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Theoretical Foundation of Advocacy in Communication: Kenyan Perspective

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Introduction

This paper is a discussion of the theoretical foundation of advocacy. The examples used in the paper will be drawn from Kenyan situation. The paper will give highlights on how advocacy can be anchored on theory by discussing theories on how advocacy influences, theories on how advocacy persuades, and theories on what to consider for a successful advocacy. After understanding advocacy, the paper will list some activities that comprise advocacy work and their examples from Kenya.

Understanding advocacy

Advocacy campaign as a development communication strategy has great potential in addressing institutional and structural obstacles to development initiatives as well as obstacles that have their roots in unequal power relationship in a community. If understood broadly, advocacy campaigns are applicable beyond engaging the news media to push for policy change in what is referred to as liberal advocacy campaigns. Therefore, understanding the theoretical foundation of this process makes the application of advocacy easier and successful. In the developing world, many NGOs have embraced advocacy as the path to more effective and strategic social change, incurring serious challenges on the authenticity of their advocacy claims. So we can start by asking ourselves, what is advocacy?

Although the term advocacy seems simple to define from its face value, it is a controversial term and dynamic concept, and this makes its definition somehow elusive. However, a few definitions will help us capture its main tenets.

Rogers & Storey (1987) define Advocacy as “the act of pleading or arguing in favour of something like a cause, an idea or a policy” (820).

Rice & Atkin (2009) define advocacy as:

[A]s purposive attempts to inform or influence behaviors in large audiences within a specified time period using an organized set of communication activities and featuring an array of mediated messages in multiple channels generally to produce noncommercial benefits to individuals and society.

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The Alliance for Justice (2013) defines Advocacy as “any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others” (p.1)..

From the above three definitions, which I have selected from sources of different decades, we can deduce that advocacy is speaking, acting, writing with minimal conflict of interest on behalf of the sincerely perceived interests of a disadvantaged person or group to promote, protect and defend their welfare and justice by: being on their side and no-one else's, being primarily concerned with their fundamental needs, and remaining loyal and accountable to them in a way that is emphatic and vigorous and which is, or is likely to be, costly to the advocate or advocacy group.

Advocacy as process is universal across topics and venues. It utilizes systematic frameworks and fundamental strategic principles developed over the past half century. Advocacy campaign designers perform a situational analysis and set objectives leading to development of a coherent set of strategies and implement them by creating informational and persuasive messages that are disseminated via traditional mass media, new technologies, and interpersonal networks.

What activities comprise advocacy work?

In order to understand advocacy better, may be it will be useful to consider pointing out the activities which comprise advocacy. The following examples are just a representative of the many activities that constitute advocacy and they are not exhaustive. Advocacy can constitute:

1. Educating the Public about the Legislative Process: in Kenya, there are many examples of activities when institutions and groups have come together to educate the public about the legislative process. An example was the 2010 constitutional making process in which Kenyans were involved in contributing and following up the process. This was a legislative process in which institutions like media and civil society movements alongside the government institutions concerned came together to pursue a common goal and they could not succeed without engaging the public.

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2. Public education: Educate the community on the issues. Community education is among the target concern of most advocacy activities. For example, a community of married people in Kenya has always been educated on family planning issue. The advocacy by the ministry of health have for the last three decades used media and other means to advocate for planned family and this has succeeded. In their advocacy campaigns they encourage, educate and advocate for the use of family planning strategies available with an aim of checking population growth.
3. Nonpartisan voter education: Inform the electorate on the issues. In Kenya, the most successful voter education was done by the interim independent electoral commission in 2010 prior to a referendum that saw the current constitution in place. This advocacy was non partisan in that the commission is presumed and supposed to be non partisan in the process.
4. Nonpartisan voter mobilization: Encourage citizens to vote. In 2010 and 2013, Kenyan electoral bodies have proved the power of voter mobilization. With the history of Kenya and its experiences of 2007/2007 post election violence, voter empathy was expected by 2013 but this was not to be. The media and Independent electoral and boundaries commission embarked on mobilizing voters. The advocacy strategy which employed print, electronic, and new media was successful. This was a defining moment and advocacy for voter participation was so critical under the so called new dispensation and constitution
5. Lobbying: Advocate for or against specific legislation. Most notorious of this kind of activities are the Kenyan civil group movements. For example, they have been very vocal against members of parliament raising their own salaries and in many cases they are seen outside parliament demonstrating against the legislator's acts of greed.
6. Organizing a rally: Mobilize for your cause. This is common in the corporate world. Many companies such as Safaricom, media houses like royal media services are known to organise rallies and road shows so as to promote themselves. They also incorporate their corporate social responsibilities in their rallies. May other corporate organisations in Kenya utilize advocacy in their

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promotion of corporate reputation, image, identity and marketing their products and services (Andreasen, 2006).

