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TOPIC: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN REPUTATION
MANAGEMENT

BY

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that the work presented is the result of my own effort, original research and findings and that no part of it has been presented for another degree or diploma in this University or elsewhere. All references to other people's work have been duly acknowledged. I am therefore to be held responsible for any error that might be detected in this project work.

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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation of this paper was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for the supervision of dissertations as laid down by the Ghana Institute of Journalism.

.....

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...../...../.....

DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my parent for their prayers and support.

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I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Esther Darku who gave me guidance through to the completion of this research work. She also helped me gain an in-depth knowledge on academic writing and research for which I am grateful.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB - Agricultural Development Bank

CIPR - Chartered Institute of Public Relations

CEOS - Chief Executive Officers

IPR - Institute of Public Relations

IABC - International Association of Business Communicators

PR - Public Relations

PRAG - Public Relations Association of Ghana

PRSA - Public Relations Society of America

ROI - Return On Investment

UK - United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Studies have shown that corporate reputation is positively affected by PR activities; therefore, reputation management is an important part of PR strategies (Cha and Kim, 2010). The goal of PR according to Hon (1998) was to communicate the image of an organisation. This research explores the role of Public Relations in reputation management. In doing so, this research employs the qualitative approach to research. The researcher analyses secondary data only. The study asserts that if an organization is perceived to have a bad image which affects its reputation, PR has to work around organisational communication. Also, it is important for organizations to maintain good relations with all the stakeholders or publics. Finally, the research found that Community Relations, Employee Relations, Government Relations, Public Affairs and Media Relations are essential to carrying out PR task such as reputation management.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Studies have shown that corporate reputation is positively affected by Public Relations (PR) activities; therefore, reputation management is an important part of PR strategies (Cha and Kim, 2010). The goal of PR according to Hon (1998) was to communicate the image of an organisation. Reputation was one of the important variables for PR effectiveness along with relationship with stockholders and employee satisfaction (Grunig, 1993). Plowman et al. (2001) as cited by Kim and Cha (2013) argued that maintaining the reputation of an organisation was the most important function of public relations. More practically, Kim (2001) argued that as the unit of PR expense increases, a positive effect on the company's reputation is expected. Cha and Kim (2010) also maintained that there was a positive correlation between a corporation's PR activities and corporate reputation.

In this regard, it is not unreasonable to assume that larger corporations have larger PR departments than smaller corporations and have correspondingly larger PR budgets. Furthermore, it is likely that the more strategically and actively PR activities are conducted, the higher and more positive reputation the corporation will have. Mitroff et al. (2002) as cited by Kim and Cha (2013) indicate that PR activities differed depending on the size and type of organisations. In particular, they argued that corporations with high revenue and good reputation undertook more diversified PR activities and allocated more budgets to PR. The roles of PR practitioners differ based on the organisation type. In a simple and static environment, the role of PR practitioners is more related to a technician function, whereas a more problem-solving facilitator function is required in a complex and dynamic environment (Acharya, 1985; Kim and Cha, 2013).

Reputation according to Davies and Miles (2010) is a complex phenomenon but one which was worth managing well. Davies and Miles (2010) argue that what differentiates the good and the not-so-good management of reputation had been the subject of many practitioner texts, but far less material has emerged from academic research outside of the possible links between an organization's culture and its image, either to the market or with its employees.

Davies and Miles (2010) are of the view that while there is vast knowledge on activities organizations undertook in their management of reputation, less was known about the issues which were addressed by reputation managers, or even their views on those issues that appear, from the available literature, to be important in their role at that point in time. Hutton, Goodman, Alexander and Genest (2011) argue that an empirical study of *Fortune* 500 companies suggests that reputation management continues to gain grounds as a driving philosophy behind corporate PR.

Gotsi and Wilson (2011) recognise that an organization's corporate reputation is affected by the actions of every business unit, department and employee that comes into contact with another stakeholder. This study seeks to explore the role of Public Relations (PR) in reputation management.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Kim and Cha (2013) espouse the view that like a human being is affected by environment, the environments that surround an organisation influence it. As the world we are living in becomes complicated and diversified, it becomes increasingly important for an organisation to effectively communicate with its publics in marketing its products and services, in turn increasing the importance of effective PR and reputation management (Kim and Cha, 2013).

Tennie, Frith and Frith (2010) argue that the reciprocal interactions with others that played such a significant part in our lives and depended on trust. Thus, individuals needed to be confident that their partners were cooperative and that they would return favours. Tennie et al (2010) espouse the view that reputation permitted the choice of better partners and provided incentives to be more cooperative. These uses of reputation were not unique to humans. However, in complex human societies, with large numbers of potential partners keeping track of each other's reputation is a vital part of everyday life (Tennie, Frith and Frith, 2010).

