

## **Perspectives of Communication in Public Competitive Intelligence Policy in Côte D’Ivoire**

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### **Abstract**

The lack of knowledge of the Ivorian general public on the Competitive Intelligence (CI) policy shows a communication issue. In fact, this issue, posed by the integration and implementation of communication in the public policies of Competitive Intelligence, involves the following main question: what are the communication perspectives in the public policy of Competitive Intelligence in Côte d'Ivoire? To carry out this research, game theory, the theory of bounded rationality and functionalism are called upon. It is a qualitative study that uses qualitative data collection instruments from officials of Ivorian organizations in charge of Competitive Intelligence policy. Thematic content analysis is the method chosen for the analysis of our survey data. This article aims to study the scope of communication in the implementation of the public policy of Competitive Intelligence in Côte d'Ivoire. It highlights the communication and diplomatic issues in the public policy of Competitive Intelligence; the practice of event communication as a Nation branding strategy; the promotion of the Côte d'Ivoire destination as a Competitive Intelligence operation; and the communication approach in the management of Competitive Intelligence.

**Keywords:** Competitive Intelligence, Communication, Nation branding, Development, Côte d'Ivoire

## Introduction

The history of the nations, civilizations, empires and their contemporary lives, even, shows that Competitive Intelligence(CI) or, quite simply, intelligence has always been a function, a strategic activity with high added value in the governance of kings, emperors, governors, etc., as well as in the establishment of strategies of military leaders. Rémi K. (2015), in *World History of the Secret Services*, shows the unavoidable character of the political, economic and military intelligence in the life of the yesteryear powers. Even today, States and current world leaders are aware of the importance and role of Competitive Intelligence. In this, the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017) is clear. *“Although material force will remain essential for geopolitical and state powers, the most powerful actors will be those who draw in networks, relationships, and informations in order to fight and cooperate. This is the lesson history has learned from the great powers policy of the 1900s”*.

This assertion exposes the scope of Competitive Intelligence, on the one hand, and its communicational dimension, on the other hand. However, observation shows an area little known by the population and little explored in terms of research in Information and Communication Sciences (SIC) in Côte d'Ivoire. This study highlights a problem related to the lack of knowledge of the public policy's Competitive Intelligence components in this West African country. The combination of the experiments carried out and the models developed, makes it possible to better understand the problem raised by the integration and the implementation of communication in the Competitive Intelligence public policy. Hence, the following main question is raised : what are the prospects for communication in the Competitive Intelligence public policy in Côte d'Ivoire?

This article aims to study the scope of communication in the implementation of the Competitive Intelligence public policy in the State of Côte d'Ivoire. On the one hand, it is a question of making available to the scientific community knowledge on the actions or interventions of the Ivorian State in the field of Competitive Intelligence, and this, under the paradigm of communication. On the other hand, it aims to present a source of knowledge helping the public authorities in the implementation of strategies for the growth of economic competitiveness in Côte d'Ivoire.

## **1. Theoretical and methodological framework**

### **1.1. Theoretical references framework**

Three theories, namely game theory, bounded rationality theory and functionalism, are invoked to carry out this research.

Game theory proves its usefulness in this research, by the possibility it gives to understand and analyze the implementation of strategies in the pursuit and achievement of objectives with regard to the actors of a same game. Thierry L. (2008) amply demonstrates this by showing the object of the theory as the study of the relationships between the actors of a same system. Indeed, it situates the approach at two levels: a first audit phase, to identify the most significant actors who interact with the system. LIBAERT underlines that this phase consists in evaluating their motivations, their constraints and their means of action to satisfy their objectives within the framework of the studied system. The second phase, still according to the author, aims to detect the strategy of these actors, their alliances and conflicts, their previous strategies and their projects. The underlying idea is to be able to anticipate subtle changes in the strategy of the actors in order to adapt their own conduct. Brought back and adapted to our case, this theory depicts the actors that are Côte d'Ivoire and other countries in the world in a situation of competition and cooperation, from an economic point of view.

