires. According to Babbie (1990), surveys include cross-sectional and longitudinal studies using questionnaires or structured interviews for data collection, with the intent of generalising from a sample to a population. The population of the study is made up of stakeholders of public secondary schools in the SW Region of Cameroon. Respondents were randomly selected from the school population made up of internal and external stakeholders. However, not every stakeholder group that relates with the school was interviewed for the study. The stakeholder groups including teachers, students, and parents were purposely sampled since they are the dominant stakeholders of the school and therefore have a powerful, legitimate and direct relationship with the school and since school decisions affect this relationship as well as their perception about the school.

**Sampling Procedure and Sample Size**

Public secondary schools under the general section in the South West Region were stratified into 6 groups according to divisions. Each group was then divided into two according to rural and urban settings (12 groups). Urban and rural schools were recognised in terms of their development and age. According to UNICEF (2012), an urban area can be defined by one or more of the following: administrative criteria or political boundaries (area within the jurisdiction of a municipality or town committee), a threshold population size (where the minimum for an urban settlement is typically in the region of 2,000 people, although this varies globally between 2000 and 50,000), population density, economic function (where a significant majority of the population is not primarily engaged in agriculture, or where there is surplus employment) or the presence of urban characteristics (paved streets, electric lighting, sewerage). Rural areas on the other hand are traditional, authoritative, generally not so literate, in most cases poor and tend to be a little more resistant to change (Ndu et al., 1997). A simple random sampling method was then used in selecting 12 schools using the lottery method from the 12 groups; 6 rural and 6 urban schools, one per category from each division. Based on the lottery method, the names of rural and urban schools from each division were written on paper and folded. The folded papers were then put in 12 boxes representing the 12 groups and well stirred. A tag was then drawn from each box until we arrived at 6 rural and 6 urban schools according to division as represented in table 2. The gender breakdown was also based on proportion. Students were randomly selected from Forms, 4, 5 to Lower Sixth and Upper Sixth classes of each school. These classes were purposively sampled owing to their duration in that school which gives them knowledge about the activities of the school.

**Sample Size**

The researcher conveniently sampled 5 teachers and 5 parents per school within the 6 divisions (5x12 schools; 5x12 schools) giving a sample size of 60 teachers and 60 parents for the study. The sample size for students was estimated using sample calculation for one proportion with the support of EpiInfo 6.04d (CDC, 2001) as explained by Nana (2012).

$$n = \frac{NZ^2 P(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + Z^2 P(1-P)}$$

Where N=total population, Z= Z value corresponding to the confidence level, d= absolute precision, P=expected proportion in the population, n effective=n*design effect. The prospected prevalence is 50% for an optimal sample size. The precision considered is 5%, a design effect (marginal error) of 1 given that simple random sampling was used to select the schools. For a total study population of public grammar secondary students in the South West Region of 49115 as seen in table 1 (Regional Delegation of the South West, 2012/2013), the sample size at 95% CI

estimated as explained above is 1163. This sample size is shared proportionately to size, to the divisions and schools.

*Table 1.* Distribution of Sample by Division

| Division | Total number of students | Sample size |
|---|---|---|
| Fako | 7536 | 178 |
| Manyu | 9578 | 227 |
| Kupe Muanenguba | 6831 | 162 |
| Ndian | 520 | 12 |
| Lebialem | 6573 | 156 |
| Meme | 18077 | 428 |
| Total | 49115 | 1163 |

At the end of the data collection procedure, a code guide was designed and questionnaires were coded by 6 coders in order to ensure inter-coder and intra-coder reliability. 1094 students, 48 teachers and 55 parents completed the survey. Data were made essentially categorical variables and they were analysed using frequencies and proportions and Multiple Response Analysis to aggregate responses within conceptual components. To ensure the validity of the tools, the researchers submitted the questionnaires to research experts. This involved assessing the consistency of the questionnaire to the research objectives. Reliability of research instrument was assured by carrying a pilot study as well as applying Cronbach Alpha reliability analysis. Chi-Square test was used to compare proportions for significant difference and to measure the association between categorical variables. The collected data were analysed quantitatively using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21.0).