Davies and Miles (2010) align with the statement that a firm's reputation was an intangible asset. The nature of such a reputation according to Davies and Miles (2010) depended upon everything the firm did as an entity and particularly the signals and communications it chose to give to the marketplace. Davies and Miles (2010) indicated that the symbol of reputation, the corporate name, when well managed, represented the organization favourably to its publics and could be particularly valuable in doing so to its customers.

This research seeks to explore the role of PR in reputation management. Even though there has been work done on the roles of PR and on reputation management respectively, synergizing both concepts to explore how they work together seems to be quite novel.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To explore the relationship between PR and reputation management, the researcher set the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the relevance of reputation management
2. To ascertain relationship between PR and reputation management
3. To examine how PR can be used in reputation management

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to achieve the objectives for the study, this paper set these research questions to help probe the objectives. These include:

1. What is the relevance of reputation management?
2. What is the relationship between PR and Reputation management?
3. How can PR be used to manage reputation?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This paper is relevant in different ways. The primary significance is to added on to the literature on PR by exploring the role of PR in reputation management. On another feat, this study help situate Ghana among the countries with work done on the role of PR in reputation management. For this reason, exploring how PR is used the management of reputation becomes essential as Deephouse (2012) indicates that reputation management was a relatively new professional service provided to corporations.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design helps the researcher to answer the research questions effectively and serves as a guide to choose the appropriate data required for the study. This study used the descriptive approach to attempt examining the role of Public Relations (PR) in reputation management. Bryman and Bell (2015) explain that descriptive research design is a process of collecting data in order to answer questions concerning the current status of the subjects in the study. This approach is often preferred by researcher in social science and has frequently been used by (Kvale, 2007).

In line with this argument, this study adopted the qualitative method of research. Qualitative techniques according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) involves an interpretive approach to research and includes the likes of case studies, interviews, personal experience and observations. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that researcher using qualitative techniques intend to understand the phenomena under study in terms of the meanings people bring to them. This opinion is supported by Grbic (2007) who posits that qualitative researcher question the underlying assumptions of positivism and are instead guided by the paradigms of constructivism and/or interpretivism, whereby, it is assumed that no objective knowledge can be generated that is independent of interpretation, therefore the concepts of truth and reality become subjective. This paper resolved to employing content analysis to review secondary data.

1.6.1 Sources of Data

This study sourced data primarily from secondary data sources. This was because the researcher consulted a wide array of literature which included books and journals among others in other to state or back arguments made by authorities in various parts of the study.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study set out to be a five-chapter project work however as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the scope of the study was adjusted to fit a four-chapter long essay. Aside this mishap, the scope of the study was limited to only reviewing of secondary data because primary data could not be collected. Future studies should thus focus on exploring topics along the lines of finding out how other variables that could affect reputation management. This could present the possibility of multiple perspectives.

1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This paper comprised of four (4) chapters. The first chapter was the opening part of the paper and included a background to the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions and the significance of the study. The next chapter then bothered on the reviewing of literature. This chapter discussed the concepts and theories relevant to the study as well drawing on empirical studies to guide this study. The next chapter covered the research methodology of the study. The fourth chapter discussed the findings of the study and summarizing the study primarily. This then extended to the recommendations made by this study as well reflections from the researcher.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter sought to give theoretical backing that would underpin the study. This was done by reviewing literature which comprised of concepts, theories and empirical studies. This was done with the expectation that relevant information would be obtained to help shape and enrich the study. The concepts include Public Relations and Reputation while the theories discussed were the Stakeholder Theory and Excellence Theory. The purpose of discussing these theories emanates from an attempt to ground the research in literature so that arguments made will have theoretical backing. This will in the long run show the depth this study brings to the table especially in terms of a scholarly discourse.

2.1 CONCEPTS

2.1.1 Evolution Public Relations

Public Relations (PR) is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics', Institute of Public Relations (2004). Harlow (1976: 36) observes that:

Public Relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics. It involves the management of problems or issues and help management to keep informed on, and be responsive to public opinions.

Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006: 5) observe that PR is a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics on whom its success or failure depends. Grunig and Hunt (1984: 42) describe publics

as the stakeholders who face a problem or have an issue with an organization. Kim and Cha (2013) admit that PR is an effective strategy to acquire higher corporate reputation that would ultimately contribute to the organizations' Return on Investment (ROI).

According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA, 1982), cited in Bowen (2010:

11) the functions of PR are as follows:

To help our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions.

It serves to bring private and public policies into harmony.

PR serves a wide variety of institutions in society such as businesses, trade unions, government agencies, voluntary associations, foundations, hospitals, schools, colleges and religious institutions. To achieve their goals, these institutions must develop effective relationships with many different audiences or publics such as employees, members, customers, local communities, shareholders and other institutions, and with society at large.

