

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM



SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

ASSESSING PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE AT GHANA MARITIME

AUTHORITY.

BY

MALIK ABASS DAABU

(MAPR 20017)

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM, IN

PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE

MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS.

DECEMBER, 2021

DECLARATION

I, Malik Abass Daabu, hereby declare that the work submitted here is entirely mine and expressed in my own words except otherwise declared. Any work(s) of other author(s) used by me in any form in this work has been duly and properly acknowledged. A list of all such references used has also been included. I state without equivocation that to the best of my knowledge, this work has not previously been, or concurrently being, submitted for any degree.

Name: MALIK ABASS DAABU

Index Number: MAPR 20017

Signed: M-A-D-A

Date: 15/12/21

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I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this dissertation was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of dissertation laid down by the Ghana Institute of Journalism.



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DR. ROSEMARY OBENG-HINNEH

(SUPERVISOR)

15th December, 2021

DATE

DEDICATION

To my beautiful and adorable Wuntima and Wuntiti-Hennah.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, the Almighty Allah deserves the greatest thanks for blessing me with good health, energy and mental acumen to complete this rather tasking work. I would not have been able to complete this work without His grace. I am exceedingly grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Rosemary Obeng-Hinneh who had to find space for me after I was reassigned to her. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Obeng-Hinneh because even when it looked less likely that I could meet the rather ominous deadline, she gave me confidence and responded to my late-night mails without complaints. Her insights shaped my work beautifully. I am grateful to Dr. Bismark Nantomah, too, for the guidance he generously offered at the early stages of my work. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Etse Sikanku, the Director, Directorate of Research, Innovation, and Development (DRID) for acting with dispatch when I needed help from the Directorate. His proactiveness saved me, for which I am eternally grateful. I must also express my gratitude to Dr. Ishmael Ayanoore, for making the time to proofread my work every step of the way. I must also say a big thank you to the Director General of the Ghana Maritime Authority, Mr. Thomas K. Alonsi, for his unceasing encouragement and guidance throughout this work. I am grateful to him. To my best friend, Rahinatu Mohammed (Sietie), I say thank you for the understanding and the sacrifices she had to make to ensure I complete this work on time. She endured weeks of my absence. I cannot complete these acknowledgements without recognizing a number of my course mates who made invaluable contribution to enable me complete my work – Celestina Asigri, Joseph Agbezuke, and Mawuli Zogbenu. To all of you, I say thank you!

ABSTRACT

Public relations is an important part of an organisation due to its role in building strong and cordial relations with stakeholders. The effective practice of public relations, thus, offers an organisation the capacity to interact and forge mutual bonds with key groups that are integral to its functioning. This recognition, notwithstanding, mainstreaming public relations in many organisations remains a challenge. This claim is particularly true about maritime administrations where despite their numerous publics, can in most cases remain faceless and detached from the environment within which they operate, with implications for undercutting the value of public relations in executing their mandates. Focusing on the Ghana Maritime Authority, this study explored the perceptions of the key publics of the organisation, aiming to understanding how it has mainstreamed public relations to build cordial working relationships. It employed the excellence model and the qualitative case study method as the theoretical and methodological point of departure respectively to explore stakeholders' perceptions about public relations within the Authority. Although the challenge of financial and functional autonomy posed a challenge to public relations mainstreaming within the organisation, the general perception by participants was that the Ghana Maritime Authority practiced public relations to a considerable extent. Such practice enables the Authority to link its programmes, activities, and goals to the incentives and expectations of both its internal and external publics – altogether improving upon the performance of the Authority. A key recommendation by the study is for the board and management of the Authority to commits to addressing the financial challenges faced by the public relations Unit by improving upon its budgetary allocations and assessing the feasibility of ring-fencing some charges retained by the Authority for PR activities.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

The maritime industry plays an integral role in the development of the world economy, helping to boost economic growth through international trade, and enabling sea transportation and security capacities (Ncube, & Lyon-Baker, 2011). This potential is exemplified by the industry's role in globalising production processes, expanding global supply chains, and merchandise trade, and improving sea security (Yercan, & Yildiz, 2012). Particularly within developing country contexts, where there is growing commitments to integrate their economies with the global economy, the maritime industry provides strong opportunities for economic growth and development (Mthethwa, 2003, Faith, 2019). Yet, harnessing this growth potential requires that the maritime administrations of developing countries overcome key challenges, including improving governance to foster industry-friendly services (Baker, 2011). This, in turn, requires a well-structured maritime administration with the capacity to effectively operate sea-borne activities.

Recent studies have sort to underline the specific nature of this proposed 'structured maritime administration', including the New Public Management (NPM) initiative that broadly proposes a more inclusive flexible, results oriented, and client sensitive management practice capable of both generating and sustaining the profitability of the industry (Singh, 2001). The concept is particularly associated with the industrialized nations such as the United Kingdom, United States of America and Australia. A key aspect of the NPM field involves employing the excellence

approach to public relation (PR) in order to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics (See Grunig et al., 2002; Pinnington, 2021). Public relations here, is a “distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to keep abreast of and effectively utilise change; serves as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools” (Tench & Yeomans 2006:8). Public relations, involving a planned and systematic organizational management is key to improving the operations and service delivery of maritime administrations (Pinnington, 2021). This management arrangement flows through a comprehensive two-way communication process, involving both internal and external publics, with the goal of stimulating better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the organization. The outcome is an effective public relations commitment that creates value by both giving valuable information to the public and soliciting feedback from same, altogether, helping to establish avenues of open communication, positive, friendly and solid relationship between maritime administrations and its clients (e.g., Vercic & Zerfass, 2016).

Despite this recognition, practitioners have long struggled to define the role and importance of public relations in fostering a structured maritime administration that delivers effective services (e.g., Ganesan, & George, 2019). This, in part, is due to a lack of appreciation and understanding by organisations of the role public relations can play in the strategic planning and management of an organisation. Attempts at mainstreaming PR in organisations have often either been

misunderstood or deliberately misinterpreted in pejorative ways that bear semblance with propaganda, with little truth, or its evasion altogether (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2009). Such practices undermine effective communication, which can in turn, weaken the role of PR in sustaining relationships, particularly the challenge of establishing and maintaining mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its internal and external publics (Tench and Yeomans 2006). This challenge underscores emerging efforts to adequately understand the crucial role public relations plays in establishing an internal system of social networks that operates within a framework of interrelated system of relationships with key stakeholders such as competitors, consumers, regulators and the media.

As with other organisations, maritime administrations can be well structured to operate effectively through mainstreaming PR, particularly as this establishes a management function – the means to monitor and interact effectively within and outside the organisation (Pinnington, 2021). The management of communication (planning, execution and evaluation) between maritime administrations and its external and internal publics ensures that the latter is in tune with both its stakeholders, and public opinion about the industry (e.g., Hunt & Grunig, 1995). The marine industry needs effective PR to make a difference in terms of operation reputation (Pinnington, 2021). Indeed, given that the maritime industry is often hungry for the latest and high standard services and information, PR can help to create a positive conversation about operational reputation, offering the public knowledge about how such operations fit in with current happenings within the industry. Given this important role of PR in building operational credibility, it is important to understand how the practice takes shape and used in the marine industry. The developmental prospects of the maritime industry cannot be overstated, thus,

making it important for administrations of the industry to have positive and credible customer and public connotations associated with their operations (ibid).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

A number of studies underline the role PR plays in public institutions in the areas of education, healthcare, security services, finance, as well as other corporate institutions but very little has been found on Maritime services (Rawjee, & Gqamane, 2012). This creates a condition known as sea-blindness, where maritime administrations remain faceless and detached from the environment they operate in (Mugridge, 2009). Sea-blindness emerges as a particular challenge to maritime administrations because such organisations have historically been discrete and prefer to keep low profiles in their operations, with implications for undercutting the value of public relations in executing their mandates (Vreÿ, 2013). Consequently, and particularly in developing country contexts, very little is known and valued by the public about maritime organisations despite the industry accounting for over 90% of global trade in terms of volume and is poised to grow to a \$3trillion by 2030 (ibid).

Despite this recognition, tackling sea-blindness through mainstreaming public relations in maritime administrations remains unsatisfactory, with important questions about the industry's role in addressing some key developmental challenges remaining unanswered. For example, the role of the maritime industry in the global decarbonisation agenda is a contentious debate needing PR practitioners to help discuss. Given that the maritime industry is the sixth largest (3%) in terms of global carbon emissions, its external publics in particular have started to question the economic benefits of the industry in relation to its commitment to the green global world agenda (Greene, & Rubio-Domingo, 2020). Beyond questions of how the maritime

industry pollutes the environment, important issues of tax avoidance and regulations evasions remain topical and contested (Dutt, & Traca, 2010).