Concerning the theory of bounded rationality, it makes it possible to apprehend the vectors of the decision-making processes in the course of the Competitive Intelligence (CI) public policy in Côte d'Ivoire, in the informational approach, the intellectual design and the motivation element. Rationality is a situation of choice in which the rational actor, faced with several alternatives, will choose the one he believes leads to the best overall result. According to Kacou G. (2016), this vision of rationality, corresponding to that of homo-economicus, revolves around the identification of a problem requiring a solution, the establishment of the list of all possible solutions, the determination of all the consequences of all the solutions considered (with a view to selecting the optimal solution), the comparative evaluation of the solutions and the choice of the most advantageous solution which maximizes the satisfaction of the objectives.

Moreover, Herbert Alexander SIMON thinks that rationality is not absolute, but limited by three factors, namely the information available (the decision maker cannot know all the

information perfectly to choose in an optimal and rational way); the capacities of the decision-maker, taking into account the physical (fatigue, stress, etc.) and intellectual limits of the individuals; and the motivations of the decision maker, for the personal values of a decision maker play a key role when making decisions.

The theory of functionalism, for its part, is used to study and situate the contribution of communication in all the actions or activities carried out in relation to the overall Competitive Intelligence (CI) public policy applied in Côte d'Ivoire. This theory postulates that each social fact is linked to one or more functions. For Paul N. (2015), functionalism is an approach that consists in grasping a reality in relation to the function it has in society or in relation to its usefulness. N'DA invites us to understand the functionalist theory as an approach that seeks to explain social phenomena through the functions fulfilled by social institutions, organizations structures and individual and collective behaviors.

## **1.2. Methodological framework of the study**

The population of this study is made up of managers of organizations that compose our study corpus. The said corpus is made up of a set of fourteen (14) heads of organizations which are: the Economic Policy National Council (CNPE); the Economic Diplomacy Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Strategic and Geopolitical Analysis Sub-Directorate (Ministry of Foreign Affairs); the General Intelligence Directorate; the Economy General Directorate (DGE); the Government Information and Communication Center; the National Office for Forecasting and Strategic Monitoring (BNPVS); the Ivorian Office of Intellectual Property ; the Business Competitiveness National Observatory (ONCE); the Union of Cities and Communes of Côte d'Ivoire (UVICOCI); the Computer Science and Health Information Department (DIIS); the Economic Operators Information Unit (CELLIOPE) of the Budget and Finance General Directorate; the Competitive Intelligence Unit within its Studies Planning and Statistics Department (DPES, CEPICI), and Côte d'Ivoire Standardization (CODINORM).

This research is qualitative, hence qualitative data collection instruments were used. Documentary study, semi-direct interview and non-participant observation are the instruments used. Through the documentary study, documents of various kinds related to organizations communication and competitive intelligence were consulted. The semi-direct interview made it possible to create an exchange framework with the first managers of the organizations in

charge of the competitive intelligence public policy in Côte d'Ivoire. Through non-participant observation, we observed behaviors and social, cultural, political and economic dynamics. It was made within the various administrations concerned by the study. It was a question of making remarks on the use of tools in the daily accomplishment of the tasks of the agents, on the one hand, and on observing the communication vectors of the organizations decision-makers, on the other hand. This observation also made it possible to pay attention to the national environment, through the media and outside the media, with regard to the behavior of state authorities in relation to the competitive intelligence activities, as well as the social, cultural, political and economic evolution of the country.

The method chosen for analyzing data from our surveys is thematic content analysis (Roger M., 2006). Thus, we have a separation of the narrative produced during the surveys by units of meaning according to the objectives of the research. The method chosen is justified by the nature of the study itself. Indeed, being qualitative, it induces the qualitative approach with the data collection tools that go along with it. The qualitative nature of this study is linked to its ambition to show the content of the competitive intelligence public policy in Côte d'Ivoire as well as the communication that accompanies it. In this, it targeted the area's political decisions, the State practices, its role in favor of the private sector and joint strategies for its development. As a result, comes the quest for the apprehension of the communicational approach which is implemented through the course of the actions of the State in relation to competitive intelligence. So, the data collected are qualitative by nature.

Therefore, the thematic content analysis allows us to retain the essential data to be analyzed in order to obtain convincing results.