The managements of institutions need to understand the attitudes and values of their publics in order to achieve institutional goals. The goals themselves are shaped by the external environment. The public relations practitioner acts as a counsellor to management and as a mediator, helping to translate private aims into reasonable, publicly acceptable policy and action.

In Ghana, the PR profession can trace its historical roots to the Colonial Era as the practice is believed to have been introduced by the British colonial administration (Boamah, Kpodo, Hughes, Addo and Nagai, 2019). Consequently, the kind of PR which was practiced during the colonial era was basically focused on public information; a practice where the colonial administration used one-way communication as a vehicle to disseminate information to the public and to garner support for their various policies and initiatives. The post-independence stage, saw Dr. Kwame Nkrumah establish the Ghana Institute of Journalism in 1959, to train public professionals to replace the colonial practitioners. In 1972, the Public Relations Association of Ghana (PRAG) was formed by Hermann Alah with a small group of practicing journalists as PR officers. Until then, some PR professionals in Ghana were

members of foreign PR associations. (Atawura, 2010) On December 6th 1991, PRAG was re-organized and a new Constitution, Code of Ethics, Code of Professional Standards and Bye-Laws were adopted which transformed it into the Institute of Public Relations (IPR), Ghana. Now, having made the progression from one-way communication models in pursuit of a more balanced two-way communication, the practice of PR relies heavily on new media and digital technologies.

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) places reputation at the forefront of its definition of PR thus; PR is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you (PRAcademy, 2020). This assertion therefore amplifies the relevance of reputation in PR. For this reason, the concept of reputation will be further discussed.

2.1.2 Reputation

Reputation is often difficult to define since the perception of what is and is not reputable is in “the eye of the beholder” (Schreiber, 2014). A variety of definitions of reputation have been offered from a number of different academic and professional backgrounds. However if one looks at the various definitions of reputation, one may note that the intersection or integrated view tends to be the same but with different constructs (Institute of Public Relations [IPR], 2020).

Mahon (2002) defines reputation as an intangible asset thus, reputation represents a firm’s past actions and describes a firm’s ability to deliver value outcomes to multiple stakeholders. Yang and Grunig (2005) also are of the view that reputation is a derivative of other actions and behaviors of the firm. The concern is, it is difficult to isolate one variable that influences perceptions to a greater degree than others across all stakeholders (Schultz, 2006). Reputation

is the collective representations shared in the minds of multiple publics about an organization over time (IPR, 2020).

Barnet (2006) describes corporate reputation as observers' collective judgement of a corporation based on assessments of the financial, social and environmental impacts attributed to the corporation over time. Bailey (2018) also argues that reputation is like beauty which is in the eye of the beholder. Thus, an organization can influence how it is perceived by publics but cannot claim full management control of the process. Reputation is intangible but has a value, with studies showing that corporate reputation is positively affected by PR activities and is an integral part of PR strategies. Plowman and Huang (2001) also admit that maintaining the reputation of an organization is the most important function of PR. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1996) argue that Corporate Reputation is formed in the public's mind and it is therefore critical to view the reputation of an organization from the perspective of the receivers' mind.

In an attempt to describe what depicts corporate reputation, Boatemaa (2011: 40) observes that an organization must have good financial records, be socially responsible citizens contributing to the growth and development of good causes. Also, the organization must be customer focused and it must be one that its publics feel good about. She further argues that the benefits of having a good corporate reputation is an efficient marketing and promotional strategy which positions the organization in a competitive market with a particular focus on about the product or service customers will want to be associated with. Bailey (2018) further argues that having a good corporate reputation establishes for the organization an identity that is worth the trust and confidence of customers. PR involves reputation building and organizations must make a deliberate effort to carry out PR activities which will enable it

develop a favourable reputation that will inure to its benefit (Bailey, 2018; Oforu, Armah, Felicia, Laryea and Daaku, 2019).

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section discusses theories that relevant to the study. Jejari (2012) indicate that whereas most textbooks describe PR—its history, its practices, and its processes—it is also important to provide some perspective about why and how PR is practiced as it is. More important, theory explains how to make PR most effective for organizations and society.

Jejari (2012) posit that theories predict the way things work or happen. They provide an understanding of the relationship between actions and events. Also, as PR practitioner, it is important to be explain why and how your plans and proposals will work (Jejari, 2012). For this study, the two (2) are discussed, the Stakeholder Theory and the Excellence Theory.

