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EVALUATION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES IN CRISIS SITUATIONS: THE CASE OF PUBLIC RELATION PRACTITIONERS IN THE SECURITY SERVICES OF GHANA

BY

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**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM
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AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS.**

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DECLARATION

I, declare that, this work is an empirical study I personally conducted and has not been submitted to any other panel of academics for award of a degree or any other certificate. I take responsibility of any liability emanating from the findings. I have attempted to reference all works used in support of my study and therefore declare this as my handy work of research.

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DATE

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my elder brother Lawyer Erasmus Ndemole Migyikrah, my wife Rebecca O. Ampaw and children Kelvina, Reginald, Ronald, Amissah-Arthur and Ajet Johnson and all who supported me in this academic exercise. I am forever grateful.

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I wish to acknowledge my principal supervisor for guiding me through this period of research and to all lecturers at GIJ for lecturing me throughout the period of my coursework. I am forever grateful to Kingsley Baffoe for his support and proof readings during this study. To all family members, colleagues and families far and near for your physical and spiritual support of prayers in this academic work.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

# ITEM	Abbreviation	Full Meaning of Abbreviation
	PR	Public Relations
	GIS	Ghana Immigration Services
	GoG	Government of Ghana
	GPS	Ghana Police Service
	GAF	Ghana Army Forces
	SCCT	Situational Crisis Communication Theory here in refer to as

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Personnel of Ghana Police Service spotted on sensitization on COVID-19

Figure 2: A gallery of pictures during the official launch of the Police Diary.

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 presented a case of emergency which effective public relations was considered as one of the major tools in managing the crisis (Valackiene, 2010). Using the qualitative approach, this study sought to identify the PR strategies that were adopted by the joint security forces, assess the effectiveness of the strategies and also find out the challenges that were confronted in the process of using the strategies in managing COVID-19 in Ghana. The purposive sampling technique was used to sample four main security services whereas one-on-one in-depth interviews were used in the collection of data for the study. With the help of interview guides, study participants were interviewed both through phone interviews, face to face interviews and observations. The study found out that, electronic media platforms, traditional face-to-face, community sensitization were the dominant PR vehicles adopted before and during the fight against managing COVID-19. While the strategies were largely successful according to study participants, they were not without challenges. Inadequate logistics, interference of fake news, non-compliance to the COVID-19 laws by the residents and inadequate human resources were identified as challenges that confronted security institutions in the discharge of their duties. Based on the findings, the study recommends that, PR template must be developed to aid security services during crisis through research. Similarly, the study recommends the formation that security services form their own non- commercial media outlets to inform the general public on their roles and other activities pertaining to combating crime and managing crisis.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of Study

Arguably, the whole world lies in crisis but the corona virus diseases outbreak in 2019 here in referred to as COVID-19 has been touted a major world crisis in recent times by governments and international organizations alike (Khan & Fahad, 2020). Undoubtedly, crisis occurs in different facets of human life including economics, social, political and cultural and has the tendency to change the societal dynamics in various ways. According to Laufs and Waseem (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic since 2019 has infected and obviously killed millions of people across the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) over 170 million infections have been recorded as at May 29, 2021 whereas over 3.51 million have already perished from COVID-19 within the same period and more anticipated until standard cure is discovered. Continentally, since its emergence in Wuhan China, all continents have been hit by the pandemic however the highest hit are the North and South America, Asia, Europe and in recent times Africa whereas USA, India and Brazil remain the topmost three countries highly hit in the world (COVID-19 Worldometer, May 29, 2021). The rapid spread of COVID-19 created a global pandemonium which forced governments to lockdown, impose travel bans, introduce compulsory masking and social distancing and in recent times compulsory testing and vaccination as its boarder control measures to help protect spread of the virus and protect the people on earth (Laufs and Waseem, 2020; Taylor, 2020). Political leaders and governments in Africa also in response to WHO declaration of a public health emergency (WHO,2020) in the world similarly imposed several restrictions in their respective nations to contain and control the rapid spread of the virus.

Ghana was not exempted from COVID-19 infections and implications but received less attention from state authorities until March 12, 2020 when Ghana recorded the first 2 COVID-19 cases (Afriyie et al, 2020; Gyasi, 2020). According to Worlddometer (2021) the figures for infected persons in Ghana has risen to over 96000 as at May 29, 2021 with over 750 deaths within the same period. According to Afriyie et al., (2020) as a result of the staggering increases in infection cases and fear of increased deaths prior to 2020, the government formulated and imposed new laws and policies as a control measure to reduce the spread of the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. The government of Ghana at the initial stage imposed a two (2) week partial lockdown in three major cities; Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi but later extended it, along with other measures. Besides the GoG decision to close borders and impose partial lockdown in selected hotspots of COVID-19, the infections rate nationwide kept increasing arguably forcing a nationwide ban placed on all forms of social gatherings. Gyasi (2020) recounts that, educational institutions, funerals, religious gatherings, weddings, sports and destinations or events where large gatherings could be attracted were the major functions that received restrictive ban from the government. Notwithstanding, the period of restriction was relaxed and made way for the implementation of strict social distancing and washing as further measures proffered to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 amidst the heightened public health burden. These came to be widely known as the COVID-19 protocols which all residents in the country needed to observe. Further, Ghana shut its tripartite doors of air, sea and land to all forms of human travels except for consumable food and medicinal products and to what came to be known as the essential service staff which included health workers and state security agencies. Security service institutions like the Police, Immigration and Customs services as well as the Military were labelled essential in the fight against the pandemic because, according

to Laufs and Waseem (2020) the rules and or the COVID-19 laws or protocols were needed to be enforced to ensure strict adherence.

Emergencies abound in the world but managing emergencies in pandemic situations with plethora of challenges required effective management strategies. Arguably, the imposed restrictions were a contradiction to the fundamental human rights of residents and so its management was anticipated to face fearless opposition from the people (Hasanbegovic, 2020). Undeniably, for security agencies to be successful in managing such emergency touted as public health crisis in extreme poor economies where large proportion of the population are in the informal sector required effective public relations strategies. The policing of the rules by law enforcement agencies has been meet with both PR successes and failures across the world since the outbreak of the virus in 2019. The strategies adopted has raised world bilateral and unilateral tensions between governments of different nations. For instance, available data reveals that the US president at the time had referred to the COVID-19 as China virus which raised geo-political tensions between the two countries and their allies. Equally, the PR tactics of the governments in richest nations affected the quick development of vaccines and fuel the mistrust in the medical products and support from other nations.

In the case of Ghana, governments PR tactics has raised public discussion on the quality and effectiveness from researchers, political and religious leaders alike. Studying the tactics adopted by security agencies in Ghana in helping the combat of COVID-19 will therefore help in appreciating the role and challenges encountered in the implementation process. Equally, it will help know and effectively handle future pandemics.

1.2 Study Problem

Arguably, pandemics have been an inevitable part of the world population for over centuries now. History reveals that, the world has experienced different devastating pandemics with varying impact levels over. For instance, the great plague of London also known as the bubonic plague of 1665 killed over 20% of London's total population (Monecke et al., 2009; Scott & Duncan, 2001) whereas the Spanish flu of 1918-1919 infected over 500 million people worldwide and claimed the lives of over 50 million (Martini, et. al., 2019). Similarly in 1957, over 1.1 million people perished as a result of the outbreak of the Asian flu (Jackson, 2009). Twelve years after the Asian flu, in the early 1980's HIV/AIDS appeared as an epidemic (Gauri & Lieberman, 2006) however Kallings (2008) argues that, it has grown to pandemic state with about 65 million cases of infection and 25 million deaths recorded. Again, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) referred to as SARS-CoV-1 which is believed to be caused by coronavirus surfaced in early 2000 and claimed several lives across the world. Seventeen (17) years after SARS-CoV-1, another severe acute respiratory syndrome herein referred to as SARS-CoV-2 struck the world in 2019. Identified in Wuhan, China in December, 2019, the pandemic COVID-19 was first declared by WHO as a public health emergency. Dan, Pant, & Upadhyay (2020) reveals that, owing to the challenges being confronted in terms of logistics and human resources, the fatalities associated with COVID keeps growing exponentially.

Worldometer (May 29, 2021) revealed that over 170 million cases of infections have been recorded with over 3.5 million deaths within the same period worldwide. According to WHO (2020) no continent in the world have been left out since the outbreak in Wuhan China causing exponential increase in fatalities. Although all continents have been affected by COVID-19, the three most affected countries in the world remains USA, India and Brazil and are located in North America,

Asia and South America respectively (Worldometer, May 29, 2021). The rapid spread of COVID19 and the increasing cases of fatalities coupled with lack of internationally accepted medicine and inadequate health facilities attracted governments attention to impose international and national restrictions on nations as a means of containing and controlling the spread of the deadly virus. Despite the argument of human right abuses regarding the COVID-19 laws, heads of states and governments formulated laws to back the implementation of lockdowns, travel bans, compulsory masking, social distancing, compulsory screenings and vaccination at various points of entries as means to protect the people in their respective countries from fatalities (Amiri, 2021; Laufs and Waseem, 2020; Taylor, 2020). Undeniably, the implementation of restrictions had economic consequences on governments with regards to revenue generation, food security and budgetary supports to poor countries and so poor nations were tactically disadvantaged in taking lockdown decisions (Ochu et al., 2021, WHO, 2009). Nevertheless, African political leaders and governments on the continent took refuge in WHO's declaration of a public health emergency (WHO,2020) in the has shown capacity in handling the pandemic through the imposition of several harsh restrictions in respective countries to control the potential devastation that otherwise would have been associated with COVID-19 since its emergence in Africa (Ochu et al., 2021).

