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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SoGSAR+)**



**EVALUATING PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES OF TERTIARY
INSTITUTIONS: A STUDY OF TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES IN GHANA**

BY

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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STUDENT DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university, and all materials used in this thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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SUPERVISOR DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this project work was done under my supervision. I thereby approve that the work is adequate in scope and quality for the partial fulfilment of their requirements for the award of Master of Arts in Public Relations.

.....
DR. ALBERT ADJEI ANANI-BOSSMAN
(SUPERVISOR)

.....
DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my supervisor, Dr. Albert Adjei Anani-Bossman for his immense guidance direction.

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ABSTRACT

Despite the indisputable role of public relations in building and maintaining beneficial relationships between organizations and their stakeholders, the Polytechnics in Ghana did not give it the necessary attention. With the conversion of all the ten national Polytechnics into Technical Universities, the need for effective and efficient public relations activities to help drive the change management process of the Technical Universities cannot be over-emphasised.

Using semi-structured in-depth interviews as a qualitative tool, the study purposively sampled six senior PR practitioners from six different Technical Universities to evaluate their public relations strategies and how they were contributing towards achievement of their goals.

The study found that the technical universities employed varied strategies in their PR operations, including events and publicity, media relations, radio programmes, social media and community relation. However, most of them were challenged by the fact that, the public relations function was not recognized as a management function, creating subsequent problems like insufficient budgetary allocations, inadequate logistics and under-staffed public relations departments. The heads of the public relations departments were not members of the dominant coalition contrary to the assertion of Excellence theory of public relations practice.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the background of the study and provides context for the navigation of the topic. The chapter then discusses the problem statement that puts the study in a context concerning other studies within the literature to drum home the rationale for the study while recognizing the contributions made by other researchers within this area of study. The chapter articulates the research aims and narrows in on the research objectives that will undergird the study. Gleaning from the research objectives, the chapter also discusses the research questions that will be answered at the end of the study while arguing the justification for the study, as well as the significance of the study. The delimitations are also discussed as well as the chapter disposition of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

Public relations is central to the creation of positive reputations since organizations are observed to thrive in the goodwill of their multiple stakeholders to remain competitive. This dilemma makes the management of relationships between organizations and their stakeholders an important factor in the success of the organization (Nii, 2006). Researching the theorization of public relations as a management function, Rawjee et al (2012) contend that, organizations need to recognize public relations as a critical component of business planning and operations.

Most definitions by researchers in literature are unanimous on public relations being the building and maintenance of relationships with an organization's stakeholders. In their widely adopted textbook, Broom and Sha (2013) defined public relations as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends." But Macnamara (1999) stresses that these relationships are built and maintained through communication.

However, for public relations practitioners to make a positive impact on their organization, they should put in place a well-defined Public Relations Plan as a critical instrument of social interactions through which relationships are established and maintained strategically (Kelvin-Iloafu (2016). These strategic public relations encompass issues management, public affairs, corporate communications, stakeholder relations, crises communication, media relations and corporate social responsibility (L'Etang 2013, p. 800). A strategic public relations plan can help organizations to communicate its message to the right people at the most opportune time.

The concept of strategic communication is seen as a holistic framework that integrates internal organizational communication, management theories and marketing, making it easier to understand, and evaluate contemporary communication processes inside the organization as well as between the organization and its external publics (Falkheimer and Heide, 2014). The authors contend that strategic communication is much advantageous since public relations, and other forms of organizational communication are inundated with developments occurring both in theory and in practice.

As the demand for higher education grows and the competition intensifies, the need for a strategic public relations plan as a guide for stakeholder engagements cannot be overemphasized. Carlsmith and Railsback (2001) submit that educational institutions as social organizations have the propensity to face obstacles such as scrutiny from the news media, increased competition, demographics, and an increased cynicism eroding the trust in the effectiveness of some of these institutions.

These findings further strengthen the argument for educational institutions to have not only competent public relations professionals but a strategic public relations plan as well. The management of higher educational institutions, in the opinion of Rawgee (2014) should be better prepared for crisis management which underscores the need to have public relations and

communications plans in place, coupled with the ability to communicate effectively during such periods. Donyale et al (2013) contend that, in times of conflicts, it is important for organizations to engage their internal and external stakeholders about the severity and nature of the conflicts. This demands a good communication strategy which is considered a public relations function by Lubbe and Puth (2000).

The study seeks to evaluate the public relations strategies of Technical Universities (TUs) in Ghana and the various tools they deploy in their communication and stakeholder engagements, as well as their effectiveness. It aims ultimately to provide a framework for Technical Universities to develop a strategic public relations and communications plan as a guide for their public relations activities.

1.2 Statement of the problem.

Orakwue et al. (2006) argue that increasing competition among organizations buttresses the need for the design of an effective and efficient communication programme that seeks to build relationships with customers using a series of interactions between individuals and the organization, to achieve and sustain competitive advantage. Just like commercial entities, effective and efficient communication has also been seen to be a factor that affects the sustainability of higher education institutions like universities, especially in its management of crisis and relationships with the various stakeholders (Rawgee, 2014).

In many studies, scholars are concerned with the sustainability of higher education among key stakeholders such as high-ranking administrators (e.g., Wright, 2010), faculty (e.g., Wright & Horst, 2013), and students (Godfrey & Feng, 2017). All these studies have addressed the issue of public relations either implicitly or explicitly. There are a few studies that have focused on assessing the effectiveness of public relations among institutions of higher learning.

Boakye et al (2012) investigated the significance of public relations practice in the achievement of the goals of private universities in the Ashanti region of Ghana and identified specific roles or functions performed by the public relations practitioners to achieve these goals, and proffered recommendations on how public relations practice can be strengthened in the private universities. He established that three out of the four institutions sampled do not have public relations department although they all agreed on the pivotal role of public relations in internal and external stakeholder engagements. This brings to fore the lack of appreciation of the professionalization of public relations by universities in Ghana. This situation calls for further and deeper investigation into the matter.

The promulgation of the Technical Universities Act, 2016 (Act 922 as amended) in September 2016 converted six out of the ten national Polytechnics into Technical Universities. They were Accra, Ho, Koforidua, Sunyani, Kumasi and Takoradi Technical Universities. In 2018, Cape Coast and Tamale Polytechnics were also converted to Technical Universities by the Technical Universities (Amendment) Act, 2018 ACT 974. Similarly, in April 2020 the remaining two Polytechnics., Wa Polytechnic and Bolgatanga Polytechnic were elevated to Technical Universities per Technical Universities (Amendment) Act, 2020, bringing the total number of Technical Universities in Ghana to ten.

Following the conversion, there were ensuing debates about the ability of these new additions to perform at par with the traditional universities, even though they had met all the eligibility criteria such as their institutional standing, academic staff requirements, and evidence of collaboration with industry (Graphic, 2016). This necessitates the need for effective public relations strategies to restore the confidence of the stakeholders in the prospects of the Technical Universities. Public relations and strategic communications have been argued to be central to the creation and sustenance of competitive advantage and this conversion offers a good reference point for the interrogation of this assertion.

1.3 Research Objectives

- i. To evaluate the public relations strategies of the Technical Universities in Ghana
- ii. To investigate the role of Strategic Public Relations Plan in PR operation at Technical Universities in Ghana?
- iii. To ascertain the importance of public relations in the realization of the organizational goals of the Technical Universities in Ghana.

1.4 Research Questions

The following are the research questions of the study.

- i. What are the public relations strategies of Technical Universities in Ghana?
- ii. What role does Public Relations Plan play in the PR operations of the Technical Universities in Ghana?
- iii. How important is public relations in the realization of the organizational goals of the Technical Universities in Ghana?

1.5 Justification of the study

Public relations have been argued to be used in the administration of universities to advance the organisational goals of many universities worldwide. Adu-Oppong (2015) argues that universities have adopted the practice of public relations as a result of an expansion of stakeholders, an increase in student and staff population, as well as their desire to keep their heads above water in their management of issues that threaten their viability and competitiveness. Not only has the use of public relations practitioners increased, but also the need for effective and efficient communication. According to Adu-Oppong (2015), problems such as crowding of campuses, inadequate accommodation, increase in fees and utilities, and limited amenities require satisfactory engagements with stakeholders. These engagements are

predicated on a well-coordinated system of information service delivery, within which public relations and strategic communication plans are considered pivotal.

The promulgation of the Technical Universities Act, 2016 (Act 922, as amended) to convert Polytechnics into Technical Universities has necessitated the need to use public relations as a vehicle to change the narratives about technical universities being the province of academically weak students in order to enhance student enrolments. This study seeks to better understand the public relations strategies used by Technical Universities which is critical in building public trust in their ability to function as full-fledged universities.

1.6 Significance of the study

Universities have been likened to other businesses and organizations that must strive to build and maintain strong relationships with their publics. The studies discussed above buttress the increasing use and prominence of public relations, as well as effective communication in universities in Ghana. Adu-Oppong (2015), argues that although universities in Ghana have public relations departments and units, they have not been accorded the same level of prominence as other departments. This study seeks to add to existing studies like that of Adu-Oppong (2015) in examining the public relation practices and communication strategies of these universities in Ghana with a sharp focus on technical universities. This complements the literature available through a discussion of the public relations and strategic communication plans used by the various universities and how important they have been (i.e., where there is one), to underscore the need for context specific-strategies. The outcome of the study will serve as a framework to guide Technical Universities to develop strategic public relations plans for their institutions.

The study adopts a qualitative national approach which will provide national insight that will be useful in discussing the international differences, similarities and dynamics involved in the appreciation, use and relevance of public relations and strategic communication by universities.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

The delimitation of the study refers to the scope of the study. Delimitations are characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of the study (Yin, 2014). Research delimitations of a study are self-imposed limitations from the scope and design of the study (Snelson, 2016).

The study will be focused on Technical Universities in Ghana and the specific public relations strategies they employ to achieve viability, efficiency and competitiveness. Based on contextual factors that may influence the strategies used in public relations and strategic communication, the study will resort to the qualitative research approach due to the subjective experiences across the Technical Universities. Information will be collected concerning the research objectives and questions and as such, generalizations from the data collected will be limited to these entities.