## Findings and Discussion

## Public Secondary Schools (PSS) in the SW Region Recognise Excellence as a Factor to Foster Their Images with Their Stakeholders

*Table 2.* Students, Teachers and Parents' Appraisal of Schools' Celebration of Excellence

| Statements | Students | Teachers | Parents | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My school gives awards to teachers/staff with outstanding performance in their duties | 60.7%(664) | 43.8%(21) | 26.8%(293) | 1094 |
| My school gives awards to students with outstanding performance in their academic performance | 77.7%(850) | 79.2%(38) | 14.0%(153) | 1094 |
| My school gives awards to students with outstanding managerial (school prefects) and extracurricular performance | 54.3%(594) | 47.9%(23) | 27.9%(305) | 1094 |
| MRS | 64.2%(2108) | 56.9% (82) | 22.9%(751) | 3282 |

$\chi^2$-test: $\chi^2$=37.21; df=2; P=0.000.
Comparing between students and teachers: $\chi^2$-test: $\chi^2$=1.25; df=1; P=0.264.

Results from Table 2 reveal that on aggregate, 64.2% of the students agreed with the indicators that measured how schools celebrate their excellence, with 12.9% of them neither agreeing nor disagreeing. However, majority of the students, that is 77.7% (850), 60.7% (664) and 54.3% (594), agreed with the opinions that schools reward students with outstanding performances, teachers/ staff with outstanding performance in their duties and gives awards to students with outstanding managerial and extracurricular performances respectively. Regarding the three categories of stakeholders, the difference was significant (P<0.05), but was insignificant between students and teachers (P>0.05). These therefore imply, students and teachers perceived that public secondary schools (PSS) in the SW Region recognise excellence as a factor to foster their images with their stakeholders while parents do not appreciate the school efforts in the celebration of excellence as a majority of students (64.2%) and teachers (56.9%) have positive views, in significant contrast to the parents (22.9%), marking a significant difference (P<0.05).

*Table 3.* Students' Appraisal of Schools' Celebration of Excellence by Background Indicators

| Indicator | Categories | Satisfied with the manner in which schools celebrate excellence | | | N_responses | Chi-Square |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | | |
| Setting type | Rural | 48.8%(341) | 15.3%(107) | 35.9%(251) | 699 | $\chi^2$=30.30 P=0.000 |
| | Urban | 68.4%(1767) | 12.2%(316) | 19.4%(500) | 2583 | |
| Cycle | First cycle | 59.3%(1143) | 12.1%(233) | 28.7%(553) | 1929 | $\chi^2$=17.02 P=0.000 |
| | Second cycle (lower sixth and upper sixth) | 71.3%(965) | 14.0%(190) | 14.6%(198) | 1353 | |

Excellence was significantly (P<0.05) more celebrated in urban (68.4%) than in rural (48.8%) areas, significantly (P<0.05) more in second cycle (71.3%) than in the first cycle (59.3%) as seen in Table 3.

Public secondary schools celebrate excellence in their schools based on students' (64.2%) and teachers' (56.9%) perspective with a non-significant difference between them (P<0.05). However, parents (22.9%) do not believe PSS celebrate excellence (See Table 2). Results further showed that excellence is celebrated more in the urban (68.4%) than in the rural (48.8%) schools (*See Table 3*). This finding can lead us to conclude that although PSS celebrate excellence as revealed by students and teachers, they hardly involve parents in events geared towards the celebration of excellence. This result is a reflection of schools' capacity to motivate students and teachers since, according to Akporehe (2011), Odor (1995), teachers and students work hard and show high levels of commitment when adequately motivated. Pistiolis (2012) assert that schools which fundraised large amount of money overall experienced higher level of student achievement as extra funds are used by school administrators to increase students' achievement and engagement especially in lower socioeconomic neighbourhoods. However, the result stipulating that parents do not believe PSS celebrate excellence is due to the

fact that parents are hardly part of the excellence celebration activity as highlighted by Wantchami (2017) and Jones (2008) who alleged that parents especially those who send their children to public secondary schools are somewhat detached from the activities and projects carryout in the schools. In Cameroon, parents are recognised as a key stakeholder as seen in Circular No. 07/08/MINESEC/CAB of 25 February 2008, which stipulates their contributions in terms of funding school activities through the Parents Teacher Associations (PTA). However, their detachment from school activities and projects require motivating and involving parents to be fully engaged in the running of schools which will therefore affect their perception towards school's efforts in the celebration of excellence.