The government of Ghana equally instigated restrictive and compulsory measures such as lockdown, quarantining, compulsory masking, ban on social gatherings of all forms to help contain and control the spread of COVID-19 following the recording of the first 2 cases in March, 2019 (Amiri, 2021; Afriyie et. al., 2020). Notwithstanding, GHS (2020) recount that infection rates of COVID-19 has been exponential since the outbreak in March, 2019 with over 96000 cases of infection and 751 deaths. Debatably, managing pandemic emergencies is considered a skilloriented phenomenon which is largely coordinated by government structures. In the case of COVID-19

outbreak in Ghana, the major skill-oriented professions that became highly essential and were touted as frontline workers were health workers and security agencies (Ashinyo, 2020) Security agencies like the police service, immigration service, customs service, military, prisons service and fire service were considered to be essential during COVID due to their role in enforcing the set guidelines or laws on COVID-19 restrictions in Ghana. Undoubtedly, the human society is complex in nature and so to be successful in managing them at different levels of understanding in crisis of a sought requires proper communication and public relation tools. Available data reveals that the state security institutions and their public relation units in Ghana have been part of the entire process in enforcing existing laws and protocols on COVID.

Despite the critical role of PR units and practitioners in managing crisis in emergency situations, since the COVID-19 outbreak in Ghana, less attention has been paid to their activities to critically assess and appreciate the character played by the individuals in the effort to manage COVID-19 and to reduce the spread. Notwithstanding, most COVID-19 research conducted in Ghana such as (Anaafo et al., 2021; Pattnalk, 2020; Anane, et al., 2020; Gyasi, 2020; Gyimah 2020) have focused on the economic, socio-cultural and political impact on society at the neglect of public relations. Tella, Suraya, Bonsu, & Anani-Bossman, (2020) recount that public relation is a vital tool in building the cooperate image of any organization and so it is crucial that the public relation tactics being used by law enforcement agencies are well understood through well-coordinated empirical research. That notwithstanding, less attention has been given to the area particularly the public relation strategies used by security agencies involved in the process. This study therefore seeks to fill the gap and contribute to knowledge by examining the roles of PR practitioners and units of four (4) selected security agencies, thus; Ghana Police Service (GPS), Ghana Immigration Service

(GIS), Customs Exercise and Preventive Service (CEPS) and Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) that have been involved in the management of the COVID-19 crisis in Ghana since March, 2019.

1.3 Study Objective (s)

1.3.1 General objectives

The study seeks to generally identify and understand the public relations strategies that were adopted by the major state security institutions in combating the current world pandemic (COVID19) in Ghana before, during and after the lockdown.

1.3.2 Specific objective (s)

The study will specifically seek to;

- i. Identify the strategies adopted by public relation departments in Ghana's security institutions before, during and after lockdown in managing COVID-19 crisis.
- ii. Assess the effectiveness of the strategies adopted by the public relations departments in Ghana's security institutions before, during and after lockdown in managing COVID-19 crisis.
- iii. Identify the challenges confronted by the public relation departments and practitioners in fighting COVID-19.

1.4 Research Question

1. What PR strategies were you using to manage health emergencies such as pandemics?
2. What are some of the strategies adopted in managing the COVID-19 crisis before lockdown, during lockdown and after lockdown?
3. How effective are the PR strategies adopted in managing the COVID-19 situation?
4. What are some of the challenges you were confronted in the discharge of duties in managing the COVID-19 crisis in Ghana?

1.5 Justification

Effective public relation is an essential ingredient in managing any crisis in the world (Valackiene, (2010). This is really so because, any form of crisis involves human. In a situation where tensions are high and crisis could escalate, effective public relations would be a pre-requisite in calming tensions and control the situation. Likewise, no form of crisis can be well managed without the security agencies of the state especially those responsible for enforcing laws of the state. Undeniably, state security agencies in Ghana have PR units that are responsible for liaising with the public and the security apparatus of the state. The security agencies are sometimes attacked and vilified by the public for some of their actions and or in actions because there could be a misunderstanding between the public and the security strategies adopted. In a major crisis like COVID-19 where the security services have been involved in the process of managing the crisis, it is worth knowing and appreciating the strategies used, the effectiveness of the strategies and also understand the challenges confronted in using the strategies adopted. This study will therefore add to existing knowledge on the role of public relation practitioners in managing pandemic emergency situations.

1.6 Scope of Study

Despite the existence of so many state security institutions in Ghana, generally, this study will focus on only four institutions, thus; the public relation unit within the Ghana Police Service, Immigration Services, Customs Exercise and Preventive Services and the Ghana Armed Forces due to their direct frontal role in the recent COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana. The focus will be on the public relation unit at the headquarters of the institutions due to their supervisory role played in managing the COVID-19 since March, 2020.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The study will be organized under five separate chapters with chapter one covering the study background, problem statement, study objectives, research questions, justification of study, scope of the study, organization, limitation and conclusion of chapter. This will be followed by chapter two which will focus the review of relevant literature based on the major concepts being considered in the study. Subsequently, the chapter three will be dedicated to discussing the research method. The major research design, sampling techniques, sampling sizes, target population, data analysis will be discussed. The findings of the study will eventually be presented under chapter four and detail analysis done. Finally, the chapter five will cover summary of study findings, conclusion and recommendations will be outlined.

1.8 Conclusion of Chapter

This chapter is essential to the study because it sets the tone and predict the direction of flow of the research. The chapter has detailed the study background to explain the genesis of the study by explaining the development of pandemics in relation to COVID and its impact from the world, Africa and Ghana view respectively. This is followed by establishing the problem statement to defend why the need for the study. The study objectives, research questions, justification of study, scope of the study, organization, limitation and conclusion of chapter are equally well explained.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to reviewing relevant literature on the concepts as identified in the topic and objectives understudied. It begins with discussing the meaning of crisis followed by discussion on crisis management. Subsequently, the concept of public relations and public relation strategies are further perused respectively. Background to Covid 19 Crisis in the World and COVID-19 Crisis in Ghana and the public relation strategies are also discussed in that order.

2.1 Meaning of Crisis

Undeniably, the whole world lies in crisis and a complex one for that matter. The complexity of the concept crisis does not only originate from the lack of common definitions but equally a determination and control of the sources and of the impact of the phenomenon. According to Boin & Kuipers (2018), the concept crisis and disaster are closely related and are largely used interchangeably by researchers but arguably different from each other in the field of academic research. Rosenthal, Boin, & Comfort, 2001 as cited in Boin & Kuipers (2018) contend that, crisis is a threat that is perceived to be existential in one way or another. Similarly, crisis is described as an unexpected situation that poses a threat to a society or body of organization. The concept crisis occurs in economics, social, political and cultural and has the tendency to change the societal dynamics in various ways (Kamil, 2020). Organizations and institutions equally experience some form of crisis in their work environment which differs from crisis that occur in larger societies.

The causes of crisis are mostly unknown, unplanned and unexpected but the effect is largely huge.

Arguably, crisis of all forms is either human activity oriented or cause of nature. For instance, natural disasters such as flooding, earthquakes, excessive drought are cases that presents an environmental threat to the society. Similarly, financial meltdowns, famine and hunger are possible economic phenomenon that poses economic crisis in states. For instance, the economic recession

in the USA in 2014 was termed crisis. Socio-political tensions such chieftaincy disputes, civil wars, political conflicts have created series of crisis in Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Cameroun and Cote d'voire which displaced thousands of people across the world. In 2015, the European Union declared a migration crisis when over 1 million people besieged the shores of European coast after the Syrian, Afghanistan crisis. Besides, pandemics created as a result of human activities that besieges a society without an immediate cure also poses threats to human existence. History recounts that, epidemics such as SARS, HIV, Asian flu and in recent time COVID 19 have been health related phenomenon that created health crisis globally due to the lack of cure and devastating nature of the disease. Thus, in crisis, uncertainty and fear is created in the human society by the negative effects of the phenomenon.

Undoubtedly, COVID 19 is an on-going world health crisis due to the high threats it poses to human live. Admittedly, for any crisis to be resolved or brought under control, effective management skills are required.