1.8 Organization of the study

The study will be organized into five chapters. Chapter one will be an introductory chapter that espouses the framework of the study. The chapter discusses the background of the problem, problem statement, research questions, research objectives, the significance of the study, the scope of the study and limitations of the study.

The second chapter is the literature review. This chapter is centered on the analyses and discussion of literature that are relevant to the problem or phenomenon under investigation. The chapter will explore the theoretical underpinnings of the study, as well as the discussion of key concepts. Lastly, the chapter reviews and discusses other related empirical studies.

Chapter three will look at the methodology to be adopted to complete a study of this nature. The research design and orientation will be carefully explored, a justification is given for the selected research method, data collection method, population and target sample. The sampling technique will aptly be explained and how data collected will be treated and analyzed.

Chapter four will be dedicated to the presentation and discussion of findings in tandem with the key research questions, and also in conjunction with relevant literature.

Chapter five which happens to be the last chapter will be focused on the summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations.

1.9 Definition of key terms

- i. Public Relations:** “It is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends.”
- ii. Public Relations Strategy:** It is the collection of all actions taken in order to achieve public relations goals and objectives of an organization.
- iii. Organizational Goal:** Organizational goals are strategic objectives that an organization establishes to outline expected outcomes and guide employees' efforts.
- iv. Technical University:** Technical University is an institution of higher education established to provide education in engineering, science and technology-based disciplines, technical and vocational education and training, applied arts and related disciplines.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the background, the problem statement and objectives on how the study will be treated and dealt with for the academic purpose. It also paid attention to the

research objectives, research questions, importance of the study as well as its scope. It also narrowed in on the organization of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter introduction

This chapter seeks to review relevant literature in line with the objectives of the study. It begins by deliberating on the theoretical framework that underpins this study. The chapter discusses relevant concepts such as Public Relations, Strategic management among others, and ends by exploring relevant empirical studies in consonance with the objectives of the study.

2.1 Theoretical framework of the study

Public relations theory provides a context for understanding a certain aspect of human behaviour concerning information and communication. Public relations theories help practitioners explain and predict human behaviour and communication, thereby making campaigns and communication with the publics more effective.

According to Osanloo, A., & Grant, C. (2016), a theoretical framework is the ‘blueprint’ for the entire research inquiry which serves as the guide on which to build and support your study, and also provides the structure to define how you will philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically approach the dissertation as a whole.

On his part, Eisenhart (1991) defined a theoretical framework as “a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships” Thus, the theoretical framework consists of the selected theory (or theories) that undergirds thinking with regards to how you understand and plan to research your topic, as well as the concepts and definitions from that theory that are relevant to your topic.

All organizations strive for excellence in all aspects of their operational activities to achieve their goals, including public relations. The excellence theory in public relations explains the

value of public relations to organizations and society based on the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the quality of relationships with stakeholders. Justifying the indispensable role of excellence theory in modern public relations practice, Botan and Hazleton (2006) concluded that “over the last 20 years, a leading body of work has developed around Excellence theory which has probably done more to develop public relations theory and scholarship than any other single school of thought.

Consequently, this study will be navigated using the Excellence theory as its main theoretical framework.

2.1.1 The Excellence Theory

Grunig and Hunt in conjunction with the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) conducted a long-term study to establish what might be defined as ‘excellence’ in public relations (Grunig 1992; Grunig et al. 2002), and came up with a four-level analysis of excellent public relation as follows:

- Programme level - Why, when and how individual communications programmes are implemented.
- Departmental level - How the PR department operates and fits in with other departments.
- Organizational level - Understanding and respect are given to communication processes and audience feedback by the organization and its staff.
- Economic level - Tangible value provided by excellent PR to the organization (happy external and internal audiences).

According to Grunig (2002), the theory focuses on the effectiveness of public relations and the entire organizational effectiveness to justify returns on public relations investments.

One important aspect of the theory is the recognition of the value public relations brings to organizations as well as the society in which they operate. This value is based on the quality of the relationships that organizations develop with their various publics (Grunig 2002). For organizations to reap the full benefits of their public relations activities, Ni (2006) advocates for public relations to be part of the strategic management of organizations.

Proponents of this theory argue that organizational effectiveness is contingent on achieving strategic public relations goals. This underscores the relationship between the organizational goals and the aspirations of the various stakeholder groups. It is therefore incumbent on organizations to identify the various publics that are affected by decisions of the organization or the segment of the stakeholder groups that want a problem solved by the organization. This, according to Grunig and Grunig (2011) determines the contribution of public relations to the strategic management of an organization.

The theory is suggestive of the fact that organizations must strive to communicate symmetrically with their publics to facilitate the process of building and sustaining long-term and mutually beneficial relationships with them (Grunig and Grunig, 2011). Symmetrical communication ensures that the goals set by the organization and their publics are achieved. Grunig and Grunig (2011) emphasise how central, essential and crucial good relationships with stakeholders are to the survival and effectiveness of the organization. Building good relationships between organizations and their publics tends to minimize the costs associated with unfavourable instances such as litigation, regulation, legislation and negative publicity. Such good relationships also increase the prospects of the organizations delivering on goods, products and services that are needed by its stakeholders and at the same time reduce risks associated with making decisions that have the prospects of adversely impacting on the different stakeholders (Grunig and Grunig, 2011).

The excellence theory also provides four main categorizations for excellent public relations function. According to Grunig and Grunig (2011), these categorizations help in explaining the value of public relations and communication in general to the effectiveness of an organization. The categories explain how the functions of public relations should be organized to attain maximum value.

i. Empowering the public relations function

The excellence theory requires that the public relations function must be empowered as a strategic management function (Grunig and Grunig, 2011). Based on this maxim, it is expedient that, the head of the public relations department should be an integral member of the strategic management team of the organization as well as an effective contributor to strategic management practices. The strategic practice of public relations is an essential one and requires organizations to develop programmes to communicate to both internal and external publics. Vercic, Grunig and Grunig (1996) who refer to these publics as ‘strategic publics’ contend that they are potential threats and opportunities for/to the organization and can best be identified through environmental scanning. Consequently, public relations practitioners must possess the prerequisite knowledge of the managerial and symmetrical roles of public relations required to plan and execute excellent public relations programmes (Vercic, Ruler, Butschi and Flodin, 2000).

ii. Roles

The second category under the excellence theory is the establishment of communicator roles. The theory argues that there are two major roles in public relations namely communication manager and the communication technician (Grunig and Grunig, 2011). According to Vercic et al (1996), most public relations practitioners serve in their capacity as both managers and technicians. The excellence theory suggests that less excellent public relations departments

have all their communication practitioners, including their managers practising as technicians. This is adversative to the assertion of this theory that the public relations departments should be manned by a manager rather than a technician who is a senior communication manager responsible for the conceptualization and direct public relations programmes (Vercic et al., 1996). This advances and consolidates the conceptualization of public relations as a management function.

iii. Organization of the communication function and its relationship with other managerial functions.

The excellence theory advances that excellent public relations functions should be characterized by the integration of all the communication programmes and the coordination of all the departments of the organization (Vercic et al., 1996). According to Heath (2005), public relations programmes targeted at different stakeholders should be coordinated by a senior communications manager. This categorization under the excellence theory also advances that, to preserve the unique role of public relations as a management function, it should be independent of other managerial functions (Grunig, 1992). In collaborating with this position, Vercic et al. (1996) contend that a merger of the public relations functions with other functions prohibits the transfer of communication resources across strategic publics.

iv. Models of public relations

According to Grunig and Grunig (2011), four models of public relations provide four ways of conceptualizing and conducting public relations functions. These include the two-way symmetrical model which is characterized by dialogue, participation and cooperation; press agency which focuses on positive publicity; public information model which is focused on the dissemination of accurate and favourable information; and the two-way asymmetrical model which uses the scientific approach to persuasion (Grunig, 2002). In consonance with the principles of the excellence theory, the most recommended communication function is based

on the two-way symmetrical model. In this regard, communication programmes are developed based on research, and employ dialogue in managing conflicts and fostering relationships with strategic publics (Grunig and Grunig, 2011). The model is characterized by consensus, mutual understanding, mutual benefits and feedback. It also empowers employees and encourages participation in decision-making (Grunt and Hunt, 1984). Consequently, PR practitioners need to develop knowledge and understanding of the 2-way symmetrical communication model.

2.1.2 Relevance of the theory to the study

The Excellence theory provides a framework for how public relations should be structured and implemented. It explains how public relations can contribute to organizational excellence. The theory is relevant for this study because it provides an understanding of the rationale, purpose and direction of public relations strategies of tertiary institutions in Ghana, most especially the Technical Universities.

The theory will also help to evaluate the effectiveness of the public relations practice in Technical Universities and also help to determine to what extent the Technical Universities are amassing value from their public relations activities. Since the two-way symmetrical is considered to be the most effective and efficient model as a result of its ability to build and sustain long term relationships between the organization and its stakeholders, the theory will help determine if the PR practitioners in the Technical Universities employ this model and the benefits that they have accrued so far.

2.2 Review of relevant concepts.

2.2.1 Evolution of Public Relations

The concept of public relations has been a subject of interest to many scholars and as such, has been defined in different ways. The rudimentary and formative stages of Public Relation has been argued to be based on the concept of persuasion. In that vein, Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman

and Toth (2004) contend that the history of public relations can be traced to the times of ancient Greece where the Greek Rhetoricians were known to have persuasive skills who demonstrated achievements through picture stories during festival parades. Similarly, Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) argue that the term propaganda, which was coined in the 17th century and subsequently used by the Catholic Church to propagate the faith, was a crucial moment in the historical development of Public Relations. Lattimore et al (2004) advance that, persuasion is an integral element of PR which is based on the objective of directly influencing the public as well as public opinions for hundreds of years.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) indicate that the history of Public Relations, as well as its evolution, is seen in the categorizations that ultimately became the four models of PR such as the Press Agency, Publicity, Public Information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models.

Broom et al (2000) advance that, the earliest definitions of public relations were emphatic on the roles of press agencies which served as the foundation for the growth of modern public relations. The public relations officers mostly referred to as the press agents, had the sole responsibility of creating stories and events that were newsworthy enough to attract the media. Broom et al (2000) emphasize that the main objective of public relations in its earlier conceptualization was to attract the attention of the public, instead of the modernized perspective of building and sustaining mutual understanding between an organization and the public. This means that public relations were focused more on publicity (Broom et al, 2000). Lattimore et al (2004) argue that the most dominant tool of public relations used during the mid-19th century press agency was propaganda.