Theoretical Foundation of Advocacy

Advocacy did not start recently; it is as old as communication itself. Persuasive communication, which is a key tenet in advocacy, is traceable back to Aristotle (Greek philosopher-teacher Aristotle 384-322 B.C). He developed a rhetorical theory. Rhetorical theory is based on the available means of persuasion. That is, a speaker who is interested in persuading his or her audience should consider three rhetorical proofs: logical, emotional, and ethical. Audiences are strategically significant to effective persuasion as well. Rhetorical syllogism, requiring audiences to supply missing pieces of a speech, are also used in persuasion. Aristotle held that "Rhetoric" is "the faculty of observing in any given cases the available means of persuasion" (*Rhetoric* 1335b). Aristotle's speaker-centered model received perhaps its fullest development in the hands of Roman educator Quintilian (ca. 35-95 A.D.), whose *Institutio Oratoria* was filled with advice on the full training of a "good" speaker-statesman. Another development of Aristotle's persuasion model was derived by Kinneyay from Aristotle's description of proof (McQuail, 1994). In this model, there are three dimensions which include logos; which refer to the message, the pathos; which is the audience; and ethos which is the speaker. Aristotle's rhetorical concept would later be developed by Lloyd Bitzer into what he called rhetorical situation (McQuail, 1994). The situation, although it is not a model identifies some classical components of a communication situation.

The Aristotle's model of communication was the start of a long historical journey. From then on, a number of theoretical perspectives, mostly used in communication are regularly invoked to guide advocacy campaign strategies. Campaigns across the spectrum of health, pro-social, and environmental domains share some similarities to commercial advertising campaigns.

Theories on how advocacy influences

There are many theories that have been used to explain the way advocacy works. Leading of them are stalagmite theories that explain the effect that advocacy has

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on the audience. The theories focus on the way the message works and the value of consistency on advocacy if results are to be attained. Influence of the advocacy in Kenya has been taken seriously because Kenyans experience with mass media has been long. For example, at the peak of 2007/2008 post election violence, all mass media was prevented from giving violence events live coverage. This was done on realization that media is a powerful advocacy tool and has mediated experiences that induce long term effects that are not easy to measure (Makinen & Kuira, 2008). The effects of long term persuasion in advocacy and any other communicative discourse are compared to stalagmite dripping up over time. In Kenya, most advocacies are known to be done through media but there are a myriad of other advocacy activities that are done through other methods such as road shows, promotions, campaigns and others. The success of any advocacy activity is measured through its impact to the target group. In this case, most of the impact of advocacy in Kenya can be analyzed using cultivation and meaning theories.

Cultivation theory was proposed by George Gerbner who tried to determine the influence of media advocacy on viewers' understanding of the environment they live in (Littlejohn, 2002). Gerbner realised that the dominance of television created a common view of the world and made all cultures to have a common thinking. Like many other mass media, television portrays the society as a bad place to live in, and this makes people not to trust the world. In advocacy, the theory is believed to emphasize the way advocacy as a process impacts upon the target stakeholders when carried out over a long period. Therefore, advocates are encouraged to ensure repeated, persistent and consistent emphasis on their interest and subject of their advocacy so as to cultivate the behavioral change they desire. For example, if they are advocating for against Female genital mutilation FGM, they must keep their message consistent and persistent until the target community achieves behavioral change. Cultivation theory contends that persuasive content over time imbue symbols, messages, images and meanings that dominate and eventually absorbed as truth.

Another theory of influence in this case is the meaning theory which has it that persuasive messages mould meaning by crafting issues to fit in a particular framework. In advocacy, this is good news as strategists know the best way to imbue behavioral

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change in the community. This is what the ministry of health has employed in its advocacy for family planning. By consistently using media advocacy, they have been able to advocate for sizeable family and family planning through the theory of meaning. This comes as a result of constant reminder of the important of family planning, the ills of a bloated family and the means of controlling family or planning one's family.