The growing concerns around these issues and more are likely to increase the scrutiny of public and mainstream media around the operations of maritime organisations. Maritime administrations, thus, need to be aware of these issues and the changing landscape within which they operate. Subsequently, mainstreaming PR within such organisations can help them to scan the environment for issues to ensure that they are in touch with the public's expectations, including regulators assessments on relevant issues and the expectations of staff. With mainstreaming PR, maritime administrations stand to get abreast about how the competing economic, social, security and environmental interests inherent in their mandates place significant pressures and responsibility on them to listen and (re)shape their operations accordingly.

This study explores the preceding issues further, with a focus on the Ghana Maritime Authority (GMA), particularly how it has strived to operate within the increasingly complex terrain above, through mainstreaming PR to build cordial relationships with both their internal and external publics. The objective is to help underline PR as a strategic management function that is key to help maritime administrations, particularly in developing countries to respond to the changing and complex economic, environmental, social and political landscape within which they operate.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective is to assess public relations practice at the Ghana Maritime Authority. The specific objectives are;

1. To examine the perceptions of staff of the Ghana Maritime Authority on public relations practice.
2. To assess the effectiveness of public relations practice in the Ghana Maritime Authority.
3. To explore the challenges encountered by public relations practitioners in the Ghana Maritime Authority.

1.3 Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions;

1. What are the perceptions of staff of the Ghana Maritime Authority about public relations practice?
2. How effective is the public relations practice in the Ghana Maritime Authority?
3. What are the challenges encountered by public relations practitioners in the Ghana Maritime Authority?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study's findings will generate useful information for government and public institutions such as the Ghana Maritime Authority, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Communication and Digitisation, Ministry of Information, The Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (IPR-Ghana), and other stakeholders about the need to mainstream public relation in their operations. Moreover, it will help in designing effective and efficient reforms for PR enterprises, particularly in public institutions. The study promises to be useful to other academic researchers seeking to investigate the role public relations plays in sensitising the public on the operations of state institutions. It will essentially provide researches with useful information and data concerning the nature of PR practices within public institutions and the gaps therein. Overall, this study will contribute to

existing literature, particularly with respect to the comparison of past and present studies on the effective use of public relation by public relations practitioners in Ghana particularly in public institutions.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This research primarily assesses public relations practices at Ghana Maritime Authority in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The Authority is one of the country's growth poles, with very important stakeholders contributing to this. As such, PR should constitute an important management function if the Authority seeks to both consolidate its gains and address some of the challenges that confronts it. The study, thus, helps to explore whether PR helps to underpin a strategic managerial environment and fosters collaborative relationships between the Authority and its publics.

1.6 Organisation of the Study

The study is arranged in five chapters. Chapter One introduces the research task, involving the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, scope and organisation of the study. Chapter Two focuses on the review of related literature. This is followed by Chapter Three, which dwells on the research methods, involving a discussion of the research design, the population, sample and sampling procedures, instruments, data collection procedures of the study and data analysis. Chapter Four is dedicated to the analysis and discussions of the data collected. Finally, Chapter Five summarises the key findings and concludes the study, including offering recommendations based on the findings, and making suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the conceptual literature, examining the key theoretical discussions on mainstreaming public relations in organisations, particularly within the maritime industry. It begins with a reflection on the excellence theory in public relations, discussing the adequacy of the model in helping to mainstream and strengthen public relations practices in organisations. This involves describing the model, reviewing works that have adopted the model in explaining public relations successes and failures, and discussing how the model has been applied within the context of the maritime industry. The chapter further explores the mediums through which public relations practices, adopting the excellence model can foster improved organisational operations in terms of engaging cordially with both its internal and external publics, including a review of current and previous trends of practice and tactics particularly within the maritime industry.

2.1 The excellence model in public relations, towards a conceptual framework

Grunig et al.'s (2002: 2) broad definition of public relations as: "management of communication between an organization and its publics" largely shaped his conceptualization of the excellence model in public relations, which has become an important reference for PR research and practice (De Beer & Rensburg, 2011) The model helps to characterise effective public relations practice, including conceptualizing why and how it contributes to supporting effective organizational functioning. For Grunig et al., (2002), public relations contribute to effective organizational

functioning in two interrelated ways. First, when the practice helps to reconcile the goals of an organization with the expectations of its strategic clients, particularly through building valuable and long-term relationships with these groups, and second, when public relations manager and practitioners are part of the dominant organizational decision makers with capacity to shape the organization's goals, including help to determine the external publics most strategic to the organization.

Grunig et al., (2002), categorise their excellence model within three levels, with these broad levels feeding into subsequent effects. The three broad levels illustrate how effective public relations practice is achieved in the organizational setting. The first is the programme level which illustrates how effective public relations is planned, enforced, and reviewed at the individual communication level aimed at engaging with stakeholders such as employees, customers, investors, the media and community groups. The programme level embodies the external character of the organization's communication, and how this engages with stakeholders. The second level is the departmental level which consists how public relations practices and units within an organization are structured and managed. This level reveals in more specific terms the key conditions that make an effective communication department and the need to continuously improve upon this level. The third is the organizational level which denotes the organizational and environmental contexts within which public relations is rolled out – in particular, the broader organizational activities, mandate and mission of the organization, and how PR helps to entrench and consolidate these conditions. Altogether, all three levels must retain certain key characteristics (table 2.1) in order to contribute to the operation successes of the organization (Grunig et al., (2002).

Table 2.1: Characteristics of levels of excellent public relations in an organization

	Level	Characteristics of levels
1	Programme Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PR is managed tactically, in that an organization strategically builds relationships with its key publics through public relations practices.
2	Departmental Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instituting a single or integrated PR department dedicated mainly to mainstreaming public relations. • While PR and marketing departments have common objective, these should be separated as distinct departments. • The PR department should report directly to a senior management. • The department should design a two-way symmetrical communication model that supports the balancing of the interests of both the organization’s internal and external publics. • The department has a ‘senior PR officer’ who is a managerial role, and within the organizational decision-making hierarchy. • The senior PR officer should have the capacity to execute excellent public relations, as exemplified by their academic training in public relations, professionalism, knowledge of their managerial role, and knowledge of the symmetrical model.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of equal opportunities for both men and women within the PR department of the organization.
3	Organizational Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The character of PR within the organization mirrors the ‘two-way symmetrical model’, and consensus on this established between the senior managers and the departmental level. • The PR director should have power and influence within the highest decision-making body in the organization. • Existence of a ‘participative rather than an authoritarian organizational culture, where employees are able to closely engage and contribute to decision making. • A symmetrical system of internal communication exists in the organization and it is used. • The existence of an organic rather than mechanical organizational structure that enables employees to have the leeway to take initiatives and offer alternative contributions. • The existence of well-developed and functioning PR unit capable of operating within the often turbulent and complex environment with associated pressures from clients that can create challenges for the organization.
4	Effects of Excellent Public Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departmental programmes meet the communication objectives of the organization. • Excellent PR relations helps to reduce costs of regulation, pressures, and litigation. • Excellent PR helps to offer high job satisfaction to employees.

Source: Redeveloped from Grunig et al. (2002)

2.2. The two-way Symmetrical Communication and Public Relations mainstreaming in Organisations

A key aspect of the excellence model is the focus on the two-way symmetrical communication as the ideal approach organisations must operationalise in order to reach their goals (Gower, 2006). The approach cuts across all the three PR levels above, constituting the pillar of effectiveness in communicating and engaging with both internal and external publics (Grunig et al., (2002). Two-way symmetry approach is essentially an arrangement where individuals, organizations, and the publics communicate with and among each other to shape and adjust their ideas and behaviour in ways that align to the ideas of other actors rather than to control how others think and behave (ibid). This approach serves the interests of both the organization and its stakeholders although the former can still advocate its own interests here, through balancing this with the interest of stakeholders (ibid). Two-way symmetry approach contrasts with the persuasion approach where stakeholders are told what to believe, how they should act, and how to assess the organization (Pfau & Wan 2006).