2.2 Crisis Management

All public health crisis whether been caused by nature or by man presents great challenges to the society. The effects of public health crisis such as SARS, Asian flu, Anthrax, Ebola and many others affects the lives of millions of people globally. Whiles many millions of lives are lost through such pandemics, the source of livelihood of those left behind alive are damaged. Countries either rich or poor are subjected to economic and social recession due to the policies of state governments. During such crisis, human and natural resource are brought under intense pressure whereas the fundamental human rights of citizens are largely abused by state governments due to the enforcement of laws in an attempt to curtail the pandemics. With over 170 million infection

cases recorded and more than 3.5 million deaths and clearly no continent left out since 2019 Worldometer (2020), the COVID-19 has reached an alarming record of crisis (WHO, 2020) as a result require strategic management skills by states and governments. Afriyie et. al. (2020), reveals that effective management skills are required in the era of this global crisis due to the absence of well trusted medication as scientist struggle to discover the best cure.

In efforts to contain the spread of the virus in this crisis, governments are using the building of emergency health facilities, provision of PPE's, establishment of ICU's and provision of laws to restrict flow of the virus. The imposition of lockdowns, social distancing, ban on social gatherings, compulsory wearing of mask are largely part of the crisis management strategies (Taylor, 2020; Lauf's and Waseem, 2020;

The management of crisis sometimes require well-coordinated security presence to ensure the enforcement of certain laws. In a complex human society, people have the tendency to flout the set rules meant to manage the situation.

The management of every crisis is premise on effective communication and public relation skills and strategies implemented by public relation practitioners. Citizens comply to laws that they understand and appreciate and for that matter, public relations are the most effective tool to be used to reach out to the timing public.

2.3 Understanding the Concept of Public Relations

The whole world has become complexly globalized and sophisticated in technology in an exponentially increasing population with high demand for information and data (Kamil, 2020).

Most of these who are living in the peripheries of countries are reached out to through the use of public relation tools by both public and private institutions alike. Nonetheless, according to Kamil

(2020) public relation as a social phenomenon has been with society over centuries past but has become more widespread in recent times. However, in a rapidly changing world of modernity, the concept of public relations keeps changing in scope and definition due to the way of usage. For instance, Kamil (2020) describes public relations as a service primarily concerned with providing programmes that satisfy the public interest. According to Edward Barney as cited in Stevenson, Kaul, & Puttaraju (2017), Public relations are the attempt by information, persuasion, adjustment, to engineer public support for an activity, a cause, movement or an institution''. Similarly, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations also defines public relation as "A strategic management function that adds value to an organization by helping it to manage its reputation."

Meanwhile the Public Association Relations refers to public relations as "The art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organizational leaders and implementing planned programme of action which will serve both the organization and the public interest" (Theaker, 2012). Undeniably, the concept public relation is largely understood by different institutions and organization differently. Public relations (PR) involve variety of activities which are conducted by companies to promote and also to protect the image and products and policies in the eyes of the public. In modern terms, the practice has become widespread and employed in economics, politics, sports, tourism, security and many facets of human life due to the benefits associated with it. Public relation is deliberately planned by skilled practitioners and so it is situational specific. For instance, in any form of crisis, trained practitioners in security institutions use public relation strategies to help communicate to the public in managing the situation.

2.4 Public Relations Strategies in Crisis Management

In a rapidly diversifying world where crisis continues to fill the environment and create economic, political, social and cultural scare, public relation becomes a management tool used by governments and private firms. There are varying PR strategies that are used by practitioners depending on the situation at hand. For instance, the communication strategies that may be adopted by a PR practitioner in a multinational beverage producing company to reach out to its target market will not be same that will be used in managing health emergencies such as COVID-19. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has created a series of unexpected and unprecedented challenges for PR departments globally however, PR practitioners have devised many strategies to engage the public so as to reduce the fear just like other emergencies.

A PR strategy is a master plan that is devised by a practitioner to help deliver strategic activities that work towards achieving a particular goal in a situation. A good strategy will therefore set out a direction for the practitioner and it should be possible to be summarised in a few short words to be used. Nevertheless, PR tactics are not the same as PR strategies as the former are the day-today activities or steps that a practitioner performs to achieve the said strategies set out. A practitioner underscores the fact that, every crisis undergoes at least four stages, thus; Prodromal (Pre-crisis), Acute (Crisis), Chronic (Clean up) and finally to the Crisis resolution stage (postcrisis) stages respectively. These stages in crisis management are essential to PR practitioner because each requires specific PR strategies to be adopted. Likewise, in the management process of crisis, a practitioner must factor the mitigation, preparedness, **response** and recovery plans into his strategies. In all instances, the PR practitioner is expected to use of the approaches, traditional publicity, public information, persuasive communication, and two-way symmetrical approaches to manage the situation. Public relations experts and researchers argue that PR deals with facts and not with lies, intimidation, and empty promises and so in managing crisis, practitioners must gather

accurate data on information before communicating to the public. The use of mass communication is considered one of the most important means of public relations to reach the masses in crisis. However, the use of community engagements to explain the situation at hand and the long-term effects and precautionary measures is mostly effective.

Although the use of press release is good, in crisis management not much could be made from such approaches as in the heat of crisis not much people will heed to reading but could listen more and watch more. In the modern system where, millions could be reached through social media mediums, in crisis management, such mediums become appropriate channels of reaching out to the public with relevant communication. In the spade of crisis, the delay of relevant information to the public tends to be of bad faith and so release of information intermittently calms situation.

Kasirye (2021) argues that the adoption of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by Coombs in 1995 by PR practitioners in managing COVID 19 situational crisis could guide practitioners to know when to deny and when to confirm situations to reduce unnecessary tensions in the society. Undeniably, there are array of strategies that are at the disposal of practitioners to utilize in resolving conflicts health crisis but not all helpful and so it requires diligence of the PR practitioner to weigh the situation and proffer appropriate strategies as a solution to the crisis.

2.5 Background to Covid 19 Crisis in the World

Health emergencies and pandemic and its devastating impact in our world dates back to centuries. Debatably, pandemics are inevitable part of the world population which comes with both negative and positive effects on the society. Although, in recent times, corona virus diseases outbreak in 2019 here in refer to as COVID-19 has been touted a major world emergency by governments and

international organizations (Khan & Fahad, 2020), history reveals that, the world has experience different devastating pandemics with varying impact levels over the years. Monecke et al., 2009 and Scott & Duncan, 2001 revealed that, the great plague of London also known as the bubonic plague of 1665 killed over 20% of London's total population whereas Martini, et. al., 2019 espouse that, the Spanish flu of 1918-1919 infected over 500 million people worldwide and claimed the lives of over 50 million. Similarly in 1957, over 1.1 million people perished as a result of the outbreak of the Asian flu (Jackson, 2009). Twelve years after the Asian flu, in the early 1980's HIV/AIDS appeared as an epidemic (Gauri & Lieberman, 2006) however Kallings (2008) argues that, it has grown to pandemic state with about 65 million cases of infection and 25 million deaths recorded. Again, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) referred to as SARS-CoV-1 which is believed to be caused by coronavirus surfaced in early 2000 and claimed several lives across the world. Seventeen (17) years after SARS-CoV-1, another severe acute respiratory syndrome herein referred to as SARS-CoV-2 struck the world in 2019. Dan, Pant, & Upadhyay (2020) reveals that, owing to the challenges being confronted in terms of logistics and human resources, the fatalities associated with COVID keeps growing exponentially.

According to Laufs and Waseem (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic since 2019 has infected and claimed the lives of millions of people across the world. World Health Organization (WHO) revealed that over 170 million infections have been recorded as at May 29, 2021 and over 3.51 million lives already lost to COVID-19 within the same period. Available data shows that, since COVID 19 outbreak in Wuhan China, no continent on the planet have been left out by the pandemic. However, the highest hit continents are the North and South America, Asia, Europe and in recent times Africa whereas USA, India and Brazil remain the topmost three countries highly hit in the world (COVID-19 Worldometer, May 29, 2021).

The rapid spread of COVID-19 and the increasing cases of fatalities coupled with lack of internationally accepted medicine and inadequate health facilities attracted governments attention to impose international and national restrictions on nations as a means of containing and controlling the spread of the deadly virus. Despite the argument of human right abuses regarding the COVID-19 laws, heads of states and governments formulated laws to back the implementation of lockdowns, travel bans, compulsory masking, social distancing, compulsory screenings and vaccination at various point of entries as means to protect the people in their respective countries from fatalities (Amiri, 2021; Laufs and Waseem, 2020; Taylor, 2020). Undeniably, the implementation of restrictions had economic consequences on governments with regards to revenue generation, food security and budgetary supports to poor countries and so poor nations were tactically disadvantage in taking lockdown decisions (Ochu et al., 2021, WHO, 2009).

Following WHO's deceleration of COVID-19 as a world health emergency without current medical cure, political leaders and governments in Africa also in response took steps several restrictive measures in their respective nations to contain and control the rapid spread of the virus amidst the various challenges the countries were confronted with. Ghana like many other COVID19 affected countries in the world also had a story to tell.