The late 19th century was characterized by an appreciation of public relations based on public information or journalism. Lattimore et al (2004) aver those historical incidences such as the

Industrial Revolution in America, coupled with the growth of newspapers at the time gave rise to the need to serve the rising American middle-class market. The process of industrialization culminated in the introduction of government regulations, trade unions, corporate social responsibility, workers right among others, which required the expertise of public relations practitioners (Lattimore et al, 2004).

During and after the first World War, Lattimore et al (2004) observe that persuasion was predominantly used as a way of mobilizing and garnering support for the war. Grunig (1992) postulated that this development birthed the scientific approach to public relations. Orakwue, Hammond and Gyambrah-Adaefie (2006) contend that the concept of public relations grew due to its recognition and use by many organizations. This growth resulted in an expansion in the meaning of public relations to include the need to research before actions are initiated by the organization, careful and detailed planning of activities as well as a thorough evaluation of the results of the various strategies. Orakwue et al (2006) indicate that the process described above is continuous and systematic, rather than a one-time activity that involved multiple audiences. It was characteristically different from the earliest approaches to public relations such that, it was a two-way process unlike the earlier periods of press agency and public information which were one-way communication approaches, resulting in a conceptualization of by Grunig and Hunt (1984) as a two-way asymmetrical process.

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), the final stage in the historical evolution of public relations emanated from the works of Ivy-Lee, Edward Bernays, and John Hill. This new era called the two-way symmetrical era has fundamental principles such as truth-telling, mutual understanding between the organization and their publics established through research and the intensification of a mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and its publics (Grunig, 1992).

Other additions to the concept of public relations include the idealization of the role as a management function that is characterized by important tools such as public participation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and accommodation to build a long-term commitment between an organization and its public (Orakwue et al, 2006).

2.2.2 Overview of Public Relations

Seitel (2007) argues that public relations is a multibillion-dollar industry practiced by about 160,000 coupled with an increase in the rate of employment of public relations practitioners. The spurt in the public relations industry can be attributed to the increase in competitiveness in the business environment among different types and sizes of organizations Seitel (2007). Even though there is no universally accepted definition of public relations, there is very little ambiguity about its concept amongst practitioners and scholars. Sietel (2007) records that in a search to find the most universally accepted definition of public relations, the Foundation of Public Relations Research and Education was commissioned in 1975. With 65 public relations managers participating in the study and 472 definitions analyzed, the Foundation proposed an 88-word sentence as the most exhaustive definition for public relations.

Public relations is a distinctive management function that helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communications, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools (Seitel, 2007, p.4).

According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.” It is concerned with influencing, engaging and building a relationship with key stakeholders across numerous platforms to shape and frame the public perception of an organization. PRSA contends that public relations encompass anticipating, analyzing and

interpreting public opinion, attitudes and issues that might have an impact, for good or ill, on the operations and plans of the organization. It is also the responsibility of the practitioners to counsel management at all levels in the organization about policy decisions, courses of action and communications – including crisis communications, taking into account their public ramifications and the organization’s social or citizenship responsibilities, as well as protecting the reputation of an organization (PRSA).

According to the UK Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), ‘Public Relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, to earn understanding and support and influence opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics’. Similarly, according to Griffin (2014), reputation has become part of normal corporate discourse, especially in large global companies. Reputation is now discussed at executive committees and boardrooms. This makes Public Relations Management role purely a Strategic management function.

Highlighting the management function of public relations, Harlow(1977) considered public relations as a distinctive management function that helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools.

Broom, Cutlip and Center (2013) considered public relations as a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends.

These definitions give a strong indication that public relations does not subscribe to a haphazard way or process of doing things but is a planned, deliberate and carefully thought-through process organized strategically to help build and maintain good reputation of organizations.

2.2.3 Significance of Public Relations in Organizations

Investing in Public Relations can help organizations achieve their goals and objectives. Public relations is not about creating a good image for a bad team since false images cannot be sustained for a long time. Even though the organization itself, as well as its products or services, maybe good, it is still imperative to adopt an effective public relations campaign to motivate and attract the public to the organization, its products or services.

An effective public relations strategy can create and build up the image of an individual or an organization. At the time of adverse publicity or when the organization is under crisis, an effective and efficient public relations strategy remove the "misunderstanding" and can create mutual understanding between the organization and their stakeholders. In this regard, strategic public relations do not only help build mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics, but it also contributes immensely to the ability of the organization to nurture and sustain already established relationships.

According to PRSA, Public Relations as a management function encompasses the following:

- Anticipating, analyzing and interpreting public opinion, attitudes and issues that might impact, for good or ill, the operations and plans of the organization.
- Counselling management at all levels in the organization concerning policy decisions, courses of action and communication, taking into account their public ramifications and the organization's social or citizenship responsibilities.
- Protecting the reputation of an organization.

- Researching, conducting and evaluating, on a continuing basis, programs of action and communication to achieve the informed public understanding necessary to the success of an organization's aims. These may include marketing; financial; fundraising; employee, community or government relations; and other programs.
- Planning and implementing the organization's efforts to influence or change public policy.
- Setting objectives, planning, budgeting, recruiting and training staff, developing facilities — in short, managing the resources needed to perform all of the above.
- Overseeing the creation of content to drive customer engagement and generate leads.

In the contemporary competitive world of business/brand competition, the ability to create and maintain a positive corporate reputation has become a priceless asset. It is this platitude that inspired Macnamara (1999) to assert that the days of public relations practitioners performing solely press agency roles are over. An organisation thrives on the goodwill of its multitude of stakeholders to remain competitive (Blair, et al 2002). In this regard, the need to deploy public relations as a vehicle for managing stakeholder relations for the overall success of organizations cannot be over-emphasized (Ni, 2006).

This study evaluates public relations strategies of Technical Universities and how they have contributed towards the attainment of organizational goals. In this regard, a fair understanding of the concept of organizational goals is necessary for the navigation of this study.

2.2.4 Organizational Goals of Institutions

Organizations are collectives of individuals who work together towards the attainment of a common goal. According to Johns and Saks (2008), organizations are social interventions that help in accomplishing goals through recognized group efforts. This conceptualization embodies diverse entities such as businesses, schools, hospitals, fraternal groups, religious

bodies, government agencies, among other things. Johns and Saks (2008) intimate that, there are three main characteristics of organizations. Organizations are social interventions, they accomplish goals, and achievements are through collective and group efforts. As social interventions, Johns and Saks (2008) assert that organizations are primarily made up of people. Organizations generally have reasons that buttress their existence and serve as the foundation that undergirds the efforts of the group. They explain that, although most organizations are profit-oriented, their goals are intertwined with other goals. That is why it is very important to integrate organizational goals and the personal goals of the individuals who have affiliations with the organization. Accordingly, group efforts of organizations stem from interactions and interdependency between the members of the group and the organization itself Johns and Saks (2008). For Shapiro (2006), the attainment of organizational goals is also dependent on the ability of the organization to overcome barriers and obstacles.

Most organizations in Ghana are bound by organizational goals and objectives. Tertiary institutions also have goals and objectives that inform various strategies needed to ensure their attainments. In this regard, the institutions are made up of departments, units and sections that work harmoniously to ensure that they achieve their desired goals. However, one department that is integral to the realization of organizational success is the public relations department, as a result of its ability to build a 'ring of goodwill' around the organization.

2.2.5 Role of Public Relations in Educational Institutions

There have been a few studies that have been focused on an examination of the role of public relations in educational institutions. Seitel (2007) argues that the role played by public relations in educational institutions is no different from the normative role of managing the flow of internal as well as external communications.

The public relations department in educational institutions is responsible for managing the reputation and relationship of the organization with its internal and external publics (Seitel (2009), which is a very important intangible asset (invisible assets) of the institution. (Nova, 2009).

Ojomo et al. (2006) assert that the normative and traditional role of public relations is analogous to that of a scribe and paper mover. Their role implies informing and publicizing, while most of the duties of public relations practitioners in educational institutions involved recording and publishing of meetings and the development of materials, supervision of school newspapers (Ojomo et al., 2006). However, the role of public relations practitioners has evolved and broadened now. Adu-Oppong (2015) recounts that there are twenty roles for the contemporary public relations specialist, that expands the role of public relations in educational institutions. These roles include publicizing, advertising, marketing, conducting campaigns, community relations, among others.

Seital (2009), from an examination of the public relations practice in the United States of America, argues that public relations is regarded as a management function, with evidence from the prominence accorded the position by the boards of various organizations. He argues that, in most organizations, Vice Presidents superintend over communication functions and public relations activities.

However, Adu-Oppong (2015) claims that the narrative is different in Ghana. Even though the educational institutions in Ghana are replete with public relations departments, they are not accorded the same prominence as other departments. He indicates that the practice of public relations in educational institutions in Ghana is predicated on the dissemination of information from the management. In other words, the public relations role is not considered a management function by most tertiary institutions in Ghana. The public relations practitioner reports through

a bureaucratic system because the department is not accorded a management status (Adu-Oppong, 2015).

2.3 Review of related studies

This section of the chapter discusses some relevant studies in the field of public relations practice in educational institutions.

In their study to examine the public relations functions in higher education in the United States of America, Luo and Yi (2005) underscored the need for tertiary institutions to have fully-fledged and well-functioning public relations departments. According to the study, the communication functions in the two universities examined were divided into components such as marketing communications, alumni relations, fundraising and university foundation. The study revealed that the communication function was under the domain of the director of marketing communications who doubled as the Supervisor. This is in line with the dictates of excellence theory which underscores the need for the superintendent of the public relations functions to be a well-qualified and experienced practitioner. The study also showed that the senior communication executives were active participants in the decision-making processes of their organisations. In one of their interactions with a college, Luo and Yi (2005) discovered that the vice president for communication reported directly to the President and served as an integral member of the President's cabinet. The study concluded that public relations in the tertiary institutions were considered managerial functions since the senior executive in both institutions are active participants in the decision-making of the organization.