Inspired by Grunig's excellence model, Kim et al., (2013) developed a behavioral, strategic management perspective where they note that public relations help to bridge gaps between interests, including align postures on challenges between an organization and its publics by engaging in proactive communication that balances the differing interests of actors. In Gower's (2006) assessment of the theoretical foundations of public relations, for example, she identifies the two-way symmetry approach, and how this engenders cordial relationship building as the most influential PR paradigm in recent times.

2.3 Limitations of the Excellence Model

The influence of Grunig's excellence model, notwithstanding, it is not without criticisms. Grunig's theorization has attracted questions around its considerably 'categorical' notion that the excellence model is one superior model of communication that can help organizations achieve excellence in public relations (Hutton, 2010). Hutton (2010) argues that no single model can claim superiority in all circumstances, and that public relations practices are fluid conditions that can be operationalized in several ways to achieve organizational objectives. Fawkes and Moloney (2008), for example, more favour a view of public relations as an expression of power relations amongst social groups against Grunig's symmetry model. As Roper (2005) suggests, symmetrical communication is no more an ethical approach to communicating with stakeholders than it is a strategy by organizations to meet its interests by forging a cordial relationship with the public. The compromising effects of the two-way symmetrical communication approach, in the long run, favours the organization more than it does with the stakeholders, with this often undermining the negotiating power stakeholders (ibid). For Roper (2005) negotiations underpinned by symmetrical communication are rarely collaborative, and based less on democratic principles of open dialogue around the public good.

Despite these criticisms, the excellence model remains influential in recent times in shaping public relations mainstreaming within organizations, including evolving to not only focus strategic public relations management as the sole purview of senior management and public relations practitioners but emphasise the responsibility of leaders at all levels of the organization and from various disciplines (De-Bussy, 2013).

2.4 The Excellence Theory and Public Relations in Maritime Organisations

Current understanding and expansion of the excellence model, particularly the specifically two-way symmetry, has enabled its application within various sectors, including the maritime industry (see Glykas & George, 2017). The operation of the maritime industry can be facilitated by either the one-way or two-way communication, depending on which is suitable for PR practitioners to mainstream public relations. For example, publicity and the conveying of information by a maritime organization to the public can be one-way communication intended to inform or persuade rather than build relationships with stakeholders, and balancing their interests with that of the organization (Zhuldz et al., (2013). More importantly, however, the maritime industry also requires the two-way symmetrical communication, particularly because of the need to engage with clients in ways that solicits feedback but also enables such stakeholders to contribute to shaping the goals and operations of the organization (Pierce, 2015).

Given this recognition that the operations maritime industry is much facilitated by two-way communication, Bissias & Pallis (2016) underpin conditions such as strategic communication, relationship building, and two-way symmetrical communication as key for the successful operations of any maritime organization, not least because the interest to not just make profit but support the economic development of host countries through sea transportation of goods. Osobajo, Koliouisis & McLaughlin (2021) note that the ‘strategic communication management tools’ often used by maritime administrations are very much rooted in the excellence and relationship management theories, because such tools underline the significance of engaging with stakeholders to build networks that are key achieving organizational goals. The two-way communication has been helpful in provoking a rethink around the ‘one size fits all’ relationship-building model that hitherto occupied PR practices in most maritime organizations, and instead,

focus on a more dialogic approach where maritime organizations, and both their internal and external public can exchange information, and tailor this to individual situations (Bissias & Pallis, 2016).

As indicated above, beyond the profit motive, maritime organizations occupy a significant developmental role through facilitating the transportation of goods to support trade and economic growth (Ehlers, 2006). This dual role often pushes maritime administrations to prioritize efforts that can attract clients as well as motivate staff. Gopnik et al., (2012) argue that the fulfillment of the dual role of maritime organizations can be limited by two key factors, namely clients and financial resources, requiring that such organizations engage closely with their internal and external publics in order to progress. For Bissias & Pallis (2016) the efficacy of public relations practice of maritime organizations is inextricably tied to attracting more clients and associated financial resources, including communicating effectively with staff to address their concerns. In attracting clients and motivating staff, nonetheless, maritime organizations have to be trustworthy, with ethical and bureaucratic structures that support good working conditions and allows for ease in doing business (ibid). This incentive, in turn, requires public relations efficacy, to engage closely with both clients and staff in a reliable and honest manner through effective communication (Gopnik et al., 2012). For Cahoon (2007), clear, transparent, and dedicated public relations practice has the capacity to both attract clients and serve as a conduit for staff to contribute to organizational functioning. Instituting the two-way communication arrangement within maritime organizations can adequately provide opportunities for feedback from clients, towards entrenching an open process that allows for the discovery of the public's perception about the organization as well as find out what PR strategies are more effective in establishing a good image for the organization (ibid). As Stone (1995) argues, focusing on clients' interests and

concerns, and involving them in a two-way communication arrangement can lead them to build a sustainable trust for the organization.

The point around clients' interests and concerns has close links with the longstanding PR principle that organizations wield significant potential for improvement when they adopt a customer-centered, and market-oriented approach, rather than self-centered approach (Huang & Hagan, 2011; Papasolomou et al., 2014). Maritime administrations often need to structure the nature of their operations with clients in ways that can help to forge a collaborative working relationship (Bissias & Pallis (2016). This responsibility links closely with Grunig et al's. (2002) concept of strategic public relations management where cordial relationships are constructed between the organization and its clients. A good strategic public relations management, in turn, requires a dedicated and competent staff and effectively engaging with a diverse clientele – two cornerstones for the successful and profitable operations of maritime organizations (Gregory, (2000). These two cornerstones align strongly with Grunig et al's excellence model, as they support an organization's capacity to attain its goals as well develop and project its image and reputation.

2.5 Image and Reputation Building as key Public Relations Principles in the Maritime Industry

The concepts of image and reputation, although differ in context are often mutually understood in an organisational setting (Hutton, 1999). In terms of the maritime industry, Shaojun (2010) suggests that organizations need to tailor their communication, both within and externally, in ways that projects an image around seeking the welfare of staff and clients, including being aware of the changing maritime regulatory landscape and environmental issues to ensure that they are in touch with the public's expectations. Projecting a good image helps to rally a positive

assessment and expectation by the industry's external publics around the economic and social benefits of maritime administrations such as contribution to fiscal revenues and foreign exchange, commitments to global carbon reduction, and addressing tax avoidance and regulatory evasions (ibid). A good organisational image in turn, helps maritime administrations develop, control, and sustain their reputations. Given the contentious nature of maritime operations, the public's trusts for maritime administrations remain fragile, and can pose a challenge for the industry in its efforts to build a good reputation (Rai, 2019). It is thus, important to mainstream PR within maritime administrations to manage communication on the competing economic, environmental and social interests in their operations in ways that assures some good economic and social purpose that reaches the target publics, altogether, helping to build a good image and reputation.

Consolidating an organization's image and reputation, in turn, requires a broad, proactive plan that helps an organization to evaluate its achievements as well as its shortcomings in terms of the impact of its PR strategies (Anthonissen, 2008). Emphasising the need for a consolidated and clear plan for PR mainstreaming within maritime administrations, de Vivero & Mateos (2012), argue against the practice of periodic communication within an organisation with little structure and pattern, and underscores the importance of a communication plan to the effective operation of any organisation. They stress that this plan must be engrained within the mission and vision of the organisation to achieve greater success. The authors emphasise a 'strategic communications guide', which should include developing goals, identifying the elements to use to achieve such goals (i.e., identify target publics, develop suitable messages, etc.), and pursuing continuing activities such as media engagements and publicity, with all these elements working together to achieve greater success.

2.6 Mediums of Effective Public Relations Mainstreaming in the Maritime Industry

There are various ways maritime organizations can enhance their engagement with their internal and external publics. Beyond a competent PR department and staff, Yau et al. (2009) suggest that maritime organizations can utilise online platforms such as websites, social media and other interactive communications tools to communicate their missions, nature of work, including work related information to staff. Online platforms emerge as important avenues for maritime organizations to develop and project both their images and reputations, including attracting new clients and promoting organisational awareness to both their internal and external publics (Rodseth, Fjortoft, & Lambrou (2011). Sanri, (2019), for example, has examined how the use of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter by the maritime administration in Turkey has helped the organisations to effectively cultivate relationships, particularly because of the two-way symmetrical communication and relationship this arrangement offers.