**Students and Teachers Assessment of School-Alumni Relationship**

*Table 4:* Students and Teachers' Appraisal of Schools' Relations with Alumni

| Statements | Students | Teachers |
|---|---|---|
| My school has a well-structured X-student (alumni) association scheme | 55.4%(606) | 56.3%(27) |
| My school has a date scheduled to celebrate with the alumni | 34.7%(380) | 33.3%(16) |
| My school has an alumni website page/e-mail group to cater for the alumni network | 27.1%(297) | 31.3%(15) |
| My school alumni is proactive in the development of the school (supports school projects) | 43.8%(479) | 43.8%(21) |
| MRS | 40.3%(1762) | 41.1% (192) |

$\chi$2-test: $\chi$2=0.04; df=1; P=0.851.

In summary, less than half the number of students (P>0.05), that is 40.3%, expressed satisfaction with the relationship that exists between schools and their alumni, with 17.5% of the students neither agreeing nor disagreeing. 55.4% (606) of the students agreed that their schools have well-structured alumni association schemes, with 43.8% (479) who also agreed that their school alumni are proactive in the development of the school and supports school projects. Finally, just 34.7% (380) and 27.1% (297) agreed with the statements that their schools scheduled dates to celebrate with the alumni and had an alumni website page/e-mail group to cater for the alumni network respectively though 20.7%(226) and 19.1% (209) of the students neither agreed nor disagreed as far as alumni website page/ e-mail groups to cater for the alumni network and being proactive were concerned (See Table 4). Public secondary schools in the South West region of Cameroon therefore exhibit poor school – alumni relationship which may affect the fund raising efforts of the alumni as they are somehow detach from the school and its activities (Wantchami, 2017; Jones, 2008) hence demonstrate low social ties with the school, a key predictor for alumni contribution (Leslie and Ramey, 1988). The government of Cameroon recognises the potential of the school alumni in the development and support of school activities (Section 32 of Law No. 004/98; circular No. 07/08/MINESEC/CAB of 25 February 2008), therefore school administrations should mobilise, design, manage and execute strategic programmes and activities that engage the school alumni.

*Table 5.* Students Appraisal of Schools' Relations with Alumni by Background Indicators

| Indicator | Categories | Satisfied with the school-alumni relationship | | | N_response | Chi-Square |
| | | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Setting type | Rural | 24.1%(225) | 15.1%(141) | 24.1%(225) | 932 | $\chi 2$=32.26 P=0.000 |
| | Urban | 44.6%(1537) | 18.1%(624) | 37.3%(1283) | 3444 | |
| Cycle | First cycle | 37.9%(975) | 15.5%(398) | 46.6%(1199) | 2572 | $\chi 2$=3.62 P=0.047 |
| | Second cycle (lower sixth and upper sixth) | 43.6%(787) | 20.3%(367) | 36.0%(650) | 1804 | |

Students were significantly (P<0.05) more satisfied with school alumni in urban areas with a proportion of 44.6% as compared to 24.1% in rural areas. They were also significantly (P<0.05) more satisfied in the second cycle, with a proportion of 43.6% as compared to 37.9% for the first cycle (See Table 5). Manafo (2006) highlights that with due consideration on the successful careers of many public school graduates, it is surprising that public schools generally have little interest in cultivating those who have passed through their portals as reflected in the degree of satisfaction on students' appraisal of school-alumni relationship of rural 24.1% and urban 44.6% schools.