2.2.1 Stakeholder Theory

Mitroff (1983) first suggested the idea of the Stakeholder Theory in his book Stakeholders of the Organizational. Shortly thereafter, Freeman (1983) also released an article about Stakeholder Theory. Freeman rather attributed the Stakeholder Theory to discussions at the Stanford Research Institute. Freeman went on to publish his own book, Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach. However, there are many books and articles on the subject and most cite Edward Freeman as father of the theory (Blackburn, 2019).

The Stakeholder Theory is a theory of organizational management and business ethics that accounts for multiple constituencies impacted by business entities like employees, suppliers, local communities, creditors, and others (Lin, 2018). It addresses morals and values in managing an organization, such as those related to corporate social responsibility, market economy, and social contract theory.

The Stakeholder Theory succeeds in becoming famous not only in the business ethics fields. It is used as one of the frameworks in corporate social responsibility methods. For example, ISO 26000 and Global Reporting Initiative involve stakeholder analysis (Ann, 2010). The stakeholder view of strategy according to Philips (2003) integrates a resource-based view and a market-based view, and adds a socio-political level. One common version of stakeholder theory seeks to define the specific stakeholders of a company (the normative theory of stakeholder identification) and then examine the conditions under which managers treat these parties as stakeholders.

Argandoña (1998) is of the view that the Stakeholder Theory of the social responsibility of business is the more appealing of the two from an ethical point of view, at least if we understand ethics in a broad sense. And yet it lacks a solid philosophical, sociological and economic foundation that would be acceptable to a variety of schools of thought.

Stakeholder theory has seen growing uptake in higher education in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Westerheijden, 2014). One influential definition defines a stakeholder in the context of higher education as anyone with a legitimate interest in education who thereby acquires a right to intervene (Björkquist, 2011). Studies of higher education first began to recognize students as stakeholders in 1975. External stakeholders may include employers. In Europe, the rise of stakeholder regimes has arisen from the shift of higher education from a government-run bureaucracy to modern system in which the government's role involves more monitoring than direct control (Mansell, 2013).

Blattberg (2004) has criticized Stakeholder Theory for assuming that the interests of the various stakeholders can be, at best, compromised or balanced against each other. He goes on to argue that this is a product of its emphasis on negotiation as the chief mode of dialogue for dealing with conflicts between stakeholder interests. Blattberg (2004) recommends conversation instead and this leads him to defend what he calls a 'patriotic' conception of the

corporation as an alternative to that associated with stakeholder theory. By applying the political concept of a 'social contract' to the corporation, stakeholder theory undermines the principles on which a market economy is based (Mansell, 2013).

However, the relevance to this theory among other things, is the position it holds that a company is only successful when it delivers value to its stakeholders, and those values can come in many forms beyond financial benefits. The theory also addresses business ethics, morals and values when managing stakeholders involved with a project or organization. It seeks to optimize relations with stakeholders, thereby improving efficiencies throughout the project or organization. There are ethical benefits of practicing it as well. The usage of the opinions and influence of stakeholders helps shape an organization and put it in a much better positioned for success. When an organization practices the Stakeholder Theory, it creates healthy competition among other companies, where all can thrive and help benefit their stakeholders. Also, this theory becomes relevant to this study because the resulting effect of corporate social responsibility is to gain goodwill. This goodwill is what translates to a good image which metamorphosizes into a good reputation for an organization.

2.2.2 Excellence Theory

The Excellence Theory is a general theory of PR which resulted from a 15-year study of best practices in communication management funded by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation. Three books were published from the research (Grunig 1992; Dozier et al. 1995; L. A. Grunig et al. 2002). The theory was tested through survey research of heads of PR, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and employees in 327 organizations (corporations, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and associations) in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom (Survey; Interview). The survey research was followed by qualitative interviews with heads of PR, other PR practitioners and

CEOs in 25 organizations with the highest and lowest scores on a scale of excellence produced by statistical analysis of the survey data.

The Excellence Theory first explained the value of PR to organizations and society based on the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the quality of relationships with stakeholder publics. To behave in socially acceptable ways, organizations must scan their environment to identify publics who are affected by potential organizational decisions or who want organizations to make decisions to solve problems that are important to them. Then, organizations must communicate symmetrically with publics (taking the interests of both the organization and publics into account) to cultivate high-quality, long-term relationships with them.

The interviews with CEOs and senior PR officers revealed that good relationships were of value to organizations because they reduced the costs of litigation, regulation, legislation, and negative publicity caused by poor relationships; reduced the risk of making decisions that affect different stakeholders; or increased revenue by providing products and services needed by stakeholders.

Based on this theoretical premise about the value of PR, the Excellence Theory derived principles of how the function should be organized to maximize this value. First, the research showed that involvement in strategic management was the critical characteristic of excellent PR. PR executives played a strategic managerial role as well as administrative manager role. PR also was empowered by having access to key organizational decision-makers in other words, the dominant coalition.