2.6 COVID-19 Crisis in Ghana and the public relation strategies

Ghana like many countries in the world was not spared by COVID-19 infections and implications but received less attention from state authorities. On March 12, 2020, Ghana recorded its first two (2) COVID-19 cases in Kotoka international airport (Afriyie et al, 2020; Gyasi, 2020). According to Worlddometer (2021) the figures for infected persons in Ghana has risen to over 96000 as at May 29, 2021 with over 750 deaths within the same period. According to Afriyie et al., (2020) as a result of the staggering increases in infection cases and fear of increased deaths prior to 2020,

the government formulated and imposed new laws and policies as a control measure reduce the spread of the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. The government of Ghana at the initial stage imposed a two (2) week partial lockdown in three major cities; Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi but later extended along with other measures. Besides, the GoG decided to close borders and impose partial lockdown in selected hotspots of COVID-19 at the time when the infections rate nationwide kept increasing. Gyasi (2020) recounts that, the GOG took a hard decision to impose further restrictive measures on educational institutions, funerals, religious gatherings, weddings, sports and destinations or events where large gatherings could be attracted for major functions. Notwithstanding, the period of restriction was relaxed and made way for the implementation of strict social distancing and washing of hands, the use regular sanitizers as further measures proffered to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 amidst the heightened public health burden. These came to be widely known as the COVID-19 protocols which all residents in the country needed to be observed. Further, Ghana shut its tripartite doors of air, sea and land to all forms of human travels except for consumable food and medicinal products and to what came to be known as the essential service staff which included health workers and state security agencies. To ensure compliance to the laws of COVID-19 protection protocols, security service institutions like the Police, Immigration and Customs services as well as the Military were labelled essential in the fight against the pandemic because, according to (Laufs and Waseem 2020).

Arguably, the imposed restrictions were a contradiction to the fundamental human rights of residents and so its management was anticipated to face fearless opposition from a section of the public (Hasanbegovic, 2020). Undeniably, for security agencies to be successful in managing such emergency touted as public health crisis in extreme poor economies where large proportion of the population are in the informal sector required effective public relations strategies. The policing of

the rules by law enforcement agencies has been met with both PR successes and failures across the world since the outbreak of the virus in 2019. The strategies adopted has raised world bilateral and unilateral tensions between governments of different nations.

The Presidency adopted a persuasive PR mechanism through the President's weekly address to the nation on public media outlets where the president updated the nation on state of affairs and revealed new directives as part of efforts to fight COVID-19. As commander in Chief of the security forces in Ghana, the President through state ministries coordinated all the security services. Similarly, the joint security operations team also used media outlets to educate and inform the public from time-to-time to on the COVID-19 protocols and laws made in the era of COVID-19. In addition to the security services enforcing the laws of lockdown, quarantining, compulsory masking, ban on social gatherings of all forms to help contain and control the spread of COVID19 (Amiri, 2021; Afriyie et. al., 2020), organized community engagements to further explain matters to the general public using local dialects. That notwithstanding, governments PR tactics has raised public discussion on the quality and effectiveness from researchers, political and religious leaders alike. Studying the tactics adopted by security agencies in Ghana in helping the combat of COVID-19 will therefore help in appreciating the role and challenges encountered in the implementation process. Debatably, managing pandemic emergencies is considered a skilloriented phenomenon which is largely coordinated by government structures. In the case of COVID-19 outbreak in Ghana, the major skill-oriented professions that became highly essential and were touted as frontline workers were health workers and security agencies (Ashinyo, 2020) were to conduct several activities including contact tracing and monitoring infected persons.

Undoubtedly, the human society is complex in nature and so to be successful in managing them at different levels of understanding in crisis of a sought requires proper communication and public relation tools. Available data reveals that the state security institutions and their public relation units in Ghana have been part of the entire process in enforcing existing laws and protocols on COVID but their effectiveness, challenges are not well known.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

2.7.1 General Systems Theory (GST) and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

In a complex world of systems and institutions where crisis inevitably abounds and varying objects of inquiry interact with each other, individuals, organizations and the public are to be coordinated by public relations through communication. This generates the debate of systems thinking argued by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972). The General Systems theory here in refer to as (GST) was that first propounded by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972) after World War II to espouse his argument that people are not mechanisms in the organized society. Rather, they interact with each other in the complex system of operations. The biologist advances his argument that, although organisms could be studied as a whole, it must be argued that the independent wholes interact with other objects which brought his ideas into the of systems thinking and eventually GST (Hammond, 2003). In this complex world systems, the systems theory maintains that all systems that interact with each other in the environment are subsystems that belong to a higher order supra-system that are coordinated by separated boundaries through an organized communication structure (Cutlip et al., 1994).

The theory argues that to maintain equilibrium in the environment, interacting systems respond to and adjust to changing pressure from the environment. In the system are therefore attributes, internal relationships, objects and the environment.

An object refers to any part, element, or variable within a larger system of interactions whereas attributes represent the quality of the system and the related objects. A system usually has internal relationships that generates change pressures in the form of information, energy and other inputs. Therefore, the system becomes dysfunctional if the internal relationship does not respond change to the pressures from its immediate environment. Hammond (2003) reveals that, the system is either closed or open depending the on the nature of the environment.

In a closed system, the boundaries become impermeable and this affects exchange of information from one unit to the other in the environment. The rigidity of the system is only lowered if there is external pressure thereby making the system reactive and not proactive (Cutlip et al., 1994). On the other hand, the open system is flexible and ensures the exchange of information flow from one unit to the other thereby making it permeable. Open systems are open to changes upon receiving feedback in the interrelated system and initiate corrective measures to neutralize the changes before they become major problems, making it a more reactive process compared to the close system (Cutlip et al., 1994).

Be it close or open system, the situation or context within the environment may vary and so the Situational theory becomes relevant in the choice of strategies. In a special circumstance of crisis, Situational Crisis Communication Theory here in refer to as (SCCT) advanced by Coombs 1995 becomes beneficial to the world systems theory. Coombs (2004) contend that to protect the reputation of an organization within the system of interactions, the theory provides a framework for use in crisis communications. These two theories thus GST and SCCT combined are therefore considered fit for this study because COVID-19 is considered a global crisis with situation specifications operating in a system. Institutions like police, the army, fire service, immigration service and the health services who are at the frontline are individual units with individual internal

structures that are jointly pulling resources to work in the super-environment. The public relation interactions between these institutions in the management of the COVID 19 with different unique features requires joint efforts of many departments and ministries in the larger system to be effective. Invariably, the plans, actions and inactions adopted by these security forces to manage and maintain their reputation to the teeming public would have to be coordinated and so the adoption of the GST and SCCT for this particular study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The chapter is dedicated to outline the research methodology and or design adopted to aid in achieving the objectives set for this study. In sequential order of presentation, the chapter will proceed by perusing the study area, discuss the research design adopted, explain the target population, discuss the sample size, outline the sampling techniques, describe the research instruments and finally discuss the tools that could be used for the analysis of the data collected amongst others.

3.1 Research Setting

The study was conducted among security institutions based in Ghana's capital Accra. It is the official gate way for immigrants and emigrants. This study area was practically chosen because, Accra remains the headquarters of the major state security institutions and most of the decisions emanates from here and trickle-down to other regions for implementation. Besides, Accra remains the major point of COVID-19 cases since its emergence in Ghana in 2019 and has recorded the highest number of cases. Despite the city locally considered a Ga dominated environs, Accra is a complexly heterogenous and so handling COVID-19 communication by Security institutions will demand different approaches to achieve its aims. The study location is therefore appropriate because, it helped the researcher to gather relevant information from the right sources in other to achieve its objectives.

3.2 Research Method

The coherent set of rules and regulations which guides the conduct of any scientific research and prescribes the basic mode of presentations is described as a methodology (Kitchin and Tate, 2000). Like Weber (2004) rightly put it, the quality of one's research findings depends on the adoption of the right methodology. Admittedly, there are different methodological approaches and designs in the field of social science which are linked to the various philosophical positions of positivism or interpretivism. Until recently, the field of social science was controlled by two main methodological approaches, thus 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' which is connected to 'positivism' and 'interpretivism' schools of thought respectively.

The approach 'Quantitative' is regarded as a research strategy that is concerned with the use of numerical methods in the collection, and analysis of data from the field of research. In most cases, it involves a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research in which the emphasis is placed on the testing of theories and their credibility in relation to the problem under research. The quantitative research is used by many social science researchers due to its ability to allow for generalisation. Again, the same technique makes room for predictions and comparison which could serve as basis for future research. (Holland and Campbell, 2005).

On the other hand, Qualitative approach is the research technique or strategy that emphasizes the use of words or narratives rather than quantifying the collection and analysis of data. It is said that, this approach is inductivist as well as interpretivist (Babbie 2001 and Bryman, 2001) and it gives emphasis to behaviour, motivation and meanings of issues under research. In most cases, the approach requires the use of structured instruments like interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations. Researchers argue that, qualitative research design makes room for

detailed collection of information from respondents based on the experiences, perceptions, emotions, beliefs and behaviours. Again, it is believed that this approach is flexible and less expensive to run as compared to quantitative design (Timewell, and Alexander, 1995).