Globally, almost all maritime administrations have website and use this to project their identity, image and reputation (Notteboom & Rodrigue, 2005). Websites are particularly helpful for conventional public relations purposes, not least because they provide brief but detailed tailored to the needs of the internal and external publics of an organisation, particularly on organisational goals and missions, including ongoing activities and news (Jones et al., 2004). The website approach is prominently used by maritime organisations – helping to provide a communication space that targets and builds relationships its publics, particularly clients and staff (Notteboom & Rodrigue, 2005). The PR role of websites, notwithstanding, Jones et al. (2004) argue that the fact these platforms do not offer an interactive two-way symmetrical communication space make them weak in helping to mainstream PR within organisations. Websites can, thus, emerge as weak platforms to extract critical feedback that is necessary for building relationships and

networks. However, a strong web presence, in the form of an integrated use of websites, social media and blogs can help maritime organisations mainstream PR effectively (Rodseth, Fjortoft, & Lambrou, 2011). The regular and efficient use of these online platforms as part of the primary communication tools for maritime organisations can be in information dissemination, relationship-building, and attracting new clients.

The state of public relations within maritime administrations is still in need of further research as the literature specific to this subject is quite limited. However, a number of researchers are, however, emerging to explore the extent of PR practices within maritime organisations and the specific conditions under which such practices can be improved (e.g., Glykas & George, 2017; Zhuldz et al., 2013; Bissias & Pallis, 2016). A Key aspect of this emerging research focuses on the underlying factors that inhibit the practice and effective mainstreaming of PR. The challenge of financial resources emerges as a major constraint to the PR commitments of many organisations, with most organisations often maintaining a lean staff, subsuming PR units into the broader marketing department or avoiding the creation of PR departments altogether (see Center et al., 2008). Yet, as Grunig (2009) maintains, an effective PR mainstreaming does not require high expenditure, and financial resources do not have to be huge in order to communicate an organisations operation to its publics. For Agrifoglio et al., (2017) investments in an integrated PR strategy can offer a ‘cost-effective’ communication arrangement for maritime organisation. This integrated approach harmonises the goals, vision, mission, ideas, messages, images, etc. of an organisation that supports and reinforces each other to mainstream PR within. Othman, Bruce & Hamid, (2011) also suggest that ‘cluster marketing’ can be another cost-effective way to mainstream PR in maritime administrations. Within this approach, maritime organisations collaborate or partner with a sister organisation, such as the navy, shippers’

council, custom excise and preventive services etc. to communicate the industries operations to the public as well as engage with clients in ways that ensures the smooth operations of the latter's business (ibid).

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored aspects of the conceptual literature around public relations mainstreaming in organisations. It examined the theoretical and empirical discussions on the excellence model by Grunig (2002) in terms of how it has helped shape public relations practices in organisations, particularly within the maritime industry. The chapter reviewed how scholars have applied the excellence theory within different contexts, including the maritime industry, and in doing so helping to discuss the adequacy of the model in helping to mainstream and strengthen public relations practices in organisations. The chapter explored the key mediums within which public relations practices can be rolled out effectively to improve the operations of an organisational.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach for the study. It focuses on how the research was carried out, and how methods for empirical investigations and analysis were applied in order to assess the mainstreaming of PR practices in the Ghana Maritime Authority. The chapter presents the methodological points of departure, outlining the research design, the study area, the study population, sampling techniques and size. The chapter also outlines the data collection tools and procedure and the data analysis approach.

3.1 Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative approach. The approach focuses on examining and understanding social and human phenomena (Zawawi 2007). As Creswell et al. (2017) note, qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The qualitative research attempts to gather knowledge about human phenomena through their behaviour, experiences, perceptions, attitudes, interactions and of social events (ibid). The approach focuses on investigating and analysing specific problems by, among other strategies, gathering data through interviews or questionnaires, analysing the content of documents to extract meaning and describing and interpreting scenes and events (Yates, 2003). The approach is also inductive, meaning that the specifics of data analysis at the outset of a study is rarely known, largely due to the fact that qualitative research entails a view of social reality as a constantly changing phenomenon (Neuman 2006).

Critical positions exist about the 'unscientific' nature of the qualitative research design (e.g., Berg, 2004), particularly because of the approach's limited scope of objectivity, validity, reliability, verifiability, and generalisability (Grix, 2010). However, the choice of the qualitative approach was based on the study's objective to explore the perceptions, views and experiences of staff and clients about PR practice within the GMA.

In drawing on the perceptions and interpretations of staff and clients of the GMA on PR practices, and how this helps in relationship building and organisational performance, adopting the qualitative approach was useful: Enquiry into how public relations is mainstreamed in GMA

was thoroughly explored through qualitative data, such as the staffs' perceptions about the role of PR in forging healthy relationships within the organisation as well as with clients and the broader public.

3.2 Research Design

Based on the research objectives, this study employed an illustrative case study design. The illustrative case study approach is particularly useful in informing a target audience about an issue of which they were previously uninformed (Hayes et al., 2015). Despite this advantage, some scholars argue that the approach is limited in providing a basis for generalization given that it does span over a vast number of cases and may not sufficiently describe the high level of diversity that exists in most social contexts (Reis, 2009). Notwithstanding this challenge, the illustrative case study approach helps to bridge the gap in the understanding of a phenomenon through controlling preconceived notions from interfering in the researcher's analysis or judgement, particularly because of the benefit of the researcher's proximity to the phenomenon under study that allows for the co-creation of knowledge between the researcher and participants, including triangulation of data sources (Flyvbjerg, 2011). When well executed the approach can help to accurately describe a phenomenon – what is happening and why it is happening (ibid). Within this current study, this approach was useful because of the on a target audience (i.e., staff and clients of the GMA) that may not be well informed about PR mainstreaming in the organisation.

3.3 The Study Area

The Ghana Maritime Authority was established in 2002 as the country's statutory regulatory agency to promote, direct and monitor activities in the maritime industry. The GMA's

regulatory, monitoring, and coordination mandates are both internal and external (Cobbah, 2012). The GMA's internal mandate consists of regulating transportation and navigation within Ghana's inland waters, including facilitating maritime transport and other activities in the industry. Its external mandate consists of regulating the maritime space, in terms of activities in the marine and maritime zones of Ghana, including enforcing Ghana's international maritime commitments and responsibilities in accordance with the IMO rules (ibid).

In more specific terms, section 2(2) of the Act establishing the GMA mandates it to implement the provisions of the new Ghana Shipping Act 645, in place of the Merchant Shipping Act 1963, Act 183 that was repealed in 2003. Key procedures, rules and regulations within the Act 645 include ship registration, ship inspections and survey, maritime services, inland waterway safety, and ship wrecks and salvage. The GMA's enforcement of this Act is supposed to help Ghana address challenges pertaining to water transportation safety, particularly on the Volta Lake and Oti River, ship registration and licensing, and mariners' engagement and wellbeing. (Ago, et al. 2016). The GMA has among its tasks to ensure navigation safety, led Ghana to comply with international maritime conventions, address issues relating to maritime search and rescue through coordinating the activities of the Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority (GPHA), the Ghana Naval Forces (GNF), and any other state agency in such operations, including investigating maritime casualties and taking appropriate action. Other aspects of the Authority's mandate include overseeing the recruitment, training, and welfare of Ghanaian mariners, preventing marine pollution, protecting the marine environment, initiating research into national maritime transport development, initiating the promotion and development of private shipping lines and advising government on policies for the developing and maintaining maritime infrastructure such as ports and harbours. The GMA has its head office in Accra with branches in Tema and Takoradi. It has

five major departments, namely Maritime Services, Finance and Administration, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Division, Technical, and Inland Waterways Divisions.

3.4 Population of the Study

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2000), the population of a study is the full set of cases from which a sample is taken. Jankowicz (1995) points out that in order to draw a sample; one has to know how many people are in the population, and how this total is made up from people falling into various sub-groups in which you might be interested. In this study, the staff and clients (i.e., shippers, mariners, ship makers etc.) constituted the population from which information was collected. In more specific terms, the staff comprise top management and staff of the various departments of the GMA Headquarters in Accra.

3.5 Sampling Technique

This study employed the random sampling technique, but with the intermittent use of the purposive sampling technique to further identify key informants (Silverman, 2013). The random sampling technique was used to select interviewees from the broad staff members and clients of the GMA. The purposive sampling technique was used to sample key senior staff with knowledge of the extent of PR mainstreaming within the GMA, particularly the Director and Staff of the PR department and cognate PR practitioners. This technique was employed to help identify and interview information-rich respondents – individuals with knowledgeable about or having experience with the issue under study (e.g., Creswell and Clark, 2011).