Second, the study showed that PR loses its unique role in strategic management if it is sublimated to marketing or other management functions. Sublimation to another function resulted in attention only to the stakeholder category of interest to that function, such as consumers for marketing. Sublimation to marketing also usually resulted in asymmetrical

communication. An excellent PR function was integrated and programs for different stakeholders were gathered into a single department or coordinated through a senior vice president of corporate communication. An excellent PR function did work with other management functions to help them build relationships with relevant stakeholders.

Third, the Excellence study showed that a symmetrical system of internal communication increased employees' satisfaction with their jobs and with the organization. However, internal communication generally was not practiced unless organizations had a participative rather than authoritarian culture and a decentralized, less stratified (organic) structure rather than a centralized, stratified (mechanical) structure.

Fourth, the Excellence study examined the effect of the growing number of women in PR and evidence that women had difficulty entering managerial roles. The research showed that organizations with excellent PR valued women as much as men for the strategic role and developed programs to empower women throughout the organization. The emphasis on gender also led to inclusion of diversity of race and ethnicity as a fifth part of the Excellence Theory. This focus, along with the international nature of the project, expanded the theory to make it appropriate for use outside the United States – in diverse cultural, political, and economic contexts. Replication of the study in Slovenia (Grunig et al. 1998) showed that the Excellence Theory is generic to many contexts, as long as the theory is applied differently when contextual variables are different. The research in Slovenia also resulted in the addition of ethics to the Excellence Theory – a sixth component (PR Ethics). Since the completion of the excellence study, scholars in this research tradition have continued to improve and enlarge the theory by conducting research to help PR professionals participate in strategic decision processes. This research has been on environmental scanning and publics, scenario building, empowerment of PR, ethics, relationships, the return-on-investment of PR,

evaluation, relationship cultivation strategies, conflict resolution, complexity theory, specialized areas of PR, and global strategy (Grunig 2006; Toth 2007).

This theory is relevant to this theory because it touches on the very important tenets that make up the basis on organizational success. Even though the theory is purely from the PR outlook, it extends to other disciplines such as Human Resource, Marketing and Quality Control.

Looking at the twelve (12) characteristics of excellent organizations as suggested by the excellence study, the first six look at human resources, organic structure, intrapreneurship, symmetrical communication system, leadership and culture are all related to one another, with symmetrical communication being integral factor for attaining organizational excellence.

The last six characteristics or attributes-strategic planning, social responsibility, acceptance of women and minorities in organizations emphasis on quality and effective operating systems all suggest attributes of excellence for organizations.

From the communication point of view, this theory underpins this study because it proposes certain criterion which organizations who want to be excellent should strive to achieve. In line with this study's aim, it will help to get a broader picture of an organization. As Grunig (2002) posits excellent PR is the glue that holds excellent organizations together. A perceived excellent organization in one way or another is likely to translate into a good reputation for the organization.

As important as this theory is to the practice of PR, sample for for the research which propounded the theory was not enough to be able to be generalized the world over. Also, the sample was centered only in the Western world. This therefore does not entirely fit in the make and build of the other localities and cultures like Africa and Asia. Again, the theory has

aged over a while and has not been replicated to ascertain whether its assertions have to be tweaked or upheld.

2.3 RELATED STUDIES

This section reviews works done in the area of reputation which are related to this study. The review will comprise of Ocran, Abudey, Ndom, Laarimong and Arhin's (2018) study on *The role of Public Relations and image building in public institutions*, Murray and White's (2015) work on *CEO's views on reputation management* as well as that of Aula's (2012) work on *Social media, reputation risk and ambient publicity management* and Hutton, Goodman, Alexander and Genest's (2011) work on *Reputation management: the new face of corporate public relations*.

Ocran et al. (2018) also conducted a study which focused on the role of PR in building the reputation of public institutions by using the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) as a case study. The scope of the study was between 2015 and 2016 and employed the mixed research method approach. The study employed interviews and questionnaires as the research instruments. The sample of the study was selected customers of the bank as well as employees of the bank.

From the study, it was found that the reputation of an organization could be affected if PR activities were not properly executed by the said organization. Therefore, it was concluded that for an organization to build a good image, it must have a strategic PR plan which will ultimately influence the success of the organization. The study recommended the education of customers of ADB on PR activities and functions to project the image of ADB as a viable financial institution in the country (Ocran et al, 2018).

Murray and White's (2015) paper summarised the findings which arose from a series of extended qualitative interviews with 14 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and chairmen from leading United Kingdom (UK) corporations and international organisations. The purpose of the interviews were to try to establish the value that CEOs attached to PR, and to get a sense of how they would assess its value and contribution to overall business and organisational performance.