## **2. Communication and diplomatic issues in the Competitive Intelligence public policy**

This is to present the manifestations of influence and communication of influence in the competitive intelligence public policy in Côte d'Ivoire. To do this, we talk about diplomatic speeches as means of influence and communication of influence; of the practice of event communication: for a *country branding* or *nation branding* strategy; for the involvement of influential personalities to the promotion of tourism and the Côte d'Ivoire destination: for the construction of an influential touristic brand and identity and influencers and tourist promotion.

Kacou G. (2021), talking of discourse communicational issues, says this:

Discourse is a communication that exposes a social relationship. It is identity. Thus, discursive communication is presented as an action or reaction which makes it possible to identify the sender and the context of communication. In this sense, discourses must be considered as social acts constituting social relations of issues. No speech is neutral. It has an explicit and/or implicit vocation.

This assertion evokes an observable reality in the actions and relations of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy of Côte d'Ivoire. In fact, everything could not be clearer: since the end of the Ivorian crisis, the country's authorities have found themselves in a context of reconstruction, repositioning, new sparkling and revitalization of the country's influence (especially at the West African sub-region). In this, the diplomatic offensive decreed and established by the President of the Republic is accompanied by the implementation of a discursive strategy, in diplomatic forums. Thus, the speeches delivered by the Head of State, the Prime Minister(s), the members of the government accredited through missions abroad as well as the diplomats, have mainly argued on: the return of peace, the economic potential of the country, the reforms of the business environment, the fight against corruption and the promotion of good governance, the experience of Côte d'Ivoire in terms of emerging from the crisis and post-crisis reconstruction, etc.

In fact, these speeches aim to regain confidence and appear credible to the international community; convince donors, in the context of obtaining funding for reconstruction and development projects; attract Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and private investments from the Ivorian diaspora; seduce and attract tourists to the Côte d'Ivoire destination, etc. And this, above all, when we know that the diplomats act on the international system through their speeches, as Constanze V. (2006) points out.

Côte d'Ivoire is currently engaged in an ambitious dynamic in favor of growth and development, in particular through reconstruction and employment. All the sectors of the national economy are concerned. Agro-industry, mining and energy, tourism, housing and socio-economic infrastructure await national and international investments (HE Mr. Alassane Ouattara, 2011).

In view of all the above, it seems judicious to return to the various issues of discursive communication mentioned by Kacou GOA (op.cit), based on the work of Alex M. The first issue cited is that related to the ability of communication to *transmit information*. He relates this to the *referential function* of which Roman O. J. speaks. We can therefore say that the

speeches made by the Ivorian diplomacy aim to inform, hook the public and seduce them. Therefore, these speeches fall within the scope of influence. Influence is based on the principle of providing information to a target that one wishes to influence (Robert P. et Mohammad A. A., 2012). However, influencing, according to Alain J. and Bruno R. (2012), consists in getting the person you want to influence to change his paradigm of thought, to modify his fundamentals. But, these authors deepen this perception of influence, through this statement:

In a very concrete way, the influence induces a change of level in the perception of realities. In view of the messages sent, directly or most often indirectly, the intended target will gradually extricate itself from its initial mental scheme to move towards another. As we will see, we can use in this case both reason and seduction – sometimes both – to obtain the desired final effect. Influence works in subtle ways. It is not a question here of saturating the target with simple and direct messages, but of appealing to their senses and their judgment (Same).

If influencing is about using reason and/or seduction in order to push a third party to change perception, thought patterns or to eradicate his mental pattern, then, one can attach to a strategy or the action of influencing by speech (in our framework, the diplomatic speech of Côte d'Ivoire during meetings with the diplomatic corps, as well as within the places dedicated to the function), the three registers of persuasion : logos, ethos and pathos. Indeed, according to Aristotle, the speaker must act on his audience with valid arguments [logos], touch hearts [pathos] and finally inspire confidence [ethos] (Aimée-Danielle L. K., 2012).