3.6 Sample Size

Through the purposive and snowball techniques, fifty (50) interviewees (Table 3.1) were sampled and interviewed during a 3-month initial fieldwork and a 1-month follow-up. Fifty

participants were selected because of the broad and diverse nature of interviewees with knowledge of PR practices within the GMA. Interviewees included heads and staff of the GMA, GPHA, GNF, Ghana Shippers Authority (GSA), and Ghana Shippers Council (GSC). It also included Seafarers, Fisherfolks and members of communities around the Volta Lake and sea shores. These diverse groups of participants engaged closely with the Ghana Maritime Authority, and were hence considered to have valuable experience and knowledge about public relations practice within the Authority.

Table 0.1: Categories of Participants

No.	Category	Number
1	Officials of Ghana Maritime Authority	11
2	Officials of Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority	6
3	Officials of Ghana Naval Forces	5
4	Officials Ghana Shippers Authority	5
5	Officials of Ghana Shippers Council	5
6	Seafarers/Mariners	8
7	Fisherfolks	5
8	Communities Members	5
	Total	50

3.7 Data Collection

The main data collection techniques for this study were semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Separate interview guides were developed for each group of participants above. The interviewees were contacted ahead to schedule dates and venues for the interviews, with all interviews schedules except one conducted in the offices of the participants. Each interview lasted about 30 mins, with all interviews recorded. Interviews were particularly useful in collecting and understanding the perceptions, views, attitudes, and experiences of respondents (Kvale, 2008). Interviews were conducted to gain deeper and in-depth insight and understanding into the perceptions, views, and experiences of both staff and client of the GMA on PR practice

within the organisation, and its impacts and challenges. Interviews had the advantage of enabling participants to discuss issues in greater depth, which allowed the researcher room to seek further clarification on responses and claims, with this aiding in consolidating the study's findings (e.g., Rabionet, 2011).

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

Interviews were conducted by the researcher with help of a research assistant (although minimal) mainly due to the former's tight working schedules and the high interviews target (i.e., 50) within a short period of four months. The research assistant was well coached by the researcher prior to helping in conducting the interviews. The challenge, however, was the tendency for the research assistant, although with the help of an interview guide, to interpret and ask questions in ways that reflected their personal knowledge and circumstances and not in line with the information the interview questions sought to solicit. To mitigate this challenge, however, the researcher closely monitored the recordings, and corroborated these with the notes taken by the research assistant. Participants were assured strict confidentiality that the information they offered would only be used for this academic research. Interviews were complemented with document analysis. This involved a detailed examination of the GMA's PR policies and reports, policy-related speeches and meeting minutes, reports of individual PR practitioners, memos from the PR department, media and newspaper stories and reports of the GMA, and grey secondary literature. Complementarily, the researcher employed a triangulated data collection approach by combining interviews with document analysis (e.g., Bowen, 2009).

3.9 Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations are very important in all academic research. Consequently, this study took into consideration all possible ethical implications. The key ethical issues of participant confidentiality, anonymity and safety and common research social research concerns were considered. Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were contacted at least 24hours in advance and, verbal explanations given before the start of each interview. The initial contacts provided detailed information on the study to enable the participants to gain detailed understanding of the study so as to make an informed decision. For participants who agree to take part in the study, they were provided with a consent form to sign. Participants were made aware that interviews will be audio recorded only with their permission. Participants were at liberty to withdraw at any stage without providing any reason and without any consequences. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Incorporating these ethical principles helped to clarify the procedural, situational, relational and existing guidelines that are key to ensuring quality data collection and analysis (e.g., Tracy, 2010).

3.10 Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was holistic involving the researcher immersing in the data at the initial stages of the data collection process to developing themes to structure and analyse the data collected. In the course of the fieldwork, and in line with Tracy's (2013)¹, recorded interviews were listened to several times after each day of fieldwork and before the next day's fieldwork begun to enable the researcher get immersed in the data. This approach was helpful in three ways:

¹ Tracy suggests researchers to read and listen to the data repeatedly to get immersed in the data.

First, it helped to address the gaps in earlier interviews. Relevant questions that could have been asked in the initial interviews were introduced in subsequent interviews, and data integrated with earlier responses to underpin insights into the effectiveness and challenges of PR, as well as the perceptions of respondents about the practice of PR in the GMA.

Second, the approach provided the researcher with the opportunity for immediate follow-ups while still doing interviews within an organisation, which made it possible for clarification on some information to be sought and finetuned.

Third, the approach provided the researcher the opportunity for identifying key themes early in the interviewing process to help (re)direct subsequent interviews, and which assisted adopting the eventual themes that have been analysed in Chapter four. This approach is particularly useful in research contexts that employ text and perspective data, such as interview transcripts and various types of surveys data (Clarke et al., 2014). Thematic analysis is a useful approach for analysing people's knowledge views, and experiences (Terry et al., 2017). The approach allows for flexibility in data interpretation, where data is sorted into broad themes (ibid). Despite the risk of thematic analysis to miss nuances in collected data, as the approach is often subjective, it can be valuable in revealing meaning if the researcher control's their own interpretations and focus on the raw data (Clarke et al., 2014). This study employed thematic analysis to analyse the interview responses – familiarising, coding, generating, reviewing and defining themes and writing up the final results. Themes established in the literature were employed to guide the development of similar or alternative themes. In sum, data analysis was done iteratively with each stage feeding into the subsequent stage and being illuminated by the previous stage.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach for the study, detailing how the research was carried out. It outlined how the methods for empirical investigations and analysis were conducted in order to assess the mainstreaming of PR practices within the Ghana Maritime Authority. This involved outlining the research design, the study area, the study population, sampling techniques and size, the data collection tools and procedure and the data analysis approach.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter analyses the data collected from various interview sessions, including triangulating this primary data with grey secondary literature. It analyses the views and perceptions of respondents about the practice of public relations within the Ghana Maritime Authority (GMA), and the effectiveness of this practice in forging and consolidating strong and collaborative

relationships with both the internal and external publics of the organisation. The chapter also analyses some of the key challenges public relations practitioners encounter within in the organisation. These proceeded through categorising the interview data into themes that mirror the objectives of this study in chapter one, namely the capacity of the public relations unit of the GMA, the position of public relations within the Authority's decision-making hierarchy, the effectiveness of public relations within the organisation, the types of tools employed by the PR unit to mainstream public relations within the GMA, and the challenges of public relations practice within the Authority.

4.1 The Public Relations Unit of the Ghana Maritime Authority in brief

Interviewees from the public relations department of the GMA revealed that the public relations unit consists of 12 permanent staff, with the support of two auxiliary staff, mainly interns and national service personnel. The unit is headed by a Senior Public Relations Officer who reports to Director General (DG) of the Authority. The unit was established in 2006 as an integral part of the Authority's managerial functions. The main incentive for its creation was to create and maintain constructive relations with the growing number of different key publics, including staff, clients, sister organisations, government officials, and local communities within the GMA's operational areas. Given the different interests and incentives of these publics, the establishment of the PR unit came in handy – to help supervise, assess, and understand the concerns, incentives, and attitudes of these stakeholders, and in so doing, build and maintain mutually beneficial relations between the Authority and its publics.

The interviews also revealed that although the individual PR practitioners work together to improve channels of communication, and to institute innovative ways of embedding a two-way flow of information within the Authority, each has a specialised responsibility. These

responsibilities include internal communication, corporate social responsibility, external communication, government affairs, media relations, corporate communication, event management, and protocol.

4.2 The Capacity of the Public Relations Unit

In terms of capacity and professionalism, the PR Unit of the GMA is largely progressive. Interviews revealed that the Unit retains a highly qualified and capable staff, including considerable commitment to human resource education and training. Over 70% of the staff interviewed from the Unit had a master's degree in Public Relations, including other professional courses in communication. This calibre of PR practitioners is possible to sustain largely due to the high demand for jobs within the GMA.² Both top management and staff of the PR Unit are considerably well paid relative to the broader civil service of Ghana³. The capacity of PR practitioners is also boosted with performance incentives, and rewards and promotions are reported to be meritocratic, often based on demonstrable staff performance⁴. Despite claims by some respondents of some cases of favouritism and personal influence here, this is not so apparent, with some respondents suspecting that this might be more the case at the management level. Even where favouritism and personal influence is tracked, the PR practitioners who eventually get employed are generally considered to be capable.