In recognition of the process of crisis communication as an integral part of public relations functions, Hussain and Rawjee (2014) examined the role of public relations in crisis communication in tertiary institutions. Using interviews as a qualitative tool to investigate the role of communication in the planning and management crisis in tertiary institutions in

KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in South Africa, the researchers found that even though higher education institutions in KZN incorporate conflict management and crisis communication in their strategic plans, it was never considered a priority. This was partly owing to the lack of a communication department or employees charged with the responsibility of managing communication between higher education institutions and their varied audiences. According to the researchers, higher education institutions should adopt a risk policy that specifies the functions of public relations and communication departments. Hussain and Rawjee (2014) recommend that senior management in various tertiary institutions should consider establishing public relations and communication departments as an institutional priority.

An analysis of higher education public relations by Campbell (2018) reinforced the relationship between internal communication and external communication and the value they both bring to the institutions. The study's findings revealed that the public relations roles and processes were mostly documented in writing as a matter of best practice. This helps to eliminate ambiguity in operations and ensures that public relations personnel have a clear understanding of the best practices as well as their roles and responsibilities. Again, it establishes strategic direction for practitioners to follow, thereby minimizing impromptu and knee-jerk reactions to situations. Another important observation from the study was that public relations and communications departments were headed by a senior communication officer with vast academic and professional experience and they were members of the top management of the institutions.

Mustofa, U. Y., and Kurnia, K. (2021) discovered that institutional publicity, internal and external events, community involvement with stakeholders, the formation of institutional character (Identity), and persuasion and diplomacy (Lobby and Negotiation) conducted by the institution to their publics shaped the institution's reputation.

The introduction of capitalism in the former Soviet-bloc has meant that old state-owned universities, which never had to compete, now find themselves losing students to new private universities that offer attractive packages to students (Miroiu, 1998; Neculau, 1997; Stanciulescu, 2002). This competition has prompted both state-owned and private universities to seek to utilize public relations as means of getting an edge. Recent studies, however, have advocated a move away from one-way asymmetrical methods and toward practices that resemble the characteristics conceptualized in the Excellence study.

The number of tertiary institutions in Ghana is increasing by the day with many private universities and colleges established in recent times. Adu-Oppong (2015) intimates that some private tertiary institutions have envisaged the need for an independent public relations department to improve communication efforts with their various publics. The recent conversion of all the ten national Polytechnics into Technical Universities by Act 922 (as amended) has significantly increased the number of public universities in Ghana. This study provides context to appreciate how universities in Ghana, especially the Technical Universities practice public relations.

In a Ghanaian study, Boakye et al. (2012) examined the role of public relations in the attainment of the organizational goals of four private universities that were sampled from the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The study found that only one of them had a public relations department, with the remaining three having Assistant Registrars and Registrars already saddled with administrative and other non-communication responsibilities were acting in the capacity of public relations practitioners in their respective institutions. The overwhelming responsibilities of Assistant Registrars and Registrars limit their institutions from maximizing the benefits of effective public relations such as developing, securing and maintaining mutual understanding and cooperation of organization and their publics. (Boakye et al. (2012).

Boakye et al. (2012) strongly recommend for all institutions to establish public relations departments with the sole mandate of carrying out public relations activities. These departments should engage well-qualified public relations practitioners with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This will go a long way to ensuring that, there is effective communication between the internal and external publics of the institution. Boakye et al (2012).

In a related study, Agyapong, K. et al (2015), investigating the importance of strategic public relations tools employed by educational institutions to build healthy relationships with the publics, found that public relations units relied on the websites of universities and events as major tools to disseminate information to their publics. The findings further showed that there was minimal use of community relations activities by the universities to build healthy relationships. Based on these findings, (Agyapong, K. et al (2015) suggested that the public relations outfits should be fully empowered and resourced to enhance community relations activities.

In his examination of public relations practice in higher educational institutions with a focus on a Technical University in Ghana, WB Kyeremeh (2018) concluded that the roles of the public relations practitioners were more of communication technicians. The study also identified some barriers to effective public relations practice, including inadequate resources and a lack of understanding of the purpose of public relations. Furthermore, the study found that the office of public relations is not accorded the same status as other senior management roles, nor is it adequately involved in decision-making.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed and examined relevant literature that will help in the navigation of this study. The review was done in three parts. The theoretical framework discussed the excellence theory as the most suitable theory to deploy for the assessment of public relations practices in

tertiary institutions (Technical Universities). The concept of public relations was also discussed with emphasis on the role of public relations in educational institutions.

The review of related studies showed there are many related studies of public relations in tertiary institutions internationally, but limited literature on the subject matter concerning the Ghanaian situation was found. However, no specific study on the evaluation of public relations strategies of Technical Universities in Ghana was found to have been conducted. Therefore, this study will contribute significantly to the existing literature on the subject and enhance visibility and the unique selling propositions of the Technical Universities following their conversions from Polytechnics.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used in the evaluation of the public relations strategies of Technical Universities in Ghana. As previously stated in the literature review, the number of devoted research on the assessment of technical university public relations techniques in Ghana is limited. The following pages go into the research design, methodology, and sampling techniques for the study.

3.1 Research Design

According to Panncerselvan (2014), a research design is a blueprint for how a study is carried out. According to Creswell (2009), a research design is the plan and methods for conducting research, which includes everything from broad considerations about problem identification to detailed assumptions about data collecting and analysis. As a result, a research design aims to establish the guiding principles and structure for all research efforts (Kothari, 2004). It focuses on data collection and analysis techniques and procedures (Zokmund, 2003). Therefore, a design is deciding on the optimal approach for data collection.

A research design is a systematic plan to study a scientific problem. The type of study (descriptive, correlational, semi-experimental, experimental, review, meta-analytic) and sub-type (e.g. descriptive-longitudinal case study) as well as the research questions, hypotheses, independent and dependent variables, experimental design, and, if applicable, data collection methods and a statistical analysis plan are all defined by the design of the study. A well-established research design that offers the foundation and structure for the entire investigation is therefore critical for a study of this nature.

This argument is the basis for the justification of using exploratory study for this research. According to Creswell (2009), exploratory research is used to gain a deeper knowledge of a topic, but it is not utilized to produce definitive results. Exploratory research is done to uncover concerns that can be the basis for future studies. According to Creswell (2009), exploratory research is utilized for studies when the phenomenon being examined is still in its early stages. The approach for this study is discussed in the following section.

3.2 Research Method

A research method, on the other hand, refers to the unique strategy employed by studies for further investigations about a phenomenon. In scientific research, there are three main research methodologies: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The review of related studies makes it important for this investigation to be done qualitatively among these three. This type of research required a flexible approach in which the process of discovery was combined with intuition. Consequently, the study employed qualitative research tools to maximize its potential.

Qualitative research was deemed the ideal fit for this study because of its ability to delve into interpretive modes of thinking that are concerned with the social construction of reality. Qualitative research strives to collect and analyze information and deliver conclusions that resolve challenges through the methodical application of a predetermined set of techniques. Qualitative research focuses on the study at hand, rather than attempting to generalize or utilize the findings to support a hypothesis. As a result, it provides complex descriptions of how people experience a specific study subject by offering an overview of the human side of the issue in terms of actions, beliefs, views, emotions and relationships. It also looks critically at intangible factors such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity and religion.

Qualitative research approaches are frequently based on interpretive reasoning. Interpretive researchers are particularly interested in gaining a better grasp of how meaning is formed and reconstructed in natural contexts through communication relationships. The voice of the stakeholders, notably public relations practitioners in various technical universities, is of particular importance in this study, with any other person who is not directly or indirectly involved in public relations management being excluded.

3.3 Population

A research population is generally a large collection of individuals or objects known to have the same characteristics, which form the main focus of a scientific query. Polit and Hungler (1993:37) refer to population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects, or members that conform to a set of specifications.

The tertiary institutions in Ghana constituted the general population for the study because the Technical Universities form part of the general body of tertiary institutions. The rationale behind the choice of this population is that universities have a complex and wide range of stakeholders, and therefore require very effective and efficient public relations outfits to manage their relationships with the publics.

3.4 Population sample

According to Singh, A. S., & Masuku, M. B. (2014), sampling and determination of sample size have a crucial role in research. Specific sampling techniques are used for specific research problems because one technique may not be appropriate for all problems. Similarly, if the sample size is inappropriate it may lead to erroneous conclusions.

The sample is usually the subset of the population. Sampling is selecting a subset of a population to participate in the study. Fraenkel and Wallen (1996), defined sampling as the process of selecting individuals who will participate in a study. The concept of sampling comes

from the inability of the researchers to test all individuals in a given population. The sample must be representative of the population from which it was drawn and it must have a good size to warrant statistical analysis. The main function of sampling is to allow the researchers to conduct the study to individuals from the population so that the results of their conclusion can be used to derive conclusions that will apply to the whole population.

There are two main nonprobability Sampling techniques: Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling employed by researchers in the selection of a sample of subjects/units from a population.

According to Etikan, I. et al (2016), convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included in the study. It can be useful when the researcher has limited resources, time and workforce.

On the other hand, Etikan, I. et al (2016) argue that the purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. It is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience. This involves the identification and selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are proficient and well-informed with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, J. et al, 2011).

In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard, H. R. (2002) noted the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. The idea behind purposive

sampling is to concentrate on people with particular characteristics who are better placed to assist with the relevant research.

In the case of the instant study six (6) participants were purposively selected from six out of the target population of the ten Technical Universities for the study. The participants were carefully selected to represent the various demographic regions of Ghana. Participants from the Bolgatanga Technical University (BTU) and Tamale Technical University (TaTU) were selected to represent the five regions in the northern part of Ghana. Kumasi Technical University (KTU) and Sunyani Technical University (STU) have participants representing the middle belt of Ghana while participants from the Accra Technical University (ATU) and Cape Coast Technical University (CCTU) represent the coastal/southern belt of Ghana.

3.5 Recruitment of Participants

To assist with the study, the heads of Public Affairs / Public Relations departments at eight technical universities were contacted via phone calls and the Technical Universities PR Professionals platform. Seven institutions responded positively, with six of them being chosen to participate in the research. The other was put on standby to be drafted in if accessing a participant for the interview process proved difficult or if a person withdrew. The six participants were chosen from six different technical universities to represent all demographic regions (two from each of Ghana's northern, middle, and southern belts).