That verbal strategy, already implemented on the morrow of the socio-political crisis, will continue and be enriched by the argumentative axes mentioned above, namely the experience of managing and emerging from the crisis, the success of the mission to maintain peace in the country, etc., as part of Côte d'Ivoire's campaign for a seat as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. This hit the mark, since the country was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council of the said organization in 2017, for the period 2018-2019. That said, it is important to emphasize that Côte d'Ivoire, as part of its "reputational" reconstruction, is implementing a strategy focused on events and event communication.

### **3. Practice of event communication: a *Nation branding* strategy**

From Philippe B. (2005) 's point of view, event communication has a strategic variable. For him, although strongly tinted with marketing in the general opinion, this type of

communication has a greater scope than mere commercial interests. The issues clearly go beyond the marketing framework since this type of communication leads to (Philippe B., same) "a contribution of positive image, an increase in the prestige of the firm, an increase in its capital of sympathy and confidence with the public, a reinforcement of the internal cohesion of the staff who take pride in it, an investment in recruitment, because young people like this new perspective that corporate sponsorship represents" (Arcan & Al, 2014, quoted by Philippe B., *Same*). According to Isabelle F. and Patrick L. (2010), "events, if well positioned, can improve the brand image of the territories by creating an emotional link with the destination and transmitting a strong image. It is identical to the press relations that will relate it to a wider audience. Above all, it makes it possible to increase the notoriety of a destination or a company, the main thing is therefore to be seen and to obtain numerous media coverage".

As for the case of Côte d'Ivoire, it can be noted that the authorities are counting on major events of international, continental and regional scope, which the country organizes or in which they participate. And most of these events are, for some, directly related to planetary challenges and issues (climate, migration, etc.) and for others, in connection with economic and tourist promotion, including economic forums (abroad), culture and sport to which the populations of the world and of the African continent attach great importance. However, these events, with the large audiences they attract, very naturally attract the media that see in them opportunities to make a profit, in terms of audience. Thus, these events and the territory that hosts them receive strong national and international media coverage. In this vein, the event is still a media boon on regional and international channels. Côte d'Ivoire thus gains in visibility and notoriety. These events, which we call "major events of international, continental and regional scope" are those that Philippe A. calls "major events". For him, "a major event can be defined as an event which mainly concerns a sector of activity, which has economic and territorial repercussions of all kinds and has an international media impact beneficial to the host country or territory" (Philippe A quoted by Monique B., 2013).

At this level, we can cite as a current case, the African Cup of the Nations football (AFCON) that Côte d'Ivoire is organizing for the 2023 edition. In this context, five (5) major strategic cities for the country have been chosen to host the various meetings of the competition. These cities are as follows: Abidjan – the economic capital, considered one of the largest cities in Africa and called the lagoons pearl, is home to the economic lung of the country, the Abidjan

Autonomous Port (PAA); Yamoussoukro – the political and administrative capital, brings together on its territory a certain number of symbolic and emblematic infrastructures for the country, as well as for the whole world, namely the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace (the largest in the world), the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Foundation for Peace Research, etc. ; Bouaké – the second largest city in the country after Abidjan, it is one of the few cities to have a station of the Ivoirian Radiodiffusion Télévision (RTI), RTI Bouaké; San-Pedro – this city has on its territory the second Côte d'Ivoire's autonomous port among the activities of which are partly that of the export of raw materials, including coffee and cocoa. This makes it the first cocoa export port in the world (PORT AUTONOME DE SAN-PEDRO, 2019); Korhogo – is the fourth most populous city in Côte d'Ivoire, and the largest city in the north of the country (PORT AUTONOME DE SAN-PEDRO, same). Consequently, the stakes that this sporting event represents for Côte d'Ivoire, in general, and for the cities concerned, in particular, are perceptible. In fact, major events are strategic means of economic, social and cultural promotion. Event is therefore capitalizable in notoriety, values, touristic and commercial activities, innovation, media coverage, and economic growth.

Events organization is part of a *country branding* or *nation branding* strategy for Côte d'Ivoire. According to Nicolas B. (2014), *Nation branding* or *Place branding* (territorial marketing) refers to the process of identifying, organizing and coordinating the different variables intended to shape the image and perception of a territory. It thus refers to strategies that situate countries, cities and regions in a competitive market and aims to attract tourists and investors. In the same vein, identity makes it possible to mark the difference. For Charlotte W. (2011), "*nation branding* can be defined as the process through which a nation's image can be created or altered, supervised [*monitored*], evaluated and proactively managed in order to improve the reputation of a country within a targeted international audience". It is the territorial brand spirit to be promoted.