In contemporary times, scientific researchers are of the view that no single technique or design could give accurate answers, solve, delineate, or validate a particular research problem and that the combination of two or more approaches is deemed appropriate (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). It is this believe that has promoted the use of triangulation as an alternative to qualitative and quantitative methods of finding solutions to problems confronted by social science researchers.

Triangulation therefore is considered as the use of different methodologies, investigative approaches, and other types of triangulations to yield more complete data and result in more credible findings. It is important to indicate that triangulation could be in the form of Methodological, investigative, theoretical as well as data. Methodological triangulation which is also known as the ‘Mixed Method’ is considered as the most common of all the approaches (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Creswell & Clark et. al., 2003). Investigative triangulation uses two separate researchers with different expertise to study the same research problem using the same study population and with the same methods whereas the combination of different theories in the same research is referred to as theoretical triangulation. Similarly, two different data sources could also be triangulated in the same study to further corroborate each other.

Therefore, mixed method is defined as “the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collections, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” in the same research

(Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner, 2007). Despite the different types of research methods, the qualitative research design has been considered for this study.

3.2 **Research design**

Research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution and implementation of the research strategy (Durrheim, 2004). The quality of any research findings is determined by the choice of an appropriate methodology or design that fits the purpose (Weber, 2004). The study adopted the qualitative research approach due to the nature and target population for the research. Qualitative design is the research technique or strategy that emphasizes the use of words or narratives rather than quantifying the collection and analysis of data. Qualitative approach is inductivist as well as interpretivist (Babbie 2001 and Bryman, 2001) and it gives emphasis to behaviour, motivation and meanings of issues under research. In most cases, the approach requires the use of structured instruments like interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations. Researchers argue that, qualitative research design makes room for detailed collection of information from respondents based on the experiences, perceptions, emotions, beliefs and behaviours (Balyer, 2012; Creswell, 2002). It is more fitting for this study because the approach is flexible and less expensive to run as compared to quantitative design (Timewell, and Alexander, 1995). The study adopted a qualitative approach using in depthb

3.3 **Study Population**

The study involved PR practitioners in PR departments in selected state security institutions who have been leading the fight against the spread of COVID-19 since the outbreak. However, only four of such institutions will be considered for this study, thus, Ghana Police Service, Ghana

Armed Forces, Ghana Immigration Service and Ghana Fire Service. The PR practitioners drawn from the aforementioned institutions are directly in charge of the management of the PR department and so their knowledge and experiences will be informative to the attainment of the objectives of the study.

3.4 Sample size

Using a purposive sampling technique, a total of sixteen (16) respondents were earmarked to be sampled from the four security institutions selected to form the sample size for this study. At least four (4) respondents from each of the four security institutions were to make up the total respondents however, during the data collection only two institutions were available to participate in the study. Respondents were drawn from the various PR units from the various service headquarters. The sample technique allowed for the researcher to target persons who were usually in charge of public relations. The sample size although was below the target of four, 50% was achieved which makes room for effective generalization of findings without any hindrance.

3.5 Sampling Technique

The study largely adopted a non-probability sampling approach as the best match to qualitative research approach. Therefore purposive, snowballing and convenience sampling techniques will be used for the sampling of relevant PR practitioners. First and foremost, for the purposes of this study, convenience sampling was used to consider the four state security institutions. Subsequently, the purposive sampling was used in the selection of the various PR practitioners in the PR units of the institution for interviewing. In the instance of difficulties in accessing other institutions, the snowballing technique which make room for referrals was to be used in sampling other respondents for interviewing.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

The major data collection tool that was used for this study was the interview guide, however voice recorders, field notebooks and other relevant materials were also used at different stages as supporting aids for the collection of the data. The interview guides contained set of open-ended questionnaires set in line with the study objectives which was administered one-on-one with respondents purposively sampled due to their roles in the various public relation units. This allowed respondents to freely explain questions just to ensure flexibility of responses to help answer the study objectives. During interview sessions with respondents, permission was sought from respondents for recordings which was later transcribed for the thematic analysis. Moreover, conscious observations were also to be made to pick other sensitive information that will be relevant to the attainment of the study objectives while on the field for data collection.

3.7 Data Analysis Technique

Data collected was analysed manually under themes. Similarly, sorting and coding was done for the key issues and meanings drawn from the results for the analysis. Subsequently, the results were to be analysed by comparing it to existing literature on the subject matter to validate some of the information that would have been gathered in the primary data collection stage. Equally, data gathered through researcher observations will be used to buttress key points in the discussion stage where appropriate.

3.8 Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations are essential elements in every scientific research so to ensure credible data collection devoid of confusion from respondents within the study areas, a formal permission was sought from the Heads of institutions to enable the researcher to interview selected respondents.

In all the instances, the study objectives were communicated to the various persons for them to agree willingly before interviews were conducted. Similarly, to ensure confidentiality, protection and minimize risk, no names or other identifying information are collected from persons interviewed or observed or used in the discussion. The findings are strictly a contribution to academic knowledge and I will take all the responsibility in case of any omission.

3.9 Limitations of the Study

The bureaucratic processes that the researcher went through before having access to public relation practitioners delayed the study. Equally, retrieving quality research materials in the era of proliferated online data was challenging. Similarly, the sample size considering the number of security agencies been considered for the study was relatively small to make very strong generalization. With diligence and tactfulness, this researcher put in measures to reduce the effects of these limitations on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the presentation and analysis of the research findings as obtained from the field of study. The analysis will be based on the objectives set for the study and discussed alongside existing literature.

4.1 Composition and background findings of PR units in sampled security services

The study sampled four state security services that were available to participate in the data collection process. The study found out that, all the security services had public relations unit that handled information between the service and the general public. According to the institutions, the PR units are not only stationed at the headquarters only but are decentralised across all 16 regions of Ghana where they had a command or station. However, it was observed that, while some institutions had up to regional level PR units, others had up to district levels. For instance, the GIS revealed that, in all 16 regions, there are PR units man by men on the ground but at places where there are borders of entry, there are men at the points of entry who handled PR related issues. Similarly, the Police service equally had PR units in all regions and districts but at each Police post there is a supervisor who relates to the public as well on behalf of the service.

The study revealed a mixed educational background of the personnel at the various PR units in the various services in terms of PR qualification. For instance, it was realised that whereas most of the heads of departments have PR background, their deputies had different social science backgrounds but have worked for more than 3 years and have acquired requisite skills needed to perform on the job. At the regional and district commands, not all had background in PR but have long-term working experience as well. The least working experience of the services was three years, thus invariably learning on the job.

The study found out that, the PR units are not independent in the various service structure but are either fused to some other units such as finance and administration or served directly under another unit. For instance, the PR unit of GIS forms part of the larger finance and administration unit and as such, the PR unit although headed by a professional PR practitioner is responsible to the head of administration.

Structure of communication was noted to be orderly in nature largely due to the interactions of all the security services clearly confirming the essence of Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972) argument of systems theory. Although, there are national and regional units and to some extent district level units of the PR, the PR units at the head offices supervised all the units at all lower levels. At the lower ends, all PR units reported to the regional and in turn reported to the head offices. Participants reiterated that, whereas the Headquarters handled all national information with the public, the regional offices handled cases within their jurisdiction but required permission from the headquarters on sensitive cases. Notwithstanding, it was observed that, during emergency situations, PR units at the lower level per the orders could communicate to the general public within their jurisdiction on the specific context in order to stabilize situations at hand but afterwards must report their decisions to the regional and onward submission to the head office for directive if the case still persists is a clear case of the adoption of SCCT (Kasirye, 2021; Coombs 2004; Coombs 1995).

4.2 Functions of the PR units in Security Services in Ghana

As state security institutions created by the constitution of Ghana, the roles have been clarified in accordance with their agency specification. Likewise, the various units including the PR units.

A GIS participant argued, *“our service is mandated by law to manage human mobility in and out of the country by controlling the major entry points. The PR units of GIS therefore inform, educate*

and guide travellers from Ghana and those entering Ghana to go through the lawful procedures. Immigrants in need of resident permit are assisted to obtain the necessary documentations and where they require accommodation, we laisse with landlords to support them with the necessary documentations in order to be able to stay in accordance with the laws of Ghana”.

Equally, investors in need of necessary establishment documents are assisted to go through lawful processes and so in all these, it is the PR units that becomes the first point of contact. However, during state of emergencies we perform other roles that seeks to provide security to the state by managing and providing border control measures to avoid irregular immigrants. Working with the Police and other security agencies is deemed fit due to the expertise and the functions of the various agents in the system (Ludwig von Bertalanffy,1972).