Those who agreed to participate in the study were sent copies of the Participant Information Sheet to familiarize themselves with the requirements of the study. Following that, the participants' written consents were secured by giving them 'Consent Form for Respondents' to sign.

3.6 Data Collection Method and Instrument

Data collection includes acquiring authorization, acquiring an appropriate sample size, documenting items, and anticipating ethical difficulties that may occur (Cresswell, 2013). The

study adopted an in-depth interview as a data collection method. According to Wimmer & Dominick (2006:135) “In-depth interviews are essentially a hybrid of the one-on-one interview approach.” Interviews are essential in research because they provide a structured technique to learn about and understand a subject (Zaykowski, 2014).

This study employed an In-depth interview as a qualitative tool as a result of its ability to elicit detailed information needed to better understand the strategies and tactics deployed by Technical Universities in their public relations activities. Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006) defined an In-depth interview as a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. In-depth interviews provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, such as surveys. They also provide a more relaxed atmosphere in data collection as people may feel more comfortable having a one-on-one conversation with the researcher as opposed to filling out a survey.

Interviews are often considered as a source of varied and valuable data for studies (Bekoe, 2014). There are three interview approaches, namely, structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interview (Creswell, 2007). Because it offers flexibility in the design and method of interviewing, a semi-structured interview technique was employed for this study. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of enquiry that combines a predetermined set of open questions (questions that prompt discussions) with the opportunity for the interviewer to further explore particular themes or responses. In the instant study, the researcher first determined the interview protocol that would yield the desired data. These questions originated from research objectives that formed basis for the study. A question guide for a semi-structured interview was designed to aid the researcher in collecting data.

3.7 Interview Procedure

A total of six in-depth interviews were conducted, three face-to-face and three telephone, each lasting approximately 20mins. Prior to each interview, the purpose of the study was thoroughly explained after which participants were requested to sign a consent form. Again, explicit permission of each participant was sought audio-recording of the interviews. The interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions meant to examine operations of public relations in Technical Universities. The questions focused on empowerment of the public relations function, organization of communication functions, the role of PR plan, the importance PR in achievement of organizational goals. These interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

It is important to have a section that describes how the participants were recruited.

3.8 Data Analysis – Thematic Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thus, audiotapes were transcribed into textual data to facilitate analysis. Themes were developed in line with the objectives of the study and the researcher then analysed each thematic category of data for patterns. The patterns uncovered by analyzing the four separate files denoting different themes were then used to answer the research question.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns are major considerations of every research involving humans, children, animals or other participants deemed as such. Saunders et al. (2009) define research ethics as the appropriateness of a researcher's behaviour in the conduct of research, especially the researcher's relationship with the rights of participants. That is, participation in the research should be voluntary and at the full discretion of the participants. In this research, participants were exposed to the research objectives and their full consent appropriately sought to be part of the study.

Generally, ethical clearance and considerations are required for an academic study. Hence, ethical clearance for the study was sought from the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ. Thus, voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and the absence of deception will be ensured).

The respondents voluntarily consented to participate in this study by signing the appropriate consent forms. The use of the consent form is because the target population is most likely to be comprised of educated people and are most likely to be able to append their signatures.

Participants were informed that the study was strictly for academic purposes and that strict confidentiality would be observed. Besides, no participant was compelled to provide information unwillingly. In a nutshell, this study was carried out in an atmosphere of respect for the rights and dignity of the respondents.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the appropriate research methodology that was used to achieve the objective of this study. The study gleaned towards the use of qualitative in-depth interviews. The six participants that participated in the study were purposively selected to represent all demographic regions in Ghana. The data were analysed using thematic analysis in line with the themes inspired by the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter chronicles the results of the data obtained from the respondents regarding the public relations strategies of technical universities in Ghana. Technical universities were chosen for the study because of their recent transition from polytechnics to full-fledged universities, necessitating the need for effective and efficient public relations activities as a driver of the change management process the Technical Universities need to perform at the same standards as the traditional universities. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews involving six participants from the public relations outfits of six conveniently sampled technical universities across the country. They were then analyzed using thematic organization, with the themes gleaned from the research objectives that formed the basis for this study.

Also, the demographic details of the participants, as well as the various public relations mechanisms, employed the technical universities, the use of public relations plan to guide their communication and stakeholder engagements, and the importance of the various public relations tools in the realization of the organizational goals of the technical universities.

4.1 Demographic Data of the Participants

The participants were carefully selected to represent the various demographic regions of Ghana. Participants from the Bolgatanga Technical University (BTU) and Tamale Technical University (TaTU) were selected to represent the five regions in the northern part of Ghana. Kumasi Technical University (KTU) and Sunyani Technical University (STU) have participants representing the middle belt of Ghana while participants from the Accra Technical University (ATU) and Cape Coast Technical University (CCTU) represent the coastal/southern belt of Ghana.

The participants were referred to as P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5, P6 for the purposes of concealing the identities of individuals and their specific organisations as part of the ethical considerations as discussed earlier in this report. The interactions with the participants revealed that they have formal training in the practice of public relations or in similar capacities that made them suitable to participate in this study. P1 indicated that he has worked in the institution for eight years where he currently functions as the head of the public relations unit. He holds a Master's degree in Communication Studies from the University of Cape Coast. P2 indicated that she also served as the head of public relations but at the time of the interview, she had been reassigned a month earlier. She holds a Master's Degree in English an Associate Member of the Institute of Public Relations. P3 indicated that his roles in the university revolve around internal and external communication including crises communication and has been in that role for over one year. In terms of educational qualification, he holds a master's degree in Development Communication. P4 works in the public affairs department of his university where public relations is one of the units. He indicated that he has been in this capacity since 2013 and holds a Master of Philosophy in Communication from the University of Winneba. P5, who is the deputy public relations officer explained that he is responsible for the management of all events in the university. He also holds a master's degree in public relations. P6 stated that he has been working in the public relations department under the auspices of the public affairs directorate for eleven years. He is the manager of the University Radio station and holds an MBA in Human Resource Management.

The participants meet the theoretical considerations of the study, based on the demographic data above because they all work in senior roles in public relations. They also have the educational qualifications and the necessary experience that make them competent to speak to the intricacies of the study which is centered on the public relations strategies of the technical universities in Ghana.

4.2 What are the public relations strategies of Technical Universities in Ghana?

Stakeholder Engagements

Public relations play a key role in stakeholder engagements of organizations. As educational institutions, the study assessed the nature of the stakeholder engagements and their significance to the technical universities. According to the findings, the stakeholders of the technical universities include: students, prospective students, staff, parents, local communities, partners and regulatory bodies. Stakeholders are vital to the university's operations and decisions, according to P1:

For our key stakeholders, we have our students, we have the workers we have regulatory bodies. As for the community that surrounds us, our existence largely depends on them. Everything that we do, we take them into consideration because if those people are not well handled it can negatively affect the university.

Another participant explained that their stakeholders were the general public which generally involved “students, parents, other business enterprises, suppliers and contractors”, stated P4. On his part P3 explained that as an educational institution, the students are their most significant stakeholders. He mentioned other stakeholders that are also central to the university’s activities.

Because this is an educational institution, our primary stakeholders are the students that we serve because without them we are nothing. Apart from them we also deal with our teaching and non-teaching staff, regulatory bodies in the education sector, Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, Ministry of Education, other universities and also corporate institutions.

The findings above point to the significance of the various stakeholders in the activities of the technical universities. Public relations, and for that matter communication, have been revered by scholars as central in stakeholder engagements. For technical universities, it is a critical tool needed to help enhance their image. The findings underscored the pivotal role that communication plays in building and maintaining relationship between the technical universities and their various stakeholders. The participants from the various universities

indicated that the process of communication is a central pillar in the maintenance of relationships between the technical universities and the stakeholders, both internal and external.

4.2.1 Understanding of Public Relations

The participants gave brief definitions of the concept of public relations based on their background and experiences as public relations practitioners their respective educational outfits. For instance, P2 indicated that public relations within the confines of the technical university he represented involves how the university communicates with its various stakeholders such as staff, students, and other external stakeholders.

On the other hand, P3 argued on differences in public relations practices depending on the nature of the organization. He explained that public relations is context-specific and that its operations differ from universities to corporate entities due to variances in internal and external stakeholders. This is as a result of the participant's personal work experience in both worlds.

I have been fortunate to work for a multinational company and I realized that when it comes to the concepts of Public Relations, there seems to be a difference in terms of practice when it comes to university and a corporate institution. For example, as a university, we are more into creating an image and the environment that is targeted, specifically, to prospective students and also alumni. This is unlike the case of a corporate organization that is much more concerned about creating a certain brand that would be more geared towards customers getting attached to their brand.

He further explained that PR operations in his institutions centered more on responding to issues unlike in the corporate institutions where PR activities are more proactive than reactive. This notwithstanding, he revealed that his institution, public relations is being used strategically to dissuade Ghanaians from the image portrayed about technical universities being the last option for students who performed poorly in their West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE).

P4 gave another angle to the discussion about public relations in tertiary institutions by stressing that, as a public relations practitioner, he was responsible for the coordination of PR activities of the university towards the overall direction of the school.

Public relations generally deal with communication issues on campus. PR outfit is supposed to spearhead all PR activities. In this regard, it is expected that the head of PR should be represented at management meetings and all other meetings that influence the direction of an institution, so that he gets first-hand information.

4.2.2 PR Roles and Functions

P1 discussed how decentralized public relations is at his university in an attempt to convey. He revealed that the various public relations roles such as management of protocols, relationships with alumni, as well as events were spearheaded by different people who are superintended by the main public relations Directorate. But there have been compromises made due to the deficiency in staff members, resulting in individuals performing more than one public relations role in the institution.

We have different sections when it comes to PR. We have the main directorate, then under the directorate, we have what we call the Protocol Services. There is an assistant registrar in charge of protocol services and he is more or less the event manager of the institution, he is in charge of congregations, in charge of all kinds of events on campus, whether seminars and any other things, any small event, that is going to be handled, the protocol officer must be informed, that's one section. And then the second one, we also have what we call alumni relations. Alumni relations is under Public Affairs directory, so we have an assistant registrar in charge of alumni relations, but this time due to lack of staff, there is one gentleman in charge of protocol and alumni relations. They used to be two separate offices with officers in charge of each section when I was in the main directorate but now one. I have handled Protocol Services; I have handled alumni relations and we also have what we call the Publications section.