Alongside the capacity of staff of the PR Unit, underpinned by the considerably meritocratic arrangements within, the Unit commits to internal skills training⁵. PR practitioners receive training from professional institutions such as the Institute of Public Relations (IPR-Ghana), as

² Interview, Senior GMA staff, 11/08/2021

³ Ibid

⁴ Interview, GMA staff, 23/07/2021

⁵ Interview, Manager at GMA, 24/09/2021

well as practical training from the more senior and experienced staff. The management and senior PR practitioners have masters' degrees, although their skills are also consolidated and improved routinely through on-the-job training, alongside participation in conferences and workshops. The capacity of the PR Unit supports the character of public relations within the GMA that mirrors a 'two-way symmetrical communication arrangement', both within the organisation and outside. This two-way symmetrical communication model developed by the PR Unit helps to tactically manage PR by supporting the balancing of stakeholder interests, within a move to strategically build relationships with both the organization's internal and external publics.

In addition, both the broader staff and clients of the GMA emphasised the role of the Unit's operational culture in establishing strong corporate bonding between the GMA and its publics, with a focus on training and professionalism. Interviewees stressed that successive PR managers and practitioners have continuously underscored the role of their operations as a key conduit for the performance of the GMA, and in so doing reinforced the Unit's work culture of professionalism, and commitment to forge strong corporate relations with both staff and clients of the GMA. As one senior staff opined, "successive PR managers of the Ghana Maritime Authority have served the organisation and the country well over the years, they have helped the Authority to establish mutual relations with its stakeholders"⁶. The PR Unit's institutional capacity bears a strong modern influence, making it possible for practitioners to become ingrained and integrated within the fast growing and dynamic communication landscape, and in so doing, occupying a key decision-making position within the GMA.

⁶ Interview, 1/10/2021

4.3 Public Relations within the Authority's decision-making Hierarchy

The interviews suggested that the public relations manager at the GMA occupies a management position, and reports directly to the Director General (DG) of the Authority. The public relations Unit works closely with other departments or divisions and forms part of the administrative unit of the GMA. The PR Unit plays a key role in the day-to-day operations of the GMA and maintains a cordial relationship with the broader staff, with the collective goal to help build a positive image of the organisation. The responses from the interviews also revealed that the PR manager participated in management meetings and decision making, consistent with Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier's (2002) argument in chapter two that the PR unit of an organisation becomes effective and influential when its management is part of the decision-making process. This positive arrangement, notwithstanding, the public relations Unit does not have a representative on the GMA's board, which constitutes the highest decision-making body of the organisation.⁷ The absence of a PR representative within the board of the GMA does not follow recent corporate management best practice that strongly recommend the inclusion of public relations managers at the highest decision-making body of an organisation, including involving them in strategy development – as these are key to corporate image and reputation building (see Grunig, 2009).

4.4 The Effectiveness of Public Relations Within the Ghana Maritime Authority

Exploring the effectiveness of PR practice within the GMA suggests a mix bag of features of conventional practices and some of the principles of the excellence model explored in the literature review in chapter two. The PR Unit's control by the DG, the Deputy DGs, and the Board of the GMA is still the norm rather than the exception. The type and shape of programmes

⁷ Interview, senior staff, 26/8/2021

by the PR Unit, including the share of budget allocation to fund these programmes is closely influenced by the top management of the GMA.⁸ For one senior PR practitioner:

*.... some of the managers here often want to micromanage what we do
..... whether they know what we do or not or the cost of what we do
the public relations unit has really never operated with the full
complement of its annual budget.⁹*

In recent times, however, the GMA's management has demonstrated a commitment, although subtly, towards an arrangement where the PR unit is tasked to design its programmes with the requisite budget for consideration by management, with a quest to promote a functionally and financially sufficient PR Unit that has some flexibility to roll out its activities in a fast-growing information, technology and market-oriented environment.¹⁰

Much of the interview responses from stakeholders revealed a growing commitment by the PR unit to link the goals of the GMA with both the functioning of the broader organisational staff and the expectations of its strategic clients through building valuable and long-term relationships with these groups. The PR unit retains an improved interface with individual staff and clients, other units within the GMA, sister institutions, government officials, foreign diplomats, and private sector groups. As one mariner noted:

*.... the public relations department of the Authority has a culture of increased
emphasis on consultations with clients, and customers..... altogether, to ensure*

⁸ Interview, senior manager of the GMA, 8/10/2021

⁹ Interview, 22/10/2021

¹⁰ Interview, senior manager of the GMA, 8/10/2021

that the Authority constructs a more efficient and responsive relationship with its working environment.¹¹

There is also a clear recognition by the PR Unit of the need to ensure linkages between its programmes, activities, and goals of the GMA, and how these both fit into, and address the incentives and expectations of stakeholders of the organisation. This commitment helps to engage closely with clients, enabling them to readily access information and the GMA's services in an efficient manner, including developing the organisation's image. For one senior staff of the PR department:

... linking the Authority's goals to the incentives and expectations of clients and customers is a requisite arrangement herethis helps to facilitate an inclusive communication process with clients, staff and other stakeholders, increase awareness around the operations of the Authority, positively influence the attitudes and behaviours of stakeholders towards the Authority, and promote both the economic and social contributions of the Authority towards national development.

The interviews revealed that public relations practitioners help to manage the GMA's relations with all its stakeholders, including monitoring and examining concerns and complaints raised by these stakeholders. The general consensus by respondents is that the collaborative relations that is developed between the GMA and its internal and external publics often help to reveal critical issues that shape the organisation's decision-making processes, plans and operations.

¹¹ Interview, 17/09/2021

Indeed, the public relations Unit is viewed as instrumental in boosting the revenue generation capacity of the GMA, not least because of its role in establishing a favourable image for the organisation's business operations. Gleaning from the interviews, key contributions by the PR Unit, here, include supporting the marketing activities of the GMA, stimulating client understanding, acceptance and satisfaction. Other contributions include boosting the public's awareness about the GMA's operations, building and courting stakeholder trust, informing and educating target audiences, and protecting, enhancing and sustaining the image of the organisation. A key aspect of these commitments involves creating awareness and positive feelings about the services and business of the GMA by communicating both commercial and non-commercial messages through various platforms. For example, to foster public relations with stakeholders and indirectly generate revenue for the GMA, the PR Unit often disseminates non-commercial messages such as corporate social responsibility projects with a view to target the conscience of clients for support, including increasing positive perceptions about the organisation. Interviews revealed that the PR Unit also motivates intermediaries of the GMA (e.g., staff, clients, sister organisations) to spread information about the organisation's achievements and contributions to national development, both locally and globally.

One marine surveyor noted:

.....since the PR Department conducted a survey to measure our views about of GMA, we have noticed a drastic change in the attitudes those young girls in Tema who used to treat us as we have contagious disease....at least now they respect and they have introduced a POS which we now use to make payments instead of walking in the hot sun to bank to pay money to them as was the case.

The general perception of all participants in the study was that public relations is an integral part of the GMA's operations. Interviewees revealed how the practice is key to fostering client satisfaction, underpinned by the PR department as an indivisible part of the organisation's daily operations. Alongside client satisfaction, market positioning, differentiated marketing structuring, relationship marketing, and maritime business marketing are some of the key strategies adopted by the PR unit to build a strong corporate relationship within its operational environment.¹² These marketing communication strategies constitute critical corporate enhancement tools for the PR unit and the broader management of the GMA, not least because such approaches help to develop and sustain cordial relations with the actors within which the environment the organisation operates.