The study also tried to determine the role CEOs play in reputation management. The findings concluded that CEOs do not expect or look for a simple return on investment (ROI) for PR expenditure; that PR was used regularly to enhance and protect reputation; that public relations had become mission critical for businesses and the management of reputation; that CEOs themselves take overall responsibility for the management of corporate reputation; that the CEO's personal reputation is closely linked to that of the corporation; that CEOs' profiles and the media demands made of them had never been higher; that PR could influence organisational strategy; and that high calibre people working in PR were highly sought after and valued by CEOs. There were many lessons and implications for PR practitioners (Murray and White, 2015).

Aula's (2012) work aimed at discussing the emergence of corporate reputational risk in terms of social media, exploring its threats to and possibilities for organizations' strategic reputation management. The methodology Aula (2012) employed looked at reputation risk as the possibility of damaging one's reputation, presents a threat to organizations in many ways. Aula (2012) indicated that little was known, however, about the connections between reputation risk management and social media as a mediated business environment. Following the latest conceptualizations of strategic reputation management and social media, the paper identified several challenges for organizations.

To make sense of the issue, Aula (2012) proposed a novel context for strategic reputation management, founded on the metaphor of ambient publicity, which involves not only social media, but also organizations and their stakeholders. The paper argued that social media expands the spectrum of reputation risks and boosts risk dynamics, and that social media can have notable effects on corporate-level strategic endeavors, which must be considered in order to be successful in the modern business environment. Nine tenets for corporate leaders involved in strategic reputation management are presented (Aula, 2012).

The paper also offered new insights on social media's relation to reputation risk and its management. The ambient publicity according to Aula (2012), for example, had value to leaders involved in strategic reputation management when trying to identify factors characterizing the changing business environment. Understanding ambient publicity as an environment of meaning indicates that organizations, their stakeholders, and the public create a “complex narrative web” surrounding reputation. The more unified this web is, the stronger the organization is in terms of reputation risk.

In Hutton, Goodman, Alexander and Genest's (2011) study, they argued that an empirical study of *Fortune* 500 companies suggested that “reputation management” was gaining ground as a driving philosophy behind corporate PR. Their work was on Reputation management: the new face of corporate PR. Hutton et al (2011) indicated that whether the phenomenon was a trend or a fad was not clear, given the lack of consensus in defining reputation, the instability and questionable validity of reputation measures, and unanswered questions about when and how (or even whether) reputation could be “managed”.

The concepts of reputation management and corporate public relations departments in the study embraced a wide variety of other definitions of their function, suggesting that PR continued to have great difficulty in defining itself. While the study did not find a strong correlation between reputation and overall spending on corporate communication activities,

as had a similar study the prior year, it did find some interesting correlations between reputation and specific categories of spending (Hutton et al, 2011).

2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focused on reviewing the literature on how certain theories could help solidify the base of the study. Further, various concepts which needed to be understood in order to get a better understanding and perspective of the study was discussed. Also, the researcher introduced related studies to bring to light an empirical perspective. The next chapter gives a presentation of the research methodology that was employed in the collection of primary data.

CHAPTER THREE

DISCUSSION

3.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Public Relations (PR) is the management function that evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or organization according to Miller and Dinan (2007) as cited by Hailu (2018) with public interest, and executes a program of actions to earn public understanding and acceptance. This indicates PR being a part of management function dealing with organizational communication activities by measuring public attitude, analysing policies, executing program of action, where upon keeping public interest to win public attention and acceptance. This section discusses the research objectives set in order to achieve the research questions set by the study.

3.1 RELEVANCE OF REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

In order to find out the relevance of reputation management, it is important to highlight Seitel (2017) view that corporate or organization reputation is at the centre of PR functions. Carpenter (2014) defines organizational reputation as a set of beliefs about an organization's capacities, intentions, history, and mission that are embedded in a network of multiple audiences. Wæraas and Maor (2015) argue that this implies that leaders of an organization have to use symbols to reach and appeal to diverse audiences to build a reputation. Christensen and Gornitzka (2019) assert in this line of argument that reputation management or branding is increasingly important to organizations. In essence, Maor (2016) posit that agencies care about what others think about them and try to advance their standing among different audiences.

Jefkins (2004) as cited in Hailu (2018) espouses the view that if an organization is perceived to have a bad image which affects its reputation, PR has to work around organisational communication. The resulting effect if this is that a good reputation is essential and requisite to develop good image. Thus, PR must be alert to transform negative states to positive ones, which lead to goodwill and reputation. Stacks (2016) notes that shortcomings of managing reputation may threaten a well-deserved and long cultivated favourable image and identity. For organizations who meet their objectives, they may not even value the role of reputation.