Another participant also intimated that the public relations function was mostly concerned with communication between the university and the students. To this effect, the university has a special directorate dedicated to this function.

When you come to this university, there is a Public Relations Directorate headed by the University Relations Officer. In terms of the personnel, there is the head of protocol, and then there is another department called the Publications Unit that also has two heads of departments the audio-visual and then the documentations. All these people report to the URO who also reports to the registrar.

Earlier in the study, one of the participants indicated that the conversion of the polytechnics to technical universities required the use of proactive public relations to change the stereotype of those schools being the preserve of weak students. In tune with this proactiveness of the

universities, they have a public affairs directorate that caters for various stakeholders like the alumni, students and the general public.

Public Affairs Directorate is headed by the director of public affairs. Other Units of the Directorate include Alumni, Front Desk, Protocol and Media Relations. We also have different staff responsible for graphic designs and publications.

This was collaborated by P1 who argued that his institution has a well-structured Public Relations Department under the auspices of the Registrar. This has been necessitated by the change in their status from polytechnics to universities and the need to broaden the scope of the various departments to meet the needs of the university. He explained some key public relations sections that the university plans to inculcate into their existing public relations department.

We have about twelve sections as far as our public relations department is concerned. The department is well structured is under the registrar and mind you, we just translated from being, a polytechnic to a Technical University, so the understanding is to open up and broaden some of the departments that used to be under a polytechnic. We are looking at four departments or sections in the directorate, we are looking at research, documentation and publications. We are anticipating that when things get on, we will get someone to be in charge of that. Then we are also looking at media relations and protocol. Currently, there is somebody who is in charge of media relations and protocols. Then we are also looking at alumni, institutional collaboration, so in future, this is also an aspect that we are looking at. Then the fourth section is radio, we have a radio station. That is where we also stand out as a department and then activities should be taken from there.

However, the roles played by the public relations department espoused by the representative centered around the values of the universities and their relationship with the external stakeholders based on their accreditation as a technical university.

There are many functions, but let me summarize by saying that, under the office of the Registrar what we try to do is to among other things create, coordinate, implement and maintain programmes and policies to communicate the ideals of the university and I have tracked the general public to our programs and services.

Also, P3 added that his institution has a centralized public relations department that is in charge of university events and publications.

We have a public relations office, which comprises of other members. We have a whole team that is in charge of public relations. Some of them are communication technicians,

one of the staff is in charge of the website management and others too are communication facilitators and problem-solving facilitators. We are in charge of the matriculation, congregation and issuing out of newsletters. We are also in charge of publication where we put together all Publications done by lecturers, senior members and all the staff into one document.

On his part, P5 also explained the nature and functions of public relations which is central to their engagement with the various stakeholders.

We have a public relations department with several functions. The first one is that we are responsible for disseminating information within the university community. When I say disseminating information, I am talking about putting up notices concerning holidays any notice from management to the university community. We also arrange for the media to cover events be it congregation, matriculation or any special event that we deem necessary to be publicized. We ensure that whatever they are covering is in the interest of the university. Apart from that, we make arrangements for accommodation for the guests of the university.

One of the findings of the study was the revelation by P6 that the public relations department was responsible for the management of the university's website as well as its social media handles by strategizing and deciphering contents to best position the university in a favourable light. Research is also prioritized by the university according to him.

As part of our duties, we also are responsible for the website of the university. We put in content and monitor what goes on there. We also handle all the social media handles of the university by putting in very attractive content. We also assist the directorate of the academic affairs in the enrolment drive of the university. We see to the coordination of any event in the university. We try to carry out research to know the kind of impression staff and students have about the university and if there is any special area of interest. We conduct research to ascertain how people see the university or how people see the management of the university. We also assist security services especially BNI in terms of information management.

On the use of Public Relations Plan, almost all the participants responded in negative. However, they admitted that there was the need for PR outfits to develop one to guide PR operations. For instance, P2 indicated that their new status as a university warrant the need for policies to measure the activities of the public relations team and the university in general. This was non-existent in their days as polytechnics. He argued that the university needed to make strides in the field of communication and publicity which will make the university a preferred choice of prospective students.

Let me say that hitherto, under the regime of the Polytechnic, it appears that was not a key requirement. Now as a Technical University, we need to have policies to measure the activities of the University and so we have just developed a policy to this effect and as and when the council gives their consent to it, we will certainly begin implementing what is contained in that document. Past activities suggested that we needed something in place to manage some of these activities and a committee was put together to consider the views of staff, do the background analysis, and then come out with a policy for the consideration of the Council. There is a need for the university to put in communication efforts to attract the general public to our programs and services.

The last participant indicated that the university had a public relations plan in place and it served the overarching objective of increasing the visibility of the school.

We have had a public relations policy for two years now with the object of making the university visible, advertising the programs that the university runs for the external publics to be aware and also branding the university. Before the development of this plan, there were broader consultations with the members of the university community, the management of stakeholders, as well as the office of public relations.

4.2.3. PR as a Management Function

Empowering the public relations function by involving the senior practitioners in the dominant coalition helps organization quickly recognize issues related to publics before they become problems (L. Grunig et al., 2002). This is because public relations is critical to the university operations and realization of its goals. It is especially true in the case of this study, which was reliant on the change of status of the technical universities that were once polytechnics, where there is a need for effective and efficient public relations strategies to engage existing and prospective stakeholders, as argued by the participants.

While most participants stated that the heads of the public relations were not part of the universities management team, few others indicated that their heads make some level of contributions to management decisions. In all cases, the participants indicated that their public relations outfits were directly responsible to the Registrars. The heads of the public relations departments and offices report to their Registrars. Some of the responses are highlighted in the excerpts below.

Unfortunately, our director is not part of the management team, the reason being that it is the policy of management that when the registrar is represented at a management meeting, he is representing all the directors, so whatever happens, he comes back to brief the directors and the directors also carry out, whatever is supposed to be done so the director for public affairs is not part of management.

No, he is not a management member of the institution but he is a deputy registrar so within the registry he is one of the top managers. The only meeting he is invited to attend are those that per the statutes he is a secretary, like the ICT committee and those that he has been designated by the registrar, but he's not a management member.

The directorate is under the registry so if for example the Public Affairs director wants to communicate with the Vice-Chancellor, he has to go through the registrar. So, the Public Affairs Director reports to the registrar. The issue of being part of management is a yes and no because sometimes there are major decisions that ordinarily or in some other institution you know you would have the PR as part of that team but then in the case of our university, it is not really like that. Sometimes you would have a Public Affairs director as part and at some other times, she is not involved. It is basically at the discretion of the vice-chancellor but most often, the head of public relations is actively involved when there seems to be a crisis. For example, she was a very contingent member of the management team during the escalation of Covid-19 but then as the pandemic died down, she has not been found in critical meetings where she is expected to be part.

A representative of another technical university indicated that public relations outfit is given the attention it deserves in the university. According to him, the public relations unit is the mouthpiece of the university and is also responsible for organizing all official university events. According to him, public relations is seen as a management function involved with the planning and coordination of activities relating to their internal and external publics. These sentiments were not misplaced as another participant reiterated the centrality of public relations to the university, without which, the participant argued the university would cease to exist.

Public Relations is the heart of this Technical University, without PR there is no University. We are the mouthpiece of this University. We ensure that the image of this University is enhanced all the time. We ensure that we have a good relationship with the media. We ensure that there is a good relationship between the students' management and the University.

In all cases sampled, the head of the public relations outfit of the universities reported to either the Registrar or Deputy Registrar. This collaborates with the study of Adu-Oppong (2015) that asserted that the public relations departments in Ghanaian tertiary institutions are not accorded the prominence like other departments. The public relations professionals serve as

dissemination of information from management. Thus, PR is not considered a management function in Technical Universities in Ghana. This is in contrast to a study by Luo, Y. (2005), which looked at communication management at two eastern US institutions and discovered that the head of communication was the university's vice president, who reported directly to the president and was a member of his cabinet. The study concluded that involving the heads of communication in those two universities in the decision-making process enhanced the quality of decision making and facilitated collaboration among various units.

4.3 What role does Public Relations Plan play in the PR operations of the Technical Universities in Ghana

Successful stakeholder engagement is incumbent on the nature of public relations practiced by the organization as well as the use of well-thought-through public relations frameworks or plans. The study sought to understand whether the various public relations roles discussed by the various representatives and participants are guided by a well-defined public relations plan or framework. The study found that even though most of the technical universities practice public relations based on the provisions in their over-all university strategic plans, none has a well-documented strategic PR Plan borne out of research.

One representative indicated that plans were in motion to develop a public relations plan due to the expiration of the University's Strategi plan. In the absence of a public relations plan, the university has had to resort to ad-hoc strategies based on best practices in the industry.

Unfortunately, we do not have any policy and it has been based on what we deem to be the best practices or what we may call best practices in the public relations industry. Our director has brought a suggestion where we were going to look at a communication policy but we have not begun yet, so as I said we are looking into it. Currently, we are now trying to put together a strategic plan for the directorate just because the university's umbrella strategic plan has also expired and management is also trying to present something that will be representing the directorate.

P1 one stated that, as a standard practice, the public relations role is supposed to be codified in a document. He admitted that although the functions were informed by strategies, the university

does not have a document Public Relations Plan and that the institution was working to address that gap. However, another participant explained that their public relations operations were informed by the overall strategic plan of the university.

There is a university strategic plan that guides our activities which was developed a few months ago to last for about five years. It includes the strategic plan for the Public Affairs directorate and all that. What we did was that we put out our own to fit into the Strategic Plan of the University.

Similarly, another participant contended that the public relations plan is informed by the university's strategic plan.

We have a strategic plan but then it is in tandem with the general university plan. It changes as and when. For our plans we do not just draw from the general strategic plan, we also design ours. But then it is designed in such a way that it does not veer away so much from the bigger strategic plan. It is something that happens every year so we design our strategic plan as a directorate every year. This year, for example, things that we could not achieve may be due to financial or monetary issues, we roll it over to next year and the ones that we are able to achieve we assess against the PR objectives of the university.

He explained that the core objectives of the public relations plan which among other things was to enhance the students' experience of the university and to erase the perception that polytechnics and technical universities are for weaker students.