#### **4. Promotion of the Côte d'Ivoire destination as a competitive intelligence operation**

The concept of identity is at the heart of influence strategies. In this vein, the promotion of the Côte d'Ivoire destination is a competitive intelligence operation, through the actions of construction of an identity and a tourist brand made by the Ivorian authorities. Indeed, after the post-electoral crisis, the Ivorian State has put an emphasis on the development of tourism and the promotion of the touristic Côte d'Ivoire, both nationally and internationally. And this,

through the Ministry of Tourism and Leisure, and Côte d'Ivoire Tourism which is the National Tourist Office of the country. Thus, the Ministry of Tourism and Leisure has implemented a development strategy called "Sublime Côte d'Ivoire". This aims to: make Côte d'Ivoire the African co-leader in business tourism (*Abidjan Business City* and *Abidjan Medical City*); become the base for domestic and sub-regional entertainment (*beautiful beaches for all* and *AkwabaPark*); capture an international tourism eager for an authentic change of scenery (*In paradise: between sea and nature, Routes of African Treasures and the Route of Slaves*, etc.); and develop the Ivorian social and territorial tourism entrepreneurship (MINISTÈRE DU TOURISME ET DES LOISIRS). In practice, it is, for example, to make Abidjan a stronghold of tourism for congresses and conferences in Africa, as well as the medical hub of the sub-region (*Abidjan Business City*). Therefore, through *Abidjan Business City*, the State aims to strengthen Abidjan's strong position in business tourism by establishing it as a hub for conferences, congresses and exhibitions in Africa to reach 1.5 million visitors on the horizon 2025 (MINISTÈRE DU TOURISME ET DES LOISIRS). In addition, it intends to develop two complementary territorial business tourism hubs in Yamoussoukro and San Pedro.

For its part, Côte d'Ivoire Tourism, which is under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism and Leisure, has for some time undertaken a set of tourism marketing actions, namely a visual identity with the revision of the logo; the signature, the AKWABA SAFELY label; the song CI=ZO (which means "Côte d'Ivoire is beautiful"). It is a promotion of the destination through the "sale" of the country's touristic attractions (Chantal L. et Isabelle A., 2016) in order to constitute a Côte d'Ivoire brand.

The "brand" is linked to the notion of a sign of distinction and recognition (Same). It is a set of signs that allows audiences or targets to operate differentiation or specificity. In this vein, Chantal L. and Isabelle A. (same) evoke the idea that "the brand is a signifier, a sign of recognition that serves to distinguish products or services". These authors speak of an identification system attached to the brand. Thus, they explain that the identification system of a mark is not limited to the elements of the visual identity, that is to say, to all the graphic elements (name, logotype, symbol) activating the sense of sight. This system more frequently integrates othersensory dimensions such as sound, tactile, olfactory and taste identity of the brand and overall sensory identity of the brand. Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire Tourism, through these actions, falls in the line of the strategy of influence, deployed, to attract tourists. Côte

d'Ivoire Tourism associates the country's "star influencers" with its promotional actions (JEUNE AFRIQUE, 2022).

### **5. Communication approach in the management of Competitive intelligence**

An organization is a system which good functioning is held by a whole set of functions, knowledge and know-how. And, all this set is kept running by selected individuals, each of them according to their skills for a specific task. As a result, the practice of competitive intelligence within the public administrations visited is entrusted to certain actors from specialized structures and services. Thus, for them to work and achieve their objectives, the management of their material and human resources is required. Here, the communication aspect of the management of human resources working in competitive intelligence is targeted. That said, first of all, it is possible to situate the contribution of communication in the management of the leaders and practitioners of Competitive Intelligence (CI), in a global way, within Ivorian organizations. It is the communication management approach that involves the three roles of the manager enacted by Henry M. (2004) in the practices of competitive intelligence, in particular the informational role, the interpersonal role and the decision-making role.