Agenda Setting Theory

Another theory that is used to explain how advocacy influences and works is Agenda setting theory (McCombs, 2004). The theory applies to advocacy impact on the perceived importance of societal problems and the prominence of policy issues. The effect of advocacy is explained in the persuasive message's ability to direct the significance of events in the audience's mind (Sereno & Mortensen, 1970). This theory of influence contends advocacy can be used for setting the agenda of discussion for the audience by ordering and organising their mind (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). The proponents of the theory, McCombs and Shaw argue that the agenda-setting function of advocacy brings about the correlation between the messages and public ordering of priorities.

In Kenya, the agenda setting function was seen powerfully during the joint media presidential debate where all presidential candidates were summoned on 11th February and 25th February to give Kenyans their policies (Ndonge, 2013). In this great and celebrated event, all Kenyans from all walks of life and orientation were drawn into their screens by media through advocacy messages for the programme. This is an example of how media used advocacy to set the agenda for the day by elevating events and persuading every Kenyan citizen and outside world to be drawn to a particular event, topic and content. The Kenyan media, through media advocacy, has also been used for good in setting good agenda for social benefit. For example in the past, media advocacy has been used in the fight against diseases such as HIV/AIDS through awareness. In 2011 and 2012, media set the agenda on cancer awareness and this saw many cancer survivors come to media and share their experiences with society at large. There was a deliberate move by the media to create awareness by setting the acceptance agenda. The reasoning behind the power of media advocacy is that when media sets an issue

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as the agenda, it is taken more seriously by the society and all its institutions. In this case, the agenda setting function is very important for advocacy to realize its aims of persuading and drawing attention to pressing policy issues and developmental concerns in a society.

Magic Bullet/ Hypodermic Needle

Magic bullet theory in relation to advocacy involves the consideration of advocacy messages are powerful tools. The first time the power of message was seen was after the First World War (Lazarsfeld & Stanton, 1949). The efforts that propagandists put through media advocacy before the war to some extent bore fruits and from then, media advocacy effects was on the spot with its magic bullet or hypodermic needle theories coming into existence (Barnlund, 1968). The theories agree that advocacy messages have a powerful influence on the mass audience and are able to deliberately control people's behavior (McQuail, 1987). Moreover, advocacy considers audiences as rational beings who are aware of what they want and need. Therefore, the theory of uses and gratifications (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Rubin, 2002) offers concepts useful in understanding audience motivations for selecting particular media messages, attending to such messages, and utilizing learned information in enacting behaviors. This way, any expert of communication should be able to craft the best advocacy message for a particular group of people.

Theories on how advocacy persuades

The theories on how advocacy persuades concentrates on the power of advocacy as a communication strategy and process. This is because advocacy is not a haphazard process; it is a strategic action that should consider theory and practical case studies to succeed. An example is the integrative theory of behavior change (Cappella et al., 2001). The multifaceted model integrates HBM, social cognitive theory (SCT) and theory of reasoned action (TRA) to specify how external variables, individual differences, and underlying beliefs contribute to differential influence pathways for outcome behaviors, intentions, attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy. For an advocate, it is therefore significant to understand all these factors and map out their power on your

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message and how they will contribute to the success or failure of your project delivery of success.

Another power of advocacy inheres in the ability of advocates to frame messages thus producing message frame theory (O'Keefe & Jensen, 2007; Quick & Bates, 2010). This framework focuses on how message appeals are packaged in terms of gain-frame promotion of positive behavior versus loss-frame prevention of negative behavior, especially for audiences likely to display reactance. For advocacy, this calls for proper research and consideration of the diversity of our audiences so as to know how to frame messages that will succeed. An example in Kenya is the *mpango wa kando* and condom use advert that was rejected at first but bounced back probably after its advocates convinced the concerned stakeholders about its ability to promote positive behavior and behavior change.

In their Instrumental learning (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953) adapted to mediated communication in which learning mechanism features message-related concepts of source credibility, reinforcement incentives, and repetition of presentation. This way, advocacy works with credibility of source. In this case, an advocacy message and mission persuades successfully if it is fostered by a person or channel that is trusted as credible by the stakeholders. A good example is incorporated into the health belief model (HBM) (Becker, 1974). Several concepts from HBM pertain specifically to the potency of health threat appeals: susceptibility multiplied by seriousness of consequences and the self-efficacy and response efficacy of performing the recommended behavior. For example, an advocacy for the use of mosquito net involves competent doctors talking about malaria causing mosquito and advocating for prevention through sleeping under a treated mosquito net. Sometimes, such an advocacy may involve members of approved medical professional associations so as to assure credibility of the advocacy messages.