In addition, staff, clients and respondents from sister organisations of the GMA agreed that public relations constituted a very important information source within and outside the organisation and helped to build relationship with other sister organisations such as the Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority, the Ghana Shippers' Authority and the Navy, in harnessing the maritime sector for national development. The public relations department has been both active and instrumental in building the corporate image of the GMA, including being key to building relationships with the external publics of the GMA.¹³ This involves the department regularly communicating key decisions, processes, and changes to clients, including managing public misconceptions about the organisation.¹⁴ With regards to the latter, the public relations practitioners within the GMA have helped to manage misconception about the partisan and

¹² Interview, senior GMA staff, 10/09/2021

¹³ Interview, Mariner, 18/08/2021

¹⁴ Ibid

profligate character of the organization's management that posed a threat to the image and operations of the organization.¹⁵ As one Mariner observed:

Generally, I think that the PR department has helped to manage the publics' misconceptions about the partisan and corrupt engagements of the Ghana Maritime Authority.....and has helped to invoke a positive change in the knowledge, attitude, and behaviour of the public towards the Authority.¹⁶

4.5 Public Relations tools within the Ghana Maritime Authority

The public relations unit of the GMA employs both internal and external mechanisms to communicate with its publics. Internally, memos and email communication with the broader staff and management, the GMA's website and posting information on notice boards are key tools used by the PR unit in its operations. Externally, the PR unit of the GMA continues to use a long list of traditional public relations tools consisting of direct mailing, organising Day of the Seafarers, World Maritime Day annually, advertising, brochures, billboards, conferences, newsletters, flyers, press releases, speeches, presentations at international maritime exhibitions, and both domestic and international networking. Other key conventional tools used by the PR unit include presentations at domestic fairs, organising conferences, meetings with clients, local exhibitions, print media communication, and discussions on radio and television – altogether, helping the GMA to both communicate and forge a stronger collaboration with its external public and the general public at large.¹⁷

Alongside these conventional PR tools, interview responses mainly from staff of the PR department suggest that the public relations unit utilises the GMA's website to manage its

¹⁵ Interview, senior PHA staff, 14/10/2021

¹⁶ Interview, 1/10/2021

¹⁷ Interview, senior GMA staff, 14/08/2021

communication with both the internal and external publics. The GMA's website is a key channel for communicating, informing, educating and building relationships with both the organisation's internal and external publics, including being an important tool employed by the PR unit to build the image and reputation of the organisation. Through the website, the PR unit displays information on the organisation's activities, mission, vision, goals, processes, trends, achievements etc. The PR function of the GMA's website closely aligns with Notteboom & Rodrigue's (2005) assertion that websites play a very critical role in forging collaborative working relations within the maritime industry globally.

The important PR role of GMA's website, notwithstanding, the staff of the PR unit revealed that given that the website mainly offers a one-way communication platform, it is limited in terms of creating an inclusive communication loop for the Authority and its stakeholders. The unit, thus, integrates social media platforms as a hybrid component of its PR mix, and as an integral conduit to facilitate its image and reputation building. The use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter help the PR unit to roll out its activities to foster an inclusive interaction and collaboration with both staff and clients. As one senior PR official revealed, "social media platforms have become a key cornerstone of the Authority's communication tools these have significantly improved the strategies we use to communicate with our internal and external stakeholders".¹⁸

This comment links closely to the broader interview responses by both staff and clients of the GMA that social media enables them to not only access information posted by the PR unit, but also to express and share ideas and concerns with the management of the GMA – an arrangement that enables a two-way, personalised, and timely interaction between the GMA and its publics.

¹⁸ Interview, 8/10/2021

This helps to make communication and organisational operations more progressive.¹⁹ Through social media, the PR unit is able to communicate diverse information to a wider audience, both locally and internationally via tools such as monthly, quarterly, and annual reports, advertising, corporate social responsibility projects, staff training and welfare news and updates, images, project videos, conferences, and public social activities.²⁰

4.6 Challenges of Public Relations in the Ghana Maritime Authority

Being part of an administration characterised by traditional bureaucratic features, the challenges of the Ghanaian maritime administration are considerable. Interviews from staff of the GMA revealed that a major challenge is lack of functional and financial autonomy. The PR unit is one of the smaller units of the GMA, and a subordinate office of the DG's Secretariat. This subordinate position leaves the PR unit with minimal functional and financial autonomy that often sees staff and management of the unit constantly engaging in lengthy hierarchical approval processes for even basic day to day matters. The challenge of limited functional and financial autonomy undermines the operations of the unit, particularly in terms of delays in decision-making, planning and implementation of its programmes. Limited financial autonomy means that the PR unit often has to almost entirely depend on the discretion of the DG or the Deputy DG (Finance & Administration) as to the share of the GMA's annual budget to be allocated for PR activities.

Alongside this constraint, the unit has very little or almost no flexibility with regard to varying its expenditure. The revenue allocated to the department is often so fixated to specific activities, with little space to expend on regular skills training of PR practitioners, leaving little incentive to

¹⁹ Interview, senior GMA staff, 4/10/2021

²⁰ Ibid

improve upon the capacity of its staff, with implications for the effective performance of the department. With limited budget allocations, it is almost often the case that the department cannot execute the activities and programmes it sets out to achieve within a year. Lack of functional and financial autonomy hampers the capacity of the PR unit to provide state-of-the-art services to both the staff and clients of the GMA, which in turn, adversely affect the operations of the organisation.

Closely linked to the point on limited flexibility is the longstanding hierarchical administrative culture within the GMA that has fostered a certain obsession with rules and procedures, and suppressed initiative taking. The general consensus by the staff of the GMA was that the strict rule following administrative culture stifles PR mainstreaming efforts which are supposed to be more tailored to modern communication structures, flexible, initiative and participatory – designed to meet the challenges of corporate image and reputational building in the fast-growing information and technology era. The strict rule of following administrative culture within the GMA promotes a sluggish decision-making process, which in turn affects the operations of the PR unit as it engenders low morale and initiative taking.²¹ In a sector such as PR, where time and dynamism are key to success, obsessive hierarchical arrangements can undermine the efficiency of PR staff and practitioners in doing their jobs (Grunig, 2009). The literature suggests that a more fluid and initiative PR management style with less red tape offers a more promising environment for mainstreaming public relations in ways that contribute meaningfully to broader organisational performance (De-Bussy, 2013). Strict rules and procedures associated with most maritime administrations in developing country contexts undermine the ability of PR practitioners to be initiative and flexible in the utilisation of available resources to meet modern

²¹ Interview, senior GMA staff, 11/09/2021

communication standards, and attract and retain skilled PR practitioners because of the rigid corporate space to operate (Glykas & George, 2017). Rigidity in operational rules makes it less likely that an organisation can attract professional PR practitioners to help in building strong relations with stakeholders and meeting the growing pressure associated with communication in an organisation (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the data collected from the interview. Some of the interview data was triangulated with grey secondary literature from chapter two. The chapter analysed the views and perceptions of participants about the practice of public relations within the Ghana Maritime Authority (GMA), and the effectiveness of this practice in building and maintaining collaborative relationships the publics of the Authority. It also analysed some key challenges faced by public relations practitioners within the Authority. The interview data was categorised into themes that reflect the objectives of the study in chapter one. And analysed. The key themes included the capacity of the public relations unit of the GMA, the position of public relations within the Authority's decision-making hierarchy, the effectiveness of public relations within the organisation, the types of tools employed by the PR unit to mainstream public relations within the GMA, and the challenges of public relations practice within the Authority.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

Employing a qualitative research design, this dissertation has explored the perceptions of staff and clients of the Ghana Maritime Authority (GMA) about public relations (PR) practice within the organisation, exploring the effectiveness of the practice within, and examining the challenges encountered by public relations practitioners in the Authority. This final chapter offers a summary and conclusion of the study, and makes some recommendations, including suggesting areas for further studies.

5.1 Summary of Key findings

Three key findings emerged from analysing the GMA's staff and client's perception of PR practice within the organisation and how this has helped to foster corporate relationship and image building. These findings are presented in accordance with the objectives of the study in chapter one.

5.1.1 The Perceptions of Staff and Clients of the Ghana Maritime Authority about Public Relations Practice

In broad terms the staff and clients of GMA, including the broader stakeholders of the organisation considered the public relations unit to be embedded with the capacity to perform its functions effectively. The general perception was that the unit retained a highly qualified and capable staff, including considerable commitment to human resource education and training, with over 70% of the staff possessing a master's degree. The capacity of PR practitioners is further enhanced with performance incentives and rewards. Promotions were also as meritocratic. Generally, participants emphasised the operational culture of the PR department in establishing strong corporate bonding between the GMA and its stakeholders.

The operations of the PR Unit also help to both enhance the GMA's operations through corporate relationship building and sustain this. This has contributed to incorporating the public relations manager of the GMA into management position, who works closely with other departments/divisions and forms part of the decision-making process of the Authority. While this is progressive, particularly that it aligns with a best practice argument that an organisation becomes effective when its management is part of the decision-making process, the fact that the head of the public relations Unit is not sitting on the GMA's board, which constitutes the highest decision-making body of the Authority undermines the role and influence of the PR Unit. Nonetheless, for many of the respondents, the capacity of the PR Unit and its operations underpins good PR practice within the Authority, not least because of its increasing commitment to consolidate a 'two-way symmetrical communication arrangement that helps to effectively communicate and balance stakeholder concerns and interests.

