Dr. S. Senyo Ofori-Parku

Dr. Ofori-Parku graduated with a Ph.D. in Communication and Society from the University of Oregon, and is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at The University of Alabama. His dissertation research—funded in part by the Tokyo Foundation, UO Public Impact Award, and the Lorry I. Lokey Fellowship—received the School of Journalism and Communication's 2015 Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award.

His research examines sociocultural cognition pertaining to environmental health risk communication, corporate sustainability (and CSR), as well consumer behavior relating to ‘green’ brands and products in national and international contexts. His work has appeared in journals such as Journalism & Mass Communication Educator; Public Understanding of Science; Journal of Research for Consumers; Science Communication; Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies; and Media, Culture, & Society.

Recent publications & research work include:

WHAT MADE YOU INTERESTED IN RESEARCH IN YOUR FIELD?
At first I just thought I wanted to be a journalist, but when I was in college, I found myself working with professors on their research and became interested in it. When I graduated, I knew I wanted to go straight for my master’s degree. I had to write a statement of research interest, and at first, I didn't know what to write, but then I was reminded that I like environmental research. I am originally from Ghana, and coming from a developing country, environmental issues are huge. My research focuses on environmental communication and public perception.

WHY IS RESEARCH NEEDED IN YOUR FIELD?
There are two main reasons: On the corporation side because they are growing in size, becoming a lot more influential, and producing unnecessary waste, who better than to advocate for environmental issues. But on the consumer side, consumers are becoming more aware that corporations should do good – serve the economy and the environment. These two reasons are why businesses should be ahead of the curve. I also believe that environmental issues tend to be politically polarizing. Which is why we need to understand how to better frame environmental issues so we don't fall into the politics of it and make the message more receptive.
WHAT ARE SOME OF THE STEPS TO YOUR RESEARCH PROCESS?
I always approach my research by asking myself “what is the story here.” I start by observing what is out there and connecting back to what has been done already by other researchers. Since everything is digital now, I use virtual libraries to get articles and piece them together to determine how I can make a meaningful contribution to existing research. This starts the process. I conduct experiments, surveys, as well as content analysis. Most of my experiments tend to be online – a big step of my process is securing the funding to pay people to participate in my study. I like to think of my process as organized chaos. I like to throw things around; it actually helps me find things later on.

WHY DO YOU INVOLVE OTHERS IN YOUR RESEARCH?
I have about three-to-four established researchers that I work with regularly. Working with them allows me to learn from their experiences and allows me to bring fresh ideas to projects. I create a better output working with others than if I was doing this myself. Last semester, I started working with an undergraduate through the Emerging Scholars Program, and I am having a lot of fun mentoring her. We started a project from scratch, and I get to provide them the tools and walk them through how to conduct research. It is like handing the baton off to the next generation.

WHAT DO YOU NEED FOR YOUR RESEARCH?
I use survey software, primarily Qualtrics, to collect the data. Then I use SPSS and STATA to analyze them. Recently, however, I’ve started to analyze tweets. Twitter is an interesting phenomenon because topics of interest will surge and then die back down. I look at discourse communities that form around issues and who the people are that form these groups.

DO YOUR FINDINGS ALTER PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS THAT YOU’VE HAD ON A SUBJECT?
I believe that if results align with my expectations all the time then something is wrong. Simply because I work with human beings, and human beings change all the time, things don't always happen the same way. An instance I can remember was I was researching this idea that, when organizations are local, they do better at environmental advocacy. I was studying a non-profit company off the coast of Ghana and how they were advocating for environmental responsibility, and surprisingly, I found that they were not framing the issues based on local context. They were using tactics that were created by international corporations, which contradicted previous research. These, and other findings, have shaped my approach to research. Being a quantitative and qualitative researcher means that you can have bias, but you have to test them and be willing to let those expectations go once the data emerges.

IS THERE A PARTICULAR CONFERENCE THAT YOU’VE ENJOYED GOING TO?
There are two major conferences that I go to-- Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and International Communication Association (ICA). The latter is my favorite, and it is my favorite for the same reason most people don’t like it and that’s because it’s really big. Although I consider myself an introvert, I find it to be energizing. There are so many panel options and things to see. The international component also makes it thrilling--the way scholars across the globe have different views on the same subjects.