Theories on what to consider for a successful advocacy

Advocacy cannot succeed as a one man show but is a process that works when target audiences are considered and involved. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM) (Eagly & Chaiken,

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1993) are good examples of audience involvement and consideration when doing advocacy. ELM and HSM highlight the role of audience involvement level as it shapes cognitive responses, thought generation, and central versus peripheral routes to persuasion. When the audience is treated as stakeholders, the advocacy becomes inclusive rather than exclusive and the stakeholders see the project as part of them and this makes any advocacy successful and sustainable. An example in Kenya is the *Mau* reclamation programme in which the government had to involve local residents in their advocacy against deforestation and afforestation. Without involving the community targeted in advocacy, it becomes extremely difficult to succeed and sustain advocated programmes considering that some community development programmes advocated for in most cases are meant to last for a long time.

Another theory that gives a guideline to consider when doing advocacy is Self-Efficacy by Bandura (1997). Self-efficacy constructs the role of the individual's perceived capability of successfully performing behaviors; those who are confident of carrying out recommended actions are more likely to attempt and sustain behavioral enactment efforts. This way, an advocate will consider himself or herself and ability before embarking on a programme. This is important because should one realise the need for back up, he does so instead of going a lone and failing to succeed. Therefore, confidence is very important in advocacy and one should know that lack of ability to deliver and asking for help and collaboration is not weakness.

There is also the Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (1986). SCT emphasizes the processes by which source role models demonstrate behaviors, and depiction of vicarious reinforcement enhances the impact of mediated messages. This way, understanding and researching on these factors and trying to incorporate them when crafting an advocate message is significant.

Moreover, the issue of considering diversity of audience is also critical and inevitable for a winning advocacy campaign. In this case, the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen, Albarracin, & Hornik, 2007) comes in handy. The TRA and the ensuing Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) formulate a combination of audience attitudes, perceived norms of influential others, and motivation to comply as predictors of intended behavior. A key underlying mechanism is based on the expectancy–value equation,

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which postulates attitudes are predicted by beliefs about the likelihood that given behavior leads to certain consequences, multiplied by one's evaluation of those consequences. This is where many NGOs fail when doing their advocacy programmes because they analyse the behaviors of a community and finding that they have negative consequences, they demonize the acts without tackling the perceived norms of the community members. An example is the advocacy against FGM, advocacy for family planning in some communities and so on. Therefore, analysing and considering attitudes, norms and motivation of the audience is worth considering if advocacy has to succeed.

Foundation of successful advocacy communication

As I have already stated, advocacy can succeed if considered as a dynamic process with open-ended application. Incorporating theory and practice in advocacy means high possibilities of success and sustainability of projects and policies being advocated for. Therefore, there are some inevitable laws that must be considered for a successful advocacy. These laws of successful advocacy communications are:

1. Having clear, measurable goals
2. Having extensive knowledge of whom you are trying to reach and what moves them
3. Adopting compelling messages that connect with your target audience
4. Starting with systematic planning that is reviewed and then revised.
5. Specifying for people what to do, how to do it, and why.
6. Make the case for why action is needed now.
7. Match strategy and tactics to target audiences.
8. Budget for success
9. Rely on experts when needed.

If these laws are followed, one is likely to achieve success in their advocacy campaigns. I have also to note quickly that these laws can be done differently for different cases and may be others can be omitted for the sake of avoiding redundancy in advocacy process.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that advocacy is a complex phenomenon that requires situation analysis to be successful. It is also important to know that being a process, incorporating theory and practice in designing the best advocacy strategy is indispensable. Many organisations, both government and nongovernmental organisations can not avoid advocacy in their daily activities. Most advocacies are done through media and it is easy to compress a wider advocacy process to media advocacy. Moreover, we have seen in examples of advocacy activities that corporate organisations must consider advocacy in their marketing strategies. There are theories that explain the way advocacy works such as the theories of influence and theories on how advocacy should work. In crafting a winning advocacy strategy of whatever kind and type, these theories should be considered both to appreciate the power of advocacy and to guide on how successful advocacy should be. Most important are the laws that guide any persuasive process like advocacy as listed at the end of the essay, and which when adhered to, any advocate can achieve their advocacy objectives.

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