For PR practitioners however, this trend raises serious causes for alarm because matters of corporate reputation are primarily in their domain (Davis, 2004: Hailu, 2018). This means failure to garrison the reputation of an organization in the positive light could possibly lead to the destruction of the corporate or organizational image and identity, which could in turn generate negative public opinion (Botan and Hazleton 2010). These could possibly pose a challenge to organizations preventing them from achieving their objectives and successes as a whole. Christensen and Gornitzka (2019) indicate that doing this in an organized and systematic way is what we call reputation management. In establishing the relevance of reputation management, Carpenter (2014) notes that the standing of an organization is important for its organizational well-being as well as its ability to act effectively.

3.2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PR AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

This objective seeks to find out if there is a relationship between PR and Reputation management. Guth and Marsh (2016) in this regard espouse the view that among the PR function is the task to look at reputation with the aim of earning support and influencing public opinion. For this reason, it is important for organizations to maintain good relations with all the stakeholders or publics. In sum, PR is all about maintaining relations with the

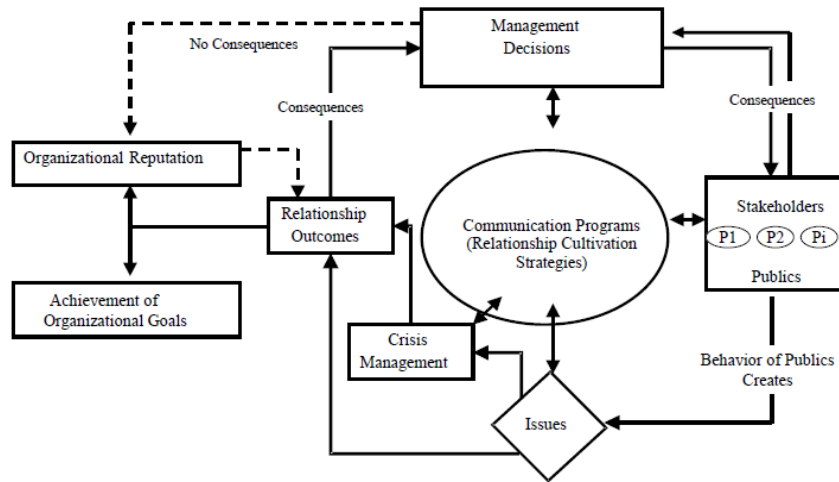
public for which reason Theaker (2017) once again affirms the notion that the role of PR in this aspect becomes very important especially to reputation management.

From the above premises, one can understand that reputation is the essential and inevitable part in the world of PR business. Thus, the current study in making an effort to investigate the role of PR in reputation management can state that PR has a significant relationship in reputation management. This conclusion is backed by a number of literatures reviewed as the scholars attribute the building of a thriving reputation to the role of PR.

With inspiration from the Excellence Theory, Grunig (2009) developed the Model of Strategic Management of Public Relations. This model depicts the role of an excellent PR department in the overall strategic management process of an organisation and the nature of strategic management of PR programmes.

From the model, Grunig (2009) posits that to arrive at *organizational reputation*, PR practitioners who are guided by the interpretive paradigm and believe that positive messages about management decisions mostly disseminated through the mass media can by themselves create a positive organisational reputation. Such a path might also produce a reputational relationship a relationship based only on secondary sources and not based on an actual relationship between the organisation and a public (Grunig & Hunt, 2002; Grunig, 2009).

Figure 1: Model of Strategic Management of Public Relations



Source: James Grunig (2020)

3.3 PR AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

PR has been proposed to be a very essential tool to managing reputation. This objective thus sought to ascertain how PR could be used to manage reputation. Rank (2016) notes that organizations see that they can profit from fulfilling wants and expectations of the public. This is why PR is in high demand in the corporate world. While it is often said that reputation management is an online extension of PR, many would argue that the field is much more complex than that. In recent times, having an online presence is extremely necessary for any business or organization. Many may not know that websites can be altered in ways that make them show up higher on search engine queries. Reputation management capitalizes on this idea, and analyzes search engine results to find ways to drive traffic to specific domains. More traffic to a website means more public awareness, which is where the public relations aspect of this field shows itself (Rank).

Among the various functions of PR, AgilityPR (2020) posits that Community Relations, Employee Relations, Government Relations, Public Affairs and Media Relations are essential to carrying out PR task such as reputation management. Community Relations is saddled with

the function of actively planning and continuing participation with and within a community to maintain and enhance an organization's to the benefit of both the organization and the community. This can involve partnerships, volunteer activities, philanthropic contributions and public participation and corporate social responsibility (AgilityPR, 2020).