5.1.2 The effectiveness of Public Relations Practice in the Ghana Maritime Authority

In terms of the effectiveness of PR practice within the GMA, the evidence suggests a mix of features of conventional practices and some principles of the excellence model in PR. With respect to the former condition, the PR Unit is controlled by the DG or Deputy DGs and the Board of the GMA. Consequently, the programmes and activities of the PR Unit, and the funds to finance such activities are closely influenced by the discretion of the DG and other top management officials of the GMA. This situation has the potential to slow down the implementation of PR programmes as well as undermine flexibility and initiative taking. This conventional practice, notwithstanding, the general agreement is that the PR Unit's institutional capacity bears a strong modern influence, and has made it possible for practitioners to become integrated within the fast-growing and dynamic communication landscape. The interview data

suggests a growing commitment by the PR Unit to link the goals of the Authority with the functioning of the broader organisational staff, including effectively managing the expectations of its strategic clients through building valuable relationships with these groups. The PR Unit retains an improved interface with individual staff and clients, other departments within the GMA, sister institutions, government officials, foreign diplomats, and private sector groups. There is also a clear recognition by the PR Unit of the need to draw linkages between its programmes, activities, and goals of the GMA. The interview data suggests that this commitment helps the PR Unit to engage closely with its clients, enabling the latter to readily access information and services in an efficient manner.

The PR Unit has also helped the GMA to establish a good image as one of the key state agencies contributing to economic and social development. This involves the instrumentality of the Unit to the revenue generation capacity of the GMA. It also involves the Unit supporting the marketing activities of the Authority, stimulating client understanding, acceptance and satisfaction, and boosting the public's awareness about the GMA's operations. Other 'image building' conditions include building and courting stakeholder trust, informing and educating target audiences, and delivering corporate social responsibility interventions. The PR Unit, thus, emerges as an integral part of the GMA's operations as it is key to fostering staff, client and the broader stakeholder's satisfaction.

The PR Unit of the GMA has largely achieved this sense of effectiveness due to its use of both internal and external mechanisms to communicate with its publics. The Unit relies on memos, the authority's website, and email to communicate with the broader staff and management of the GMA's. The PR Unit uses a long list of traditional public relations tools such as direct mailing, organising seafarers' days, advertising, brochures, billboards, conferences, flyers, newsletters,

press releases, speeches, presentations at international maritime exhibitions, and both domestic and international networking etc. to communicate externally. However, given that these traditional PR tools mainly offer a one-way communication arrangement, the Unit integrates social media platforms as important channels to communicate, bond with its publics and build its image and reputation. The use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter help the PR Unit to roll out its activities to foster an inclusive interaction and collaboration with both staff and clients.

5.1.3 The challenges faced by Public Relations Practitioners in the Ghana Maritime Authority

The study revealed two key challenges. First was the lack of functional and financial autonomy of the PR Unit. Alongside being a relatively recent creation, the PR Unit is also a subordinate office to the DG's Secretariat, a situation that leaves it with minimal operational autonomy with hierarchical battles. This challenge undermines the operations of the Unit such as delays in decision-making, planning and implementation of its programmes. Limited financial autonomy means that the PR Unit often has to almost entirely depend on the discretion of the DG or the Deputy DGs as to the share of the GMA's annual budget to be allocated for PR activities, with very little or almost no flexibility with regards to varying the department's expenditure. The revenue allocated for PR activities is often inadequate, with what is released fixed on funding specific activities. The lack of functional and financial autonomy hampers the capacity of the PR Unit to provide state-of-the-art services to both the staff and clients of the GMA, which in turn, adversely affects the operations of the organisation.

Second was the hierarchical administrative culture within the GMA underpinned by an obsession with rules and procedures which sometimes suppresses initiative taking by the PR Unit. This strict rule of following administrative culture stifles initiative taking and the integration of more

modern communication structures that are flexible, innovative, and participatory enough to meet the challenges of a fast-growing information and technology era. The strict rule following administrative culture also promotes a sluggish decision-making process, which in turn affects the operations of the PR Unit as it engenders low morale and commitment to deliver.

5.2 Conclusion

The dissertation illustrates clearly that whilst public relations practice in the GMA is commendable, this practice has to be embedded in an efficient and modern communication structures to serve the needs of an industry that is dynamic and market driven. Despite the useful role of the traditional public relations style in meeting the expectations of the various publics of maritime administrations, the integration of more modern, and information technology initiatives promise a more effective PR mainstreaming within the organisations. Analysis of PR practices within GMA indicates that it has a lot of benefits to the operations of the Authority. The main challenge facing the PR Unit is the lack of adequate resources and significant red tape that undermine its innovativeness. As discussed in chapter two, a committed application of the excellence model in PR can go a long way to address some of the challenges PR mainstreaming efforts face within the GMA and maritime administrations more broadly. With the commitment of administrative leadership to finance and adopt modern communication structures, public relation can contribute to bringing about improvements in organisational operations.

5.3 Recommendations

Given that this dissertation concludes that, on a balance, the excellence approach, with an integration of modern communication structures is likely to help the Ghana Maritime Authority establish strong and cordial relationships with its publics, it is recommended that the Authority:

1. Conducts a comprehensive assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of its public relations mainstreaming efforts and explore the possibilities of fully incorporating key principles of the excellence approach, taking into account the usefulness of incorporating modern communication structures and technologies into PR practice.
2. More effort should be put in by the PR Unit to ensure symmetry and feedback within its communication to both the internal and external publics of the Authority.
3. Commits to addressing the financial challenges faced by the PR Unit by improving upon its budgetary allocations including assessing the feasibility of ring-fencing some charges retained by the Authority for PR activities. This can enable regular and more structured PR practice necessary for the GMA to establish strong and cordial relationships with its publics.
4. Identifies initiatives and associated resources necessary to upgrade some of the tools used by the PR Unit to more modern structures and knowhow.

5.4 Suggestions for further Study

Given that time and resource constraints made it difficult for this study to examine in more detail the impact of PR practices on the performance of the Ghana Maritime Authority, further research can fill this gap by exploring how the relationship and image building responsibilities of the PR Unit has contributed to the growth and performance of the Authority in terms of profitability.

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APPENDIX

Data Collection instrument

Interview Guide for General Staff of the Ghana Maritime Authority

Introduction

This interview session seeks to collect data on your knowledge and experience of public relations mainstreaming in the Ghana Maritime Authority. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions bellow, as the interest is understanding your thoughts and experience with the subject. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes depending on how much information you would like to share. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview to enable me retain all your thoughts. Your responses will be kept confidential. You may decline to answer any question or stop participating in the interview at any time and for any reason. Thank you once again.

Demographic characteristics

1. Name
2. Age
3. Sex
4. Professional background and educational/training

Objective 1: To examine the perceptions of staff of the Ghana Maritime Authority on public relations practice.

5. What is your day-to-day role in your specific department or unit within the Ghana Maritime Authority?

6. How many employees, full or part time, does your organization have and what are their roles?
7. Whose responsibility is it to mainstream public relations in your organization?
8. What are the organizational goals of your organization and what are the specific challenges you face in the pursuit of these organisational goals?
9. What role do you think public relations play in organizational decision-making, strategic planning, and the execution of these strategic plans?
10. To what extent do public relations practices and strategies help to achieve organizational goals and overcome challenges?
11. What role does public relations play in organizational decision-making, strategic planning, and the execution of these strategic plans?

Objective 2: To assess the effectiveness of public relations practice in the Ghana Maritime Authority.

12. Where and how do you use public relations practices and strategies to help achieve those goals and overcome challenges? Please identify specific strategies and practices your organization uses.
13. How do you communicate with your key stakeholders, clients and the general public? What tools and strategies do you use?
14. How do you communicate internally and externally to discuss goals, strategies, plans, etc.?
15. How has public relations contributed to your organisational success?

16. Which communication-related expertise, resources, tools, etc., do you think would make your organization perform more efficiently and thus achieve success?
17. What insight can you add to your public relations mainstreaming and organizational success that has not been discussed in the previous questions?
18. Position public relations within the context of any emerging PR concept(s)/model(s) you know in your organization.
19. How would you rate its operationalization and why?
20. How are decisions made around public relations strategies and initiatives in your organization?

Objective 3: To explore the challenges encountered by public relations practitioners in the Ghana Maritime Authority.

21. What are the specific challenges you face as a Maritime Administration in the pursuit of these organisational goals?
22. What are the challenges to public relations mainstreaming in your organization in terms of:
 - Degree of autonomy of the PR department or unit?
 - Financial self-sufficiency of the PR department or unit?
23. To what extent does the GMA partner or engage with the private sector and the general public?