4.3 PR strategies adopted before the outbreak of COVID-19 (Prodromal stage)

Relating with the public is an embodiment of strategies that pertain to professionalism. The study found out that, prior to COVID-19 outbreak in Ghana, security agencies used mainly traditional publicity, public information systems, community sensitization to rally the general public to understand pending phenomenon. According to agencies who participated in this study, the use of call inns, radio and TV engagements were considered more effective because that had a larger audience compared to the use of the normal traditional “gongon beaten” and information vans due time and inadequate logistics.

“We collaborated with media houses to reach out to our audience because the media houses had a far-reaching audience compared to the use of the traditional approaches”

The collaboration with selected media houses according to participants was deemed necessary because of the largeness of the community population and the fact that, one person could not take

all the responsibility in the system once again confirms the relevance of the understanding of the systems theory by security agencies in Ghana.

“The country is now developing and the population is increasing with high understanding of technology and so for us to reach out to our targets faster, we mostly use the electronic media houses such as radio and TV to reach out to our targets”

However, in some instances, for border control measures, we engage communities along the major borders of the country to create awareness of some migration policies of the state so as to solicit the support of community members to the successful implementation of the intended policies. The situational analysis concept was adopted according to participants to ascertain reality on the ground and to determine suitability of the strategy to use. In most cases, the persuasive approach was used during normal times and it was seen as effective because it was more inclusive of community and other stakeholders.

4.4 PR strategies adopted during COVID-19 lockdown in Ghana

COVID-19 presented a state of emergency for all countries across the world according to WHO. State of emergency required the adoption of policies and programmes that could help resolve the challenges at hand. Regarding the COVID-19, lockdown became one of the major concepts that were largely publicised as a means of curtailing the wide spread of the novel virus. Many countries who had no significant PR strategies in handling crisis of similar impacts adopted some to deal with the context specification challenges that were found in the country of origin.

The findings from this study equally revealed some form of strategies which were adopted by security forces in Ghana in relating to the general public. It was found that security agencies who were touted as frontline workers engaged the general public using traditional publicity approaches which are familiar with the people. According to the participating departments, although the

pandemic presented a state of emergency, had to use traditional consultations with traditional leaders to reach out to their subjects. In some instances, the traditional councils had to be briefed and their information approaches used to inform the public within their catchment areas of the need to lockdown. According to participants of the study, the general public felt more comfortable with the traditional approaches especially within peri-urban communities where there was a sense of homogeneity.

Similarly, it was realised that the public information system was adopted as means of reaching out to many people. According to participants, the PR units of security services liaised with the NCCE to use the information vans to inform and educate members in some communities about the virus and the decisions of state concerning the lockdown. The protocols were explained to residents and the need to respect the protocols ensure the control of the virus. The strategy was considered as appropriate because all logistics were needed to reach out to as many people as possible during the emergencies.

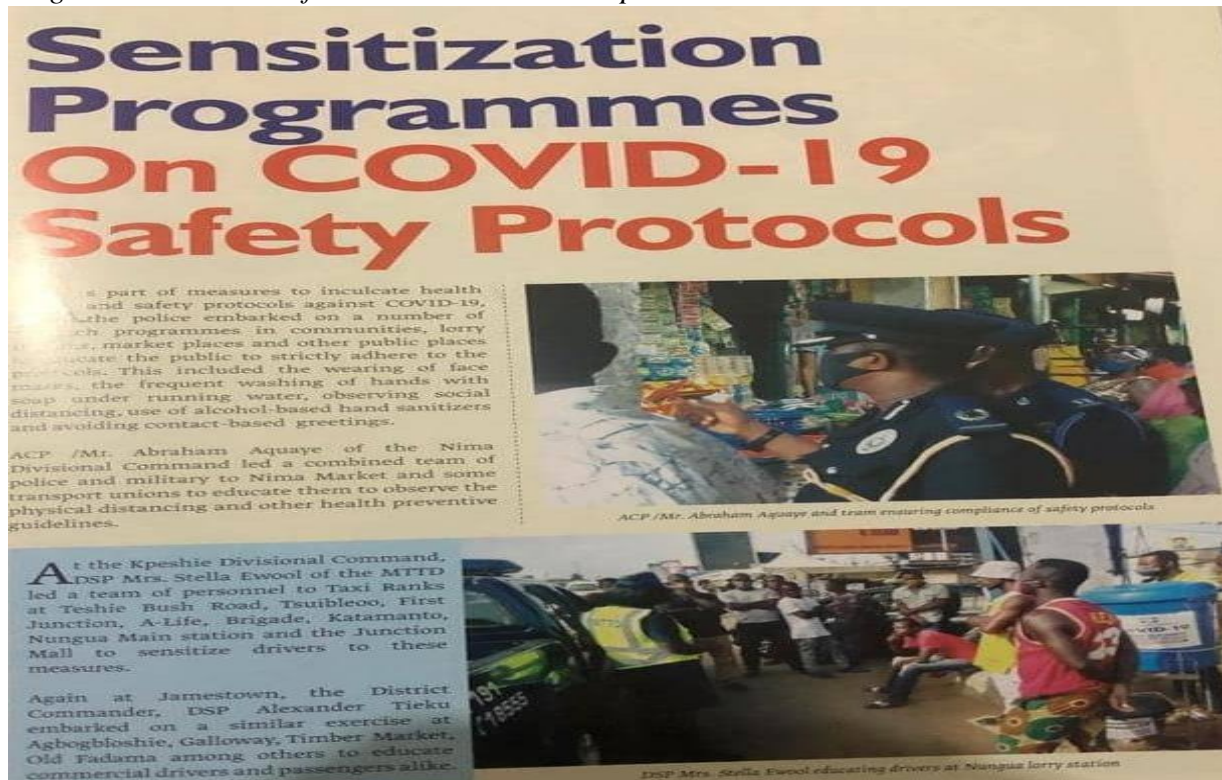
Another strategy was echoed was sensitization of the general public from different angles. The joint security forces in collaboration with the ministry of Education engaged students at all levels on their campus at the early stages of the spread of the virus. According to the Police unit, many parents were out of panic recalling their wards home whereas others were doing panic pick-ups, as a result, the joint forces visited several Senior High Schools and engaged students, parents and the school authorities about the virus and the precautionary measures put in place by the state.

Similarly, the sensitization outreach was sent to the major market places where market queens and workers and customers were educated on the urgency of the decisions of the state. The people had the opportunity to inform through these engagements about the reasons to abide by the laid down protocols like social distancing and hand washing and sanitization.

An officer stated; “We agreed on our platform that, since markets could not be closed down because people living at home needed to eat in order to survive, we had to educate the people as to how handle themselves at the market to avoid a surge. So, we went round various markets where we shared hand washing materials like liquid soap, buckets and nose masks and demonstrated how to use all such materials. As for me, I can confidently say that such markets sensitizations were very helpful during the period of the lockdown”

Another participant said; “we did not only visit schools and markets but we visited several churches and mosques at the initial stages to sensitize people about COVID virus and how they needed to conduct themselves by ensuring that, data of members are well taken, their temperatures checked, nose masking and hand washing protocols be taken to promote easy contact tracing in case of a spread and it really helped”

Figure 1: Personnel of Ghana Police Service spotted on sensitization on COVID-19



Source: Police Diary, 2020.

The study also revealed that, the use of both electronic media and print media was widely used. According to participants, Ghana is largely heterogenous country with different education, religious, language and other cultural backgrounds and so reaching out to the public demanded a multifaceted outlet that could reach to a wider audience. The study found out that, TV and radio stations were widely used to reach out to communities concerning the COVID. According to participants, it was the best medium and approach because under lockdown, except frontline workers, almost every resident of Ghana was made to stay at home and so it was only through such medium that we could quickly reach out to them. Again, through the electronic media, several audio-visual sensitization movies were shot to educate the general public about the COVID and the compliance requirements.

At the radio level, it was found out that COVID-19 jingles were drafted to educate the general public. Most of these adverts were shot in other local languages as a means of meeting the needs of the heterogenous communities especially in the cities and largely homogenous communities.

An officer said; *“because we wanted to resonate with the local people, we had to design the publicity in different languages like Twi to cover the Akan majority communities, Hausa, Ga, Ewe and other well-known Northern languages so that everybody could understand the information we put out there”*

GIS official revealed that, the adverts were designed with immigrant population into consideration and so English and French were also used to cover other foreign nationals who uses our media outlets”

Equally, the front pages of daily newspapers were adopted as point of information delivery and updating of the general public about the state of spread and the precautionary measures that were

required. The publication of relevant COVID-19 information in newspapers were also published in the online system of the media houses which was able to reach a larger audience.

Both public and private print media outlets were adopted for the spread of relevant information to the many publics that were locked up in their homes who could only access information via online channels. At the point, the study revealed that, security agencies launched private dailies as a medium of reaching out to their teeming audience who required credible sources of information. For instance, the Ghana Police Service launched the police dailies as means to spread the public including their men on the ground about happenings related to COVID-19 in Ghana and beyond.

The use of panel discussions on TV's and radios were also approaches that were adopted to explain issues to the general public. For instance, during the lockdown, there were several conflicting information in the public space and so through such discussions, clarity was given to some wrong details that were in the public domain. Phone in interviews were also seen as an approach of correcting some distorted information that reaching out the public space.