For example, we out doored our strategic plan for 2021 to 2025 in September and under the PR pillar, we have internationalization where the university wants to have more presence outside Ghana. We also want to enhance students' experience. One thing we started with this year is a competition for new students where the winners are awarded prizes. This is to help them develop affection for the university and take away the mentality that technical university is for weak students. We want to put out a certain image because we as a university find ourselves in a community that does not even have a good name. As part of our objectives, we hoping to be able to put up a certain positive image that so we are working with the city authorities and have recently signed memorandum of understanding so that they can help us rebrand.

Scholars have argued that the centralization of public relations in organizations necessitates it to be seen as a management function. This is because public relations is critical to the university operations and realization of its goals. It is especially true in the case of this study, which was reliant on the change of status of the technical universities that were once polytechnics, where there is a need for effective and efficient public relations strategies to engage existing and

prospective stakeholders, as some of the participants argued. While most participants stated that the heads of the public relations are not a part of the universities management team, few others indicated that public relations heads of their institutions make significant contributions to management decisions of their universities. In all cases, the participants indicated that their public relations outfits are directly responsible to the Registrars. The heads of the public relations departments and offices report to their Registrars. Some of the responses are highlighted in the excerpts below.

Unfortunately, our director is not part of the management team, the reason being that it is the policy of management that when the registrar is represented at a management meeting, he is representing all the directors, so whatever happens, he comes back to brief the directors and the directors also carry out, whatever is supposed to be done so the director for public affairs is not part of management.

No, he is not a management member of the institution but he is a deputy registrar so within the registry he is one of the top managers. The only meeting he is invited to attend are those that per the statutes he is a secretary, like the ICT committee and those that he has been designated by the registrar, but he's not a management member.

The directorate is under the registry so if for example the Public Affairs director wants to communicate with the Vice-Chancellor, he has to go through the registrar. So, the Public Affairs Director reports to the registrar. The issue of being part of management is a yes and no because sometimes there are major decisions that ordinarily or in some other institution you know you would have the PR as part of that team but then in the case of our university, it is not really like that. Sometimes you would have a Public Affairs director as part and at some other times, she is not involved. It is basically at the discretion of the vice-chancellor but most often, the head of public relations is actively involved when there seems to be a crisis. For example, she was a very contingent member of the management team during the escalation of Covid-19 but then as the pandemic died down, she has not been found in critical meetings where she is expected to be part.

Well, yes and no, let me put it this way. I feel that there are instances where I sit in management meetings, there are other instances when I am only told that management has taken this particular decision, go implement it and so it is quite a mix kind of thing where sometimes management feels that for this particular issue, we need to involve a public relations officer or the public affairs officer, other instances management will get in there take their own decisions and that ends it.

There are some management meetings, including even the council meetings that the public relations officer and the Public Affairs Directorate is not informed. We are not even given copies of notices of the meetings, yet we are supposed to make such meetings known to the public. How do we do that if we do not attend the meetings?

4.4 How important is public relations in the realization of the organizational goals of the Technical Universities in Ghana?

It has been argued that public relations can make a significant contribution towards the achievement of organizational goals. Participants from the sampled technical universities discussed their organizational goals which centered on increasing enrolment, enhancing the reputations of the technical universities, building international brands.

4.4.1 Increase in student Enrolment

Participants were unanimous in identifying student enrolment as key organization goal for their institutions. A participant indicated that enrolment drive was spearheaded by the PR in his institution.

The University seeks to increase its enrollment numbers so there is this enrollment drive that is being pushed by the public relations office. So, the university wants to increase its visibility and branding as well as reputational management.

Another university representative indicated that reputation management is central in their quest to increase their enrolment.

For the enrollment drive to succeed, we compare the current student numbers with the previous academic year. We also embark on reputational management to understand how the external publics perceive the university. This is done through questionnaires randomly sent around to interview external publics on their perception about the university.

4.4.2 Building International Brand

We envision becoming an internationally reputable institution of excellence in the provision of technical education. The mandate of our university is to provide higher education and undertake research but we want to achieve that in a very professional way as much as we can. We cannot talk about organizational goals without talking about values and other things. So, we need to ensure that we have discipline, ensure efficiency, effectiveness and excellence.

One of the representatives indicated that their public relations office does not play any key role in the management of their relationships with international universities and partner institutions.

We have the Directorate of International Programs and Institutional Collaboration that handles the university's relationship with international universities but only come in when it involves alumni and sometimes students. When it comes to relationship management, we struggle a bit as a directorate because sometimes the public relations outfit is unaware of the guests of the university. We struggle a bit because of the way the university is structured. This is because everybody wants to be independent limiting our function when it comes to managing relationships.

4.4.3 Enhancing the Image/Reputation

One of the most notable aspects of one of the interviews with one of the participants was the recognition of the need to rebrand the image of the institution after its conversion from a Polytechnic to a Technical University.

A representative explained how pivotal public relations have been to the actualization of their organizational goals. This is so because the university realizes the need for rebranding to restore public faith in technical universities. The explanation underscored the prominence of the various stakeholders to the strategic communication efforts of the university.

Having moved from the Polytechnic to the technical university our main agenda is rebranding. The public relations unit has made this a priority where we have embarked on outreach programs. We have put up news items through the traditional media and also advertise the institution. We have deployed a lot of e-flyers on social media as part of our communication strategy. Also, as part of the strategies, the university has been deepening the relationship between the students and the management as well as the lecturers. And so, that is another goal of the public relations office. We have put up letterboxes with telephone numbers that students can readily dial and lodge their complaints.

According to another participant said the university radio station has been very instrumental in their rebranding endeavours by complementing existing strategies like events to communicate their new orientation to their various publics.

One of the major tools or strategies we are looking at is the university radio station to change the perception of people to reinforce the new direction of the university. We are also using a chunk of events we organize as part of our public relations strategy to communicate to the outside world that this is the direction we are going. We also organize press soirees.

A participant emphasized that the university's use of public relations has substantially impacted positively on its relationships with stakeholders, as well as helped the university to make strides in managing its reputation.

For one of the participants, the indicators for the realization of organizational goals in outlined in the strategic plan of the university. However, public relations outfit has been supporting the leadership to achieve organizational goals.

It is always our desire as the office of public relations to ensure that we complement the efforts of the management or the leadership of the university to ensure the achievement of our goals. So, through our activities, we are working to ensure that the image of this institution is not undermined. We sometimes use the university radio as one of our biggest tools to project the university. We also manage our relationship with the media, the students and other stakeholders in our bid to contribute to the achievement of the goals of the university.

It has brought harmony between the internal and external publics. Now many people have gotten to know more about the university and what we do. And if issues crop about the able to resolve those issues effectively, positively affecting the reputation of the university

The organizational goals are centered on the multiple stakeholders of the universities, according to the findings. Some of the objectives were set with students in mind, while others were not. The various ways in which these connections are handled were also explored, and the findings demonstrated that public relations was an effective instrument in the process that paid off in terms of achieving the organizational goals.

4.5 Challenges

While the university has reaped enormous benefits from effective and efficient use of public relations, the participant argued that the public has yet to fully grasp the efficacy and importance of public relations, particularly when the public relations officer is seen addressing some key issues that people expect a senior management member to address.

One challenge is that sometimes people do not appreciate the role of the public relations office. People do not understand how PR works and it is a challenge. Sometimes when

issues come up, people want the Vice-Chancellor to be seen. They do not understand why the public relations officer should lead the discussion or should address the media. Even though the public relations officer is the mouthpiece in matters relating to the public, people think that the Vice-Chancellor should rather be dealing directly with the external publics. People do not understand why all issues should be addressed by the public relations office and it is a challenge.

This difficulty, which was also raised by a representative from another university, was argued to be contingent on the type of audience. Another participant stated that, while public relations has aided in the achievement of organizational goals, their university has only benefited from the tip of the iceberg because its public relations roles have been limited to media relations and the public relations department has been excluded from very important processes and information critical to the performance of their role of building and strengthening relationships between the university and its stakeholders.

It is not that bad, but then it is not also excellent. I am saying this because you will find that in our case, public affairs or public relations is seen as media relations and so it is only when we have events that the university ask public affairs to get media to cover the program. Even today there is a program, we are orienting new staff, should that not make the news? public affairs is not invited, public affairs is not represented. How do we make news out of that? Information should be easily made available to the public affairs directorate so that we can accurately be the mouthpiece of the university.

One participant mentioned that one of the most difficult issues that public relations practitioners face is the exclusion of the head of public relations in the operations of the university. The failure of management to perceive public relations as a management function is considered a major roadblock to achieving effective and efficient public relations strategies and processes.

Some of the challenges include the non-involvement of the University Relations Officer (URO) in the core management of the university. Ideally, we should be part of management to access first-hand information for onward dissemination to our stakeholders. This is a major challenge as it affects the recognition of the public relations office as an important office of the university. Other challenges include lack of equipment and also inadequate funding.

One of the key challenges for other universities has been the under-resourcing of the public relations offices, which has hampered their ability to carry out their mandate effectively and

efficiently. This is compounded by some members of the university's leadership's reluctance to identify public relations as a management function.

One of our constraints is budget. The PR office is not well-resourced for us to discharge our activities effectively. We are supposed to have a vehicle for our operations but we do not have one. Another challenge is a lack of understanding of the concept of public relations on the part of the leadership of the university. If you try to implement public relations activities, they feel that you are just going to waste money.

The aforementioned issues raised by representatives from other technical universities, as well as the infant nature of the public relations departments and the inadequate staffing proved to be the stumbling blocks in some of the university's public relations efforts. The inadequate staff creates a situation where the few available human resources are burdened with the weight of public relations duties and roles that are quite broad in scope.