## Public Secondary Schools (PSS) in the SW Region Recognise Fund-Raising as a Factor for Image Enhancement

*Table 6.* Students and Teachers' Appraisal of Fund-Raising in Schools

| Statements | Students | Teachers | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| My school has an office in charge of development and advancement affairs (fund-raising and other developmental projects) | 34.9%(382) | 12.5%(6) | 1094 |
| My school raises funds through the sales of crops from the school farm and other products produced by the school | 26.0%(284) | 22.9%(11) | 1094 |
| My school raises funds through voluntary donations from students, teachers, alumni and members of the community | 27.5%(301) | 25.0%(12) | 1094 |
| My school raises funds through the use of school facilities by local community members, such as for marriage ceremonies | 16.4%(179) | 6.3%(3) | 1094 |
| My school requests gifts and endowments from local businesses to donate to students with excellent performance | 54.2%(593) | 27.1%(13) | 1094 |
| MRS | 31.8%(1739) | 18.7%(45) | 5470 |

Generally, only 31.8% of the students agreed with the indicators that measured fund-raising in schools to support projects that can enhance the image of their schools with the stakeholders, with 17.0% of the students neither agreeing nor disagreeing. 54.2% (593) of the students agreed that their school requests gifts and endowments from local businesses to donate to students with excellent

performance. Although 34.9% (382) of them agreed that their schools have an office in charge of development and advancement affairs, 26.1% (285) were neutral, followed by 27.5% (301) and 26.0% (284) who also agreed that their school raises funds through voluntary donations from students, teachers, alumni and members of the community and through the sales of crops from the school farm and other products produced by the school. Finally, just 16.4% (179) of the students agreed that their school raises funds through the use of school facilities by local community members, such as for marriage ceremonies (See Table 6).

Significantly less than the majority of students ($\chi$2-test: $\chi$2=123.53; df=1; P=0.000) and less than the majority of teachers ($\chi$2-test: $\chi$2=37.50; df=1; P=0.000) approved of the school fund-raising efforts showing that public secondary schools (PSS) in the SW Region do not recognise fund-raising as a factor for image enhancement. These results corroborate the assertion of Jimenez et al. (1995) and Dronkers and Robert (2003) that public schools do not see the need to engage in fund raising since they are dependent on tax-supported government agencies, administratively dependent and are relatively cheap in terms of fees and therefore harness larger populations of students

*Table 7.* Students Appraisal of Fund-Raising in Schools by Background Indicators

| Indicator | Categories | Satisfied with fund-raising | | | N$_{responses}$ | Chi-Square |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Agree** | **Neutral** | **Disagree** | | |
| Setting type | Rural | 27.3%(318) | 15.6%(182) | 57.1%(665) | 1165 | $\chi$2=2.57 P=0.109 |
| | Urban | 33.0%(1421) | 17.4%(747) | 49.6%(2137) | 4305 | |
| Cycle | First cycle | 30.6%(983) | 14.3%(460) | 55.1%(1772) | 3215 | $\chi$2=0.99 P=0.320 |
| | Second cycle (lower sixth and upper sixth) | 33.5%(756) | 20.8%(469) | 45.7%(1030) | 2255 | |

Perception of impact of fund-raising as enhancer of the image of PSS with stakeholders was not satisfactory for both rural and urban schools and for first and second cycles (P>0.05). In all instances, less than the majority was satisfied (See Table 7).

**Parents' Perspective**

*Table 8.* Parents Appraisal of Fund-Raising in Schools

| Statements | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The school has an office in charge of development and advancement affairs (fund-raising and other developmental projects) | 38.2%(21) | 12.7%(7) | 49.1%(27) | 55 |
| I am interested to support projects in this school if the funding is well articulated | 67.3%(37) | 10.9%(6) | 21.8%(12) | 55 |
| This school raises funds by encouraging parents and community members to use school facilities such as school halls for their events | 32.7%(18) | 14.5%(8) | 52.7%(29) | 55 |
| MRS | 46.1%(76) | 12.7%(21) | 41.2%(68) | 165 |

$\chi^2$-test: $\chi^2=0.15$; df=1; P=0.701.