Further, it was observed and confirmed by participating institutions that, in the world of social media, information travelled faster compared to the use of traditional publicity system. However, most information was published on the website of the institution but media houses that copied and pasted on their social media houses mostly confirmed the veracity of the details through phone inn calls. And so, it was observed that, social media outlets such as WhatsApp, twitter, Instagram and Facebook became other approaches that became useful in the COVID-19 management.

4.5 PR strategies adopted after lockdown in managing COVID-19 in Ghana

The study found out that there has been a drastic drop in most of the strategies that were adopted during the lockdown. Currently, most of the strategies has been relaxed because of the understanding of the normalcy conception of the COVID-19 globally. For many citizens of the

world, although COVID-19 has no permeant vaccines, it is argued that, the virus has come to stay with the human society just like other flus of the past. The traditional approaches, community sensitizations, media outlet publicity have all dropped. The joint security platform of COVID-19 is no more functional as compared to the times of the lockdown.

An official argued that; *“I think because of the vaccinations, many people are no more afraid of the virus as compared to the days of the outbreak and so our platform for discussing strategies even at the higher level have all become dormant”*

4.6 Effectiveness of the PR strategies adopted before, during and after lockdown in managing COVID-19 in Ghana.

The PR strategies before the outbreak of the COVID-19 in Ghana according to study participants have been largely successful. The security services in Ghana have managed the public in different circumstances through the known traditional and community sensitization and more recent, the usage of electronic media.

Despite the challenges and urgency brought by COVID-19 in Ghana, the PR strategies adopted worked to perfection especially in managing the lockdown situations. Majority of the population got informed about the COVID-19 and adhered to the rules of engagement in the pandemic. This reflects the low statistics of infections recorded in Ghana compared to the global averages of infections. Notwithstanding, the standards according to study participants have gone done and has turned to normalcy. The PR work of security agencies in relation to COVID-19 control after lockdown has now become that of the ministry of health and information respectively.

4.7 Challenges confronted by the public relation departments and practitioners in fighting COVID-19

The study identified various challenges that compromised the effective delivery of the PR units in the security services in relating to the general public. First and foremost, the study identified that majority of PR personnel are not professionally trained PR practitioners but have long service experience in working in the various units. This exposes some of the lapses in the planning and approaches of communication in relating to the general public regarding the decisions of the institutions.

The study revealed that, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Ghana, the government administrative machinery responsible for public relations and the security services PR units operated separately with less interference. The programme templates were different from all institutions before the COVID. However, the study revealed that although the PR units of the services had strategies for handling communication to the general public, the ministries of information and government communicators interfered with the approaches which presented conflicting information to the general public. The conflicted information from the PR units with the ministries presented distrust and confusion amongst the recipients of the information emanating from the two institutions. This confirms the argument of the systems theory that, in a system, the dysfunction of one unit from the chain affects the effective functioning of other units. When asked whether the government communication strategies were part of the services, participants revealed that the government communicators had a different programme from the security services even though there were similarities.

A participant said, *“Largely No, they (government PR units) had their own plan in reaching out to their target audience and we (Security services) were not part of the of their general plan.”*

However, we met on several platforms where we performed similar functions during the lockdown of COVID-19”

Another participant revealed that, “during contact tracing, we worked together and so our reports were sometimes not far from the government apparatus except that we used varying strategies in disseminating such information to the general public”

The study observed that, the participating units had no personal media platform for relating to the general public on their directives and therefore resorted to private public media outlets which constrained the rapid information delivery during emergencies to the targeted audience because of the bureaucratic processes the services had to go through in accessing the services of the private media houses. Arguably, the private media house is profit making enterprise who have planned programmes for their audience and so security services had to pay for the air time used at a stipulated time which may not be convenient for the delivery of vital security information during to the general public. In confirming this, a study participant explained;

“although most media houses gave us free platforms to engage the general public, some charged the units and so we had to pay if we could afford per our budget and so this affected our timely delivery of vital information to the public”

Another participant acknowledged that, *“despite the payment of fees to media houses, many gave the services without charges but the timings were not enough and favourable always and this affected delivery”*

As a result of the challenge of security services owned media outlets, the study revealed that, in the course of constrains in managing the COVID-19, the police department for instance launched

the “POLICE DIARY” which focus on giving relevant information to the general public and the men in the service. A participant said;

“in the process of COVID-19 control, we saw the need to get our own medium of communicating to our general public and giving them credible information because the fake news was becoming too much and was causing confusion in the system and securing private media was costly and time consuming and that is why we created our own outlet, “POLICE DIARY” **Figure 2: A** gallery of pictures during the official launch of the Police Diary.



Source: Police Diary, 2020.

Public relations thrive on the availability of relevant logistics at the disposal of PR practitioners in an institution. Unfortunately, the study found out logistical constraints as a major challenge to the delivery of PR practitioners within the security services in Ghana. This was shown during the COVID-19 lockdown in major cities of Ghana where information vans, media outlets and other PR gadgets were extremely difficult to come by. For instance, information vans were considered as a vital tool for the dissemination of relevant information during community sensitization outreach by the PR units of the joint security forces. However, according to the non-availability of such vans, face-to-face community sensitization was adopted leading to the infection of most of the personnel that were on the ground with COVID-19 according to study participants. For instance, a GIS participant expressed that, *“most of our men who had gone to the grounds were infected by the virus and they had to be recalled from the field and this reduced the numerical strengths that were urgently needed at the peak of the pandemic”*

GP officials also lamented, *“the flow of our men on the ground were significantly reduced at the time when we needed them most because of the high infection rates that were recorded at the time when we were conducting different patrols”*

Another official argued, *“you see why we resulted to the use of strong media advocacy and reduced the face-to-face sensitization? It was because our men were been infected almost on daily basis and we needed to protect them because they also have family”*

Non-compliance of the general public created a hostile environment for the operations of the security services. According to participants, the behaviour of the public at the time when COVID19 cases were on the rise forced the joint security forces to change tactics of communication and enforcement of the law. This strategy was to ensure the securing of sanity in the public space

especially for law abusers in the society. This resulted to the use of minimal force to control residents especially in cities of non-compliance. An officer recounted;

“Some people are naturally stubborn, upon all the information we were giving for people to stay at home, they will move to the city centres when they had nothing essential to do, some needed to be disciplined a bit to forestall sanity and control the spread of the virus and I think it worked despite some few excesses from some of our men”

Nevertheless, the participants argued that majority of the public were compliant to our communication directives when we engaged them on various platforms.

4.8 PR Recommendations for the challenges identified

Participants argued that, challenges are inevitable in the discharge of their functions as PR officials in security services. However, participants contend that, the challenges present critical thinking of finding solutions to future unexpected occurrences. For instance, participants believe that the creation of security news outlets through print and electronic media platforms will enhance the work of PR in reaching out to the general public. An official said;

“I think we need to create and own official newspapers that will communicate only on our information to the general public so that in times like the lockdown, we could leverage on it to reach out to the masses”

“Fake media” must during emergencies must be brought under control through the retooling of the PR units of the security services to make units more responsive”. Like the saying, “justice delayed, is a justice denied” so is information delayed, information could be corrupted. Arguably, the delay of genuine information meant for the public has the tendency forcing them to consume fake information which corrupts their appreciation and acceptance of the right information that comes

in late. Responsiveness of the service is therefore key to our information delivery in the PR work as security officials.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.0 Introduction

Chapter five is focused on three key areas of the study. The first sub-section will focus on summarising the key findings of the study as obtained from the field in line with the specific objectives set for the study. Subsequently, the conclusions derived from the study analysis in relation to the key findings will be presented. Finally, the recommendations from this study and recommendation for future research will be discussed to conclude the entire study.

5.1 Summary of study key findings

Undoubtedly, the outbreak of COVID-19 throughout the world presented a case of state of emergency. The lack of country preparedness to deal with the spread was shown in their public relation approaches that were adopted especially in developing economies like Ghana. Major frontline or essential service workers at the time of enforcing COVID-19 protocols and lockdown rules did not only include health workers but critically law enforcement agencies in the country. The study found out that all the security forces created a common platform at the higher level to coordinate the management of the joint operations they handled. The platform brought together all the security services to share ideas on how to relate to the general public so as to achieve the control of the COVID-19 spread in Ghana.

The study also found out a mixed educational background of the participants in the PR units of the various security services. While most of the unit members had no PR qualification, they had working experience in PR and used some relevant strategies to achieve their targets for the COVID-19 lockdown in Ghana.

Clearly, the usage of electronic media strategies dominated the entire strategies adopted by the various security services. The use of “call inn”, panel discussions, adverts, music composed in local languages among others on TV and Radio stations respectively was comparatively more than the use of face-to-face community sensitizations due to fear of infections, use of information vans. The electronic media strategy was considered by respondents as more effective compared to the traditional approaches because it could reach a far-reaching population compared to community engagements.