I must also say that the directorate of public affairs is an infant directorate so far as the university is concerned. We still have certain problems and we still have some of the policies that we are yet to look at. We are very much concerned. We are constrained in terms of staffing, logistics, vehicles and then professional cameras or drones and all those equipment that will give us very good images and things that will help us to sell the image of the university in a very positive way. The other major challenge is that the director is not part of the decision-making process so sometimes we are not privy to decisions yet we are mandated to implement them. We want to write a proposal for the director of Public Affairs to be part of management.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter was focused on the presentation of the findings. The results of the semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives from the six technical universities in Ghana revealed public relations as a central pillar in the communication and engagement with the various stakeholders and publics. The use of public relations was buttressed by the need to change the narratives about technical universities being the province of academically weak students and the need to create a surge in enrolments. The universities had public relations departments although the various roles differed. However, most of them were challenged by the fact that the public relations function was not recognized as a management function, creating subsequent

problems like insufficient budgetary allocations, inadequate logistics and under-staffed public relations departments.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter focuses on the analysis and presentation of the findings of the six semi-structured interviews with the various participants who represented six technical universities in Ghana. This chapter is the concluding one as it discusses the summary of the findings, major conclusions of the study, and the practical suggestions of the study based on the findings, limitations of the study and the recommendations for further studies.

5.1 Summary of the Study

The overarching aim of the study was to evaluate the public relations strategies of the Technical Universities in Ghana. The findings presented in chapter four are summarized through a discussion with relevant literature. The summary is organized according to the research objectives that served as the basis for the study.

5.2 Objective One: Evaluating the public relations strategies of the Technical Universities in Ghana

The first objective of the study sought to understand PR strategies employed by the technical universities and how instrumental they have been in their stakeholder engagements. Seitel (2007) argues that organizations have publics who are important factors to organizational successes. The various stakeholders mentioned by the universities fall into the external and internal categories. The findings indicated that the internal publics included the students, faculty staff and administrative staff, while the external publics were predominantly made up of the prospective students, parents, Ministry of Education regulatory bodies, suppliers, the government, media, financial institutions and other universities. These categorizations are in line with the perspectives of Seitel (2007) who intimated that external publics are people outside the organization while the internal publics are those within the organization. Scholars

have argued that the use of public relations to guide communication and stakeholder engagement enables the organization to achieve its objectives effectively.

According to Seitel (2007), the use of public relations in relationship management attracts and motivates more publics to organizations, resulting in increased public participation. The findings indicated that the various universities gave a lot of prominence to the use of public relations in communicating and engaging with the various stakeholders. The Public Relations Society of America portends that, the use of public relations helps organizations to anticipate, analyze and interpret public opinion, attitudes and issues that may impact positively or negatively on the operation and plans of the organization. In this context, the participants emphasized that, more than ever, an effective public relations initiatives were required to rekindle public confidence in their new status as universities. As argued by the Public Relations Society of America, public relations was seen by the participants as a major tool needed to build and maintain their reputations after the transition into universities.

The findings also revealed that by utilizing public relations, institutions can put in place programs that will help in influencing and modifying public perceptions. Scholars have examined the role played by public relations in educational institutions. Seitel (2007) indicated that this helps in the flow of internal and external communications and the management of the reputation of the institutions. This was manifested in the findings as the participants from the various technical universities affirmed that public relations help to coordinate the activities of the universities in line with its strategic direction.

The findings also showed that the public relations efforts in most technical universities involved media relations, speech writing, publicity and events, community relations, management of University Radio station. However, the scope of public relations in educational institutions appears to be expanding, as some of the participants indicated other activities

including advertising, marketing, and research, internal communication as well as crises communication (Adu-Oppong 2015). In most cases, PR activities mainly targeted students, a perspective empirically proven by Ojomo et al. (2006).

5.3 Objective Two: The role of Strategic Public Relations Plan in PR operation at Technical Universities in Ghana

According to the Excellence theory of Grunig (2000), public relations frameworks must be used to achieve symmetric communication between the organization and its diverse publics and stakeholders. The theory argues that, for public relations to result in organizational excellence, it must be empowered as a strategic management function. This implies that the head of the public relations department should be an integral part of the strategic management team of the organization. The study found that the public relations function in technical universities is not seen as a management function since the heads of public relations offices or departments are not involved in managerial decision-making processes.

In consonance with the findings of Adu-Oppong (2015), the transition of polytechnics into technical universities has made it imperative for these new universities to have functional public relations departments. The technical universities however have designated public relations departments with roles that will help improve the image of the universities, make them internationally recognized, increase enrollment and stay above their competitors. However, the various roles assigned under the public relations departments such as alumni relations, communications, media relations, protocols etc. indicate that the calls by Luo and Yi (2005) for educational institutions to have a well-functioning and fully-fledged public relations outfit has been heeded to.

One of the pillars of the Excellence theory is that all communication activities should be coordinated by integrating them into a framework or plan (Grunig, 2000). The findings from

the study suggested that most of the technical universities pursue public relations without a properly documented public relations plan. However, most of them indicated that their public relations activities were based on the implementation of the portions of the university strategic plan relating to public relations. A few indicated that, since their transition into universities, plans were underway to develop a strategic public relations plan to guide their activities.

5.4 Objective three: Importance of the use of public relations in the attainment of the organizational goals of Ghanaian Technical Universities

Educational institutions, like other corporate organizations, strive to achieve organizational objectives by working together. According to a Ghanaian study by Boakye et al. (2012), public relations is critical to the achievement of organizational goals by facilitating efficient communication between educational institutions and their publics. The findings suggested that the various technical universities have different organizational goals, including an increase in students' enrolment, enhancement of international visibility, among many others. However, there was a consensus regarding one of the goals being the rebranding and repositioning of the technical universities after their conversion from polytechnic. The achievement of organizational goals is dependent on the public relations efforts of the various technical universities. Earlier, Shapiro (2006) stated that an organization's capacity to fulfil its goals is based on its ability to overcome its hurdles, a feat that is also dependent on public relations.

In some of the institutions, the role of public relations is skewed to meet the organizational goals. Because of the technical universities' major goal of rebranding to restore public trust, several of them have invested much in providing current students with memorable experience to make institutions attractive to potential students.

The findings also demonstrate how universities have improved their stakeholder engagements through the use of public relations. Universities have been able to manage their reputations

thanks to public relations, which has had a tremendous impact on their relationships with stakeholders and the general public. These findings are backed up by Hussain and Rawjee (2014), who claim that universities in South Africa utilized public relations as their major tool for restructuring. However, several of the universities' public relations operations and duties were haphazard and knee-jerk, thereby limiting their ability to contribute fully towards the attainment of organizational goals.

According to the findings, the lack of recognition of public relations as a management function also undermines the effectiveness and efficiency of the public relations operations. Most of the participants bemoaned the exclusion of the heads of public relations from managerial decisions and recounted how it affects budgetary allocations, provision of logistics, and adequate staffing. Boakye et al. (2012) indicated that when public relations is not recognized as a management function, it affects the quality of the processes, activities and functions. The Excellence theory of Grunig (2000) advocates for exceptional public relations practices, which are lacking in the case of technical universities. Although all the technical universities have public relations departments, they are accorded less significance in the university's organizational structure.

5.5 Conclusions of the Study

According to the findings, technical universities have both internal and external audiences who are important to their public relations efforts. Communication between universities and the general public was a critical area for universities, necessitating the use of public relations services to foster partnerships between universities and their numerous stakeholders. Public relations was found to be a major tool deployed by the technical universities to help change the perception that they were the preserve of weak students, following their transition from polytechnics to full-fledged universities. Public relations also play important role in the enrolment drive of the institutions.

Despite the central role the public relations departments are expected to play in the achievement of the overall organizational goals, most of them do not have a well-documented strategic public relations plan to guide their operations.

The public relations function was not characterized as a management function, resulting in challenges that affect the effectiveness and efficiency of the operations of the public relations departments and the technical universities as a whole.

Finally, this study has added to the theoretical body of knowledge as well as the professional practice of public relations in tertiary institutions, especially technical universities.

5.6 Practical Suggestions for Effective Public Relations in Technical Universities

The following suggestions are proffered to help the technical universities better coordinate their public relations roles and functions in order to reap returns on their public relations investments.

- i. This study strongly recommends that senior management members of technical universities receive adequate training in the roles, functions, and responsibilities of public relations practitioners, as well as the importance of recognizing public relations as a management function and the head of PR being a part of the dominant coalition. This will enable them to make better strategic decisions to effectively manage the relationships between the university and its stakeholders.
- ii. As a result of the indispensable role, public relations outfits play in the technical universities towards the realization of organizational goals, management of these institutions pay attention to resourcing the public relations departments of the various universities.
- iii. Public relations departments of Technical Universities should develop a comprehensive Strategic Public Relations Framework/Plan borne out of research

and extensive stakeholder engagements to help integrate all the public relations operations for the attainment of the broader organizational goals.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

The following are the limitations of the study despite the objectives being achieved.

- i. Due to time constraints, the study recruited only six participants from six different technical universities rather than ten from all the ten technical universities in Ghana. Ten participants would have provided the study with a more holistic picture of the public relations practices of the technical universities in Ghana.
- ii. The study could not examine the effects of these public relation strategies of the technical universities on the perception of Ghanaians. This would have provided the study with an insight into the effectiveness of the various public relations strategies and plans.

5.8 Recommendations for prospective studies

The following recommendations should be considered in future studies looking into the public relations strategies of technical universities:

- i. Future research should focus on a perception study of senior management members of tertiary institutions, particularly technical universities, on public relations practices.
- ii. A more holistic study of all the ten technical universities should be conducted to fully assess public relations practice in technical universities.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What is the nature of your role in the institution? How many years have you worked with the institution?
2. What is your highest level of qualification in PR/Communication?
3. What can you tell me about the new status of your institution as a university?
4. Who are the stakeholders of your institution and how important are they to the institution?
5. How important is stakeholder engagement to your institution, especially in the wake of your institution being elevated to a university status?
6. What are the various ways in which your institution communicates with the various stakeholders? How effective have these means been? And how long have they been used?
7. In your experience as a PR professional in the education industry, how will you describe the concept of public relations?
8. What is the role of public relations in your engagements with stakeholders?
9. Does your school have a well-defined public relations department or team? What role do they play?
10. Is the head of public relations a member of the university management team? Who does the head of PR report to?
11. Does your institution have a well-defined public relations plan? What is the nature of this plan? What are the objectives, targets, etc.?
12. How long has the institution used the public relations plan? In the absence of public relations plan, how does your institution manage its relationships with the various stakeholders and publics?

13. What are some of the challenges confronting PR practices and how have they impacted on your duties and overall organization?
14. As an institution, what are your organizational goals?
15. How instrumental has public relations been in the achievement of these roles?