Results from Table 8 reveal an overall, 46.1% of the parents agreed with the indicators that measured fund-raising in schools to support projects that might enhance the image of the school, with 12.7% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Majority of the parents, 67.3% (37), actually agreed that they are interested to support projects in schools if the funding is well articulated, with just 38.2% (21) and 32.7% (18) agreeing that schools have offices in charge of development and advancement affairs (fund-raising and other developmental projects) and schools raise funds by encouraging parents and community members to use school facilities such as school halls for their events. Parents were just averagely satisfied (P>0.05). These results call the need for public school administrators to recognise the role of the different stakeholders especially parents who are willing to support school activities 67.3% (37). Negligence, resorts to lack of necessary funding to support school projects and activities.

*Table 9.* Parents Appraisal of Fund-Raising in Schools by Background Indicators

| Indicators | Categories | Satisfied with funds raising | | | N_responses | Chi-Square |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | | |
| Setting type | Urban | 43.7%(38) | 13.8%(12) | 42.5%(37) | 87 | $\chi^2=0.15$ p=0.701 |
| | Rural | 48.7%(38) | 11.5%(9) | 39.7%(31) | 78 | |
| Where are the children schooling? | Public | 44.0%(62) | 12.1%(17) | 44.0%(62) | 141 | $\chi^2=0.04$ p=0.833 |
| | Private | 58.3%(14) | 16.7%(4) | 25.0%(6) | 24 | |

Parents' characterisation of fund-raising in schools to support projects that might enhance the image of the school was not dependent on any of the background indicators (P>0.05); in all instances, less than the majority was satisfied, or roughly half (Table 9). This finding contradicts Pistiolis (2012) findings which reveal that schools in affluent neighbourhoods often raise more funds than schools located in lower socioeconomic neighbourhoods which expounds as a direct extension of their private life into the public school system as parents in the rural setting 38 (48.7%) were more satisfied with fund raising efforts than parents in the urban setting 38 (43.7%).

Based on results, this study concludes that PSS have not recognised the importance of fund raising for their institutions in both the urban and rural settings. Significantly less than the majority of students ($\chi2$-test: $\chi2$=123.53; df=1; P=0.000) and less than the majority of parents ($\chi2$-test: $\chi2$=37.50; df=1; P=0.000) approved of the school fund raising efforts. Pistiolis (2012) reveals that there exists a positive correlation between fundraising amounts and academic achievement as funds raised are used to support many school activities. Fund raising is therefore a means through which schools could raise funds to support school projects as Parent Teacher Associations as well as school alumni associations have been known to raise funds to support build classrooms, provide pipe-borne water for the wellbeing of their children as articulated in Law N° 98/004 of 14 April 1998 and circular No 07/08/MINESEC/CAB of 28 Feb 2008. However, only 40.3% (1762) of students and 41.1% (192) of teachers agreed that PSS had a good relationship with their alumni. Also, results reveal that parents are willing to contribute to the development of local schools by contributing funds to enhance school development projects, but they demand transparency in the exercise 37 (67.3%). This implies that schools are not effectively engaging parents in their school development efforts. They should do so by creating an office in charge of development activities.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that although excellence is celebrated in PSS as revealed by students and teachers, parents are mostly side-lined in events, activities geared towards the celebration of excellence. Also, PSS unveil poor school – alumni relationship which definitely affects fund raising efforts in the schools as alumni are seen as potential key donors to support school activities and projects. Findings further lead to the conclusion that PSS in the SW region of Cameroon do not recognise fund-raising as a factor for image enhancement of their schools.

Public secondary schools need to realise that they cannot merely rely on state funds in order to achieve the goals of the school. The study recommends that school administrators should therefore study the interest and influence of various stakeholders in order to understand how they could be involved in the development of their schools. Creating a development office which strategically relates with members of the school community is relevant. This will facilitate not only the linkage between the school and community in order to enhance understanding of both the successes and challenges schools experience but will serve as strength for community engagement**.** Reluctance to engage the necessary stakeholders hamper on funding initiatives. School administrations should work with their development offices to mobilise, design, manage and execute strategic fund raising programmes and activities that engage their stakeholders especially school alumni and parents.
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