The study further revealed that, the strategies that were used before the out-break of COVID-19 in Ghana was not extremely different from what was adopted during COVID-19 lockdown in the major cities. However, the urgency of the implementation of strategies was faster during the lockdown period but eventually relaxed post lockdown. From discussions with participants, the COVID-19 has come to normalcy and the need for individuals to be responsible for their personal health and life is crucial and as a result, the joint security forces have relaxed their operations and each now managing their sectors.

The study observed that, the PR strategies were executed but not without challenges. Major challenges identified were the qualification of the men in terms of PR training, the general lack of established PR strategies to handle emergency situations like COVID-19, the non-compliance of the general public with the PR directives, inadequate logistics to support the activities of the PR units delivery, fake news from the general public, lack of security service owned media outlets and

platforms and many other environmental hazards were observed constraints faced by the security services in delivering quality PR services to the general public.

5.2 Conclusion

The study acknowledges that, in so far as pandemics are inevitable part of society, PR strategies are good tools that will be required to control or manage outbreaks. Arguably, the study can confirm that, there was no already established PR template for the handling of pandemics similar to COVID-19. Again, the study can confirm that, most of the PR units of the security services especially at the Regional and District levels are not composed of trained PR practitioners. At the time of this study, the researcher can be sure that challenges of delivery are inevitably going to continue until the time that most of the challenges recounted are resolved. In the system, there is dependency on each circuit and so the non-availability and functioning of the others create problems for the others and so human resource capacity are as essential as the quality of tools and other resources.

The study also believes that, despite the quality and logistical constraints, there was effective coordination of the PR units in the joint security operations which avoided conflicts and reduced the rate of infections and casualties in the various services and the civilian population in Ghana.

Nevertheless, although the state has returned to normalcy, it evident that the COVID virus have not been eradicated from the society. However, joint platforms have relaxed operations because of the confidence imposed in the general public about how to prevent, control and manage the virus. The ongoing vaccinations have also assisted several people to build strong systems to resist the virus.

5.3 Study Recommendations

The study believes that, effective PR is critical tool in managing every pandemic in any country and therefore recommend the following for future consideration by policy makers and

First and foremost, it is important policy makers jointly with security services develop strong PR template for emergency cases. More research must be conducted to appreciate the kind of tools and strategies that could be adopted to police such emergencies in the future

Again, idea of the security services in Ghana creating and owning their own media outlets like TV and Radio Stations that will be focused on promoting quality relationship between the men in the service and the civilian population is a crucial concept that must be further researched and considered for its efficacy. Arguably, the various PR units will become stronger if the human resource capacity is improved especially at the lower levels. Trained PR practitioners are therefore required at all levels to ensure consistency and delivery of PR strategies.

Researchers could look at post COVID-19 PR strategies that can be adopted for the management of the effects on the society. This enable academics to find long term solutions to the problems identified during the outbreak of COVID-19 and how future occurrences will be avoided in Ghana and beyond.

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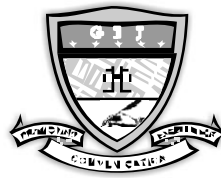
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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM, ACCRA, GHANA, WEST AFRICA



SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SoGSaR)

INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Introduction & Quality Assurance/Respondent Consent

Good morning/afternoon sir/madam. I am Evans Megyikra, a student of Ghana Institute of Journalism conducting research on the topic “**Assessment of PR Strategies in Crisis**

Situations: The Case of PR Practitioner in the Security Services of Ghana” and so will

require the assistance of your department/unit responsible to public relation. The research is conducted in partial fulfilment of obtaining a Master of Arts Degree in Public Relation and so

information from your department will be for purely academic purpose and will be treated with the highest confidentiality and shall be a contribution to knowledge and not for any other use.

{Major institutions slated to be part of the study will include GPS, GAF, GIS and Customs}.

Please I therefore urge you to open up by answering the following questions without any

reservation. Please do I have your permission to record the interview for the purposes of transcription and analysis of study data? If Yes please kindly sign this consent form {separate sheet}. Shall we start sir/madam?

II. In-depth Interview Guide

1. Please briefly introduce yourself. {Who you are, position in this office, years served in this capacity, role /function in this office, academic background/educational qualification }
2. Please tell me something about your unit/department under the GPS/GAF/GIS {What exact functions does your unit perform, in terms of structures where/who do you report to, what is the resource capacity of the unit/human resource (qualification and statistics), through which mediums do you perform, etc }
3. In attempt to *laisse* between the public and your institution as a whole, what strategies do you normally use? *Let respondent look at it from the angle prior to COVID-19.*
Are the strategies the same during emergencies or different. describe it to me.
4. During the COVID-19 outbreak in Ghana, what PR strategies were adopted by your unit in managing the situation? Narrate how the strategy was implemented during outbreak, lockdown and after the lockdown in Ghana.
5. Do you have strategies an already established strategies to manage health emergencies such as pandemics? If any how different is that compared to other strategies
6. Were the strategies adopted by the public relations departments in Ghana's security institutions before, during and after lockdown in managing COVID-19 crisis effective.
Are there indicators of the successes chalked? Respondent
7. Identify the challenges confronted by the public relation departments and practitioners in fighting COVID-19.

8. As PR practitioner in a unit within your organization, how did you corroborate with other sister security organizations and non-security organizations in managing the COVID-19 crisis.
9. What are/were some of the challenges you were confronted in the discharge of your duties as a PR practitioner in managing the COVID-19 crisis in Ghana. Let respondent explain in relation to during outbreak, lockdown and after lockdown.
10. How did you overcome the challenges you confronted during this crisis? Are the strategies sustainable for future pandemics?
11. What could be your recommendation in case of future occurrences of similar health crisis or any other crisis?

III Appreciation and Conclusion.

Thank you for accepting to be part of this study, if your outfit has any question for me, I will be glad to answer if possible. If there is any final comment too, respondent is free to comment. Example, advise to the researcher is highly welcome. Thank you!!

Appendix 2: Request for introductory letter for data collection

C/o School of Graduate Studies
Ghana Institute of Journalism Accra,
Ghana.
7/10/2021.

The Dean
School of Graduate studies Ghana
Institute of Journalism Accra,
Ghana.

Dear sir,

APPLICATION FOR INTRODUCTION LETTER IN SUPPORT OF DATA COLLECTION

I wish to appeal to your outfit for introduction letter in support of data collection from selected PR units of state security agencies for my academic research on the topic “Assessment of PR Strategies in Crisis Situations: The Case of PR Practitioner in the Security Services of Ghana”. Student details are as follows;

NAME: EVANS M.K. MIGYIKRAH

ID: {MA PR 20096}

PROGRAMME: MASTER OF ARTS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Counting on your utmost cooperation for the successful completion of my study research. Thank you!

Yours sincerely,

EVANS M.K. MIGYIKRAH

Appendix 3: Letter to security services for data collection

Ghana Institute of Journalism

School of Graduate Studies

Accra, Ghana.

17/10/2021.

The Director

Ghana Police Service

Public Relations Unit Headquarter,

Accra.

Dear Sir,

**APPEAL FOR DATA COLLECTION (INTERVIEW) TOWARDS THE
FULLFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH ON THE TOPIC: ASSESSMENT OF PR
STRATEGIES IN CRISIS SITUATIONS: THE CASE OF PR PRACTITIONER IN THE
SECURITY SERVICES OF GHANA**

As part of my graduate research in Public Relation at Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) for the 2020/2021 academic year, I wish to appeal to your service, specifically the PR unit to grant me permission to conduct a one sitting interview to solicit information towards the topic understudy. Your service forms part of other state security services participating in this study. It is strictly for academic purposes and so confidentiality and data security are well assured.

The topic remains “Assessment of PR Strategies in Crisis Situations: The Case of PR Practitioners in the Security Services of Ghana”.

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Yours sincerely,

EVANS M.K. MIGYIKRAH

Ghana Institute of Journalism
School of Graduate Studies Accra,
Ghana.
17/10/2021.

The Director
Ghana Prisons Service
Public Relations Unit Headquarter,
Accra.

Dear Sir,

APPEAL FOR DATA COLLECTION (INTERVIEW) TOWARDS THE FULLFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH ON THE TOPIC: ASSESSMENT OF PR STRATEGIES IN CRISIS SITUATIONS: THE CASE OF PR PRACTITIONER IN THE SECURITY SERVICES OF GHANA

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Yours sincerely,

EVANS M.K. MIGYIKRAH
Ghana Institute of Journalism

School of Graduate Studies Accra,
Ghana.
17/10/2021.

The Director
Ghana Armed Forces
Public Relations Unit Headquarter,
Burma Camp, Accra, Ghana.

Dear Sir,

APPEAL FOR DATA COLLECTION (INTERVIEW) TOWARDS THE FULLFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH ON THE TOPIC: ASSESSMENT OF PR STRATEGIES IN CRISIS SITUATIONS: THE CASE OF PR PRACTITIONER IN THE SECURITY SERVICES OF GHANA

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