First, at the level of the informational role, communication allows the managers of the departments and services in charge of competitive intelligence to transmit, through formal communication channels, operational information to their collaborators for the execution of tasks. These formal communication channels which are sometimes used very little, unlike informal communication channels, are department meetings, memos, intranet, professional electronic tools, etc. Then, the interpersonal role. This is achieved through interpersonal communication. For Kacou G. (2013), interpersonal communication or synallagmatic communication refers to the relationships between people that are in the organization (*same*). He continues, and indicates that it is the relationship between two or more parties/people within the company. This sense of communication exists between people of the same or different social conditions, of the same or different hierarchical levels in an organization. Within the departments, or structures in charge of competitive intelligence, this form of communication is comparable to visits in the practitioners' offices by managers, exchanges during meetings, etc. Finally, the decision-making role. This role is about all of the decision-making acts of the managers of the concerned departments, which are popularized through the

same communication channels mentioned above. Also, it should be noted that interpersonal communication occurs at the level of connecting CE practitioners with all the other organizational actors. But here, lateral communication is also at work.

Several members of these services, in their communication actions, make extensive use of digital means through which they transmit, often times, commissioned CE works. And that informal communication occupies, despite all that presented, a major place in communication practices. The theoretical explanation of all that could be found in the studies of Henry M. (1997) on the subject of organizational structures, and precisely on organizations and the two forms of communication that we find there: formal communication and informal communication. In reality, MINTZBERG shows there the *raison d'être* of these two kinds of communication. He starts from an analysis of formal authority and regulated flows within an organization to detect activities that research has highlighted. The informal communication network complements or bypasses normal circuits in decision-making processes. For Henry MINTZBERG (*same*):

Held, intangible and speculative information is simply ignored by the formal information system, although executives certainly depend on information of this nature. And the formal system, because it has to collect and aggregate factual data, is often too slow for the framework. Moreover, the progressive aggregation of informations makes that what reaches the strategic summit is abstract and so vague that it becomes of little use as a database on which to found strategic decisions. In contrast with the bland informations of the formal system, the verbal information received by an executive outside the regulated flows is very rich in meaning.

In addition, the author also thinks that the existence of informal communication in organizations is of a social nature. Otherwise, the contribution of communication at the level of the management of personnel in charge of competitive intelligence is related to raising awareness for the adoption of behaviors of observation, discretion and professional secrecy. Indeed, a civil servant or any agent of the State must not disclose informations related to the functioning of his administration, nor behave in any way likely to damage the brand image of the service he embodies. In addition, all agents are required to exercise restraint in the written and oral expression of their personal opinions. This obligation applies to anyone, even union officials remain subject to it (MINISTERE DE LA FONCTION PUBLIQUE). In fact, there are perspectives of communication in the policy of Competitive Intelligence.

## 6. Conclusion

Communication, say Thierry L. and Nicolas M. (2012), is the keystone of Competitive Intelligence(CI). Indeed, for them:

It is therefore a question of thinking dynamically about the notions of role and mechanism, while not neglecting the question of power as well as the importance of representations. Such, in our view, is the opportunity for an analysis of the dynamics of competitive intelligence through the prism of information and communication sciences when these make it possible not to fall into the trap of reductionism<sup>1</sup>.

Otherwise, a good public policy in terms of Competitive Intelligence and its implementation should not be based solely on economic and mathematical analyses. It must also integrate communication, in all its dimensions. This is the communication dimension of CI which covers technical and technological aspects, but above all, anthropological realities. Beyond personal motivation, this research finds its *raison d'être* on a social relevance. Indeed, by observation, we can see that economic life is inseparable from social life within a nation.

The results of this study provide the Ivorian authorities with knowledge in terms of competitive intelligence related to communication in order to strengthen the country's capacities face to uncertainties and hazards that could undermine its economy and its development. This research shows a fundamental and innovative component. It is therefore, a showcase of the communication approach in the public policy of competitive intelligence in Côte d'Ivoire. This study gives rise to the exploitation of other themes and other potential theses in areas related to Communication of Organizations and Marketing Communication in societal development in Africa.

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