The function of Employee Relations AgilityPR (2020) espouses involves dealing and communicating with the internal publics of an organization which could include team building and employee empowerment. Government Relations is also a way PR interacts with legislative and government agencies on behalf of an organization. This is closely linked with the Public Affairs function of PR which encompasses dealings with government and groups with regard to societal (public) policies, action and legislation. Unlike Government Relations, where the practitioner works strictly on behalf of an organization, Public Affairs is also concerned with the effect of public policies, actions and legislation on its publics. This is usually referred to as lobbying in some literature (AgilityPR, 2020).

Another salient way PR can be used to manage reputation is through Media Relations. AgilityPR (2020) posits that this function of PR thrives on working with the news media to propagate an agenda which is usually linked with publicity generation. It also involves setting up and maintaining a professional and mutually beneficial working relationship with journalists and gatekeepers, by striving to become known as a credible source and as a provider of factual, expert information whether or not that information results in media coverage (AgilityPR, 2020). This comes in handy when the organization is faced with a crisis situation and the organization needs to gain points in the court of public opinion as the media acts as a gatekeeper.

Between 2017 and 2019, Tella, Suraya, Bonsu and Anani-Bossman (2020) indicate that many of Ghana's financial institutions wounded up. During the dissolution, several frustrated

customers lamented the inadequate or lack of accurate information on their savings and investments. Customers and other stakeholders also expressed angst at the communication approaches and messaging of these financial institutions during the crisis. Some of these institutions were criticized for poor customer relations and inadequate response to crises. Those criticisms were visible in the cases of the Midland Savings Loans Company (Midland) press statement in connection with an assault on a customer by a police officer (Sasa, 2018: Tella, Suraya, Bonsu and Anani-Bossman, 2020).

The management of Midland employed the Corrective action Mortification strategies of image restoration. In a statement released by management of Midland,

“Midland Savings and Loans would like to take this opportunity to once again deeply apologise to all our customers and the public for this unfortunate incident. Rest assured that steps have been taken to ensure that an act of that nature never occurs at any of our branches ever again...” (Graphic Online, 2018)

However, Tella, Suraya, Bonsu and Anani-Bossman (2020) argue that many of these criticisms targeted the PR departments of the financial institutions as PR practitioners were denounced for not doing enough in using communication to respond to issues stakeholders considered crucial. Practitioners should have, on behalf of their institutions, engaged and explained to stakeholders, the role their institutions played in the crisis (Mensah, 2018: Tella, Suraya, Bonsu and Anani-Bossman, 2020).

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a discussion of findings for this study. This discussion of the findings is followed by an abridged summary and conclusion. This is followed by an expression of the researcher's reflections as well as the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

4.1 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Hutton, Goodman, Alexander and Genest (2001) argue that for reputation management to emerge as a significant business function, its foundation clearly rests on PR. This could be achieved by investing efforts into corporate communication, corporate affairs, corporate relations and similar terms. Oržekauskas and Šmaižienė (2014) note that public image and reputation is not a substantially new topic neither in practice of politics and public administration nor research field. This study therefore sought to explore the role of PR in reputation management.

The study then set the objectives to find out the relevance of reputation management, to examine if there is a relationship between PR and reputation management and to ascertain how PR can be used to manage reputation. The findings indicate that reputation is very essential as Oržekauskas and Šmaižienė (2014) put it "an organization has most potential to impact public opinion and reputation through its identity and performance standards and promoting actions". From the literature reviewed, the underlying and resounding view is that

as much as maintaining a good reputation is good for every organization, the role of PR is very relevant to achieve this feat.

4.2 RECOMMENDATION

Proverbs (2020) suggests that among the ways organizations can use PR to enhance reputation management is to indulge in corporate social responsibility (CSR), crisis communications plan, social media policy, media relations policy and monitoring of reputation. Tur-Porcar, Roig-Tierno and Llorca Mestre (2018) is of the view that CSR is recognized as indispensable for corporate sustainability and that interests in CSR activities is explosively growing. Companies are now utilizing CSR as a PR tool to change their corporate image, in addition to focusing on their responsibility towards society (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2010). Thus, CSR activities can be an important strategy for attracting consumer attention in today's competitive market environment (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006; Yoo and Lee, 2018).

When a crisis hits an organization, measures must be adopted to lessen the damage from the crisis (Coombs, 2014). Crisis communication is explained as involving a communication plan that seeks to ensure that an organization is well-positioned to manage potential and actual crises and events, includes gathering and disseminating crisis-related information to stakeholders (Fearn-Banks, 2016). Patashnick (2016) asserts that crisis communication is a decision of top management. When stakeholders are adequately informed about the crisis management efforts deployed by the organization, stakeholders are reassured that the organization is trustworthy and the organization can also achieve something positive for its reputation (Tella, Suraya, Bonsu and Anani-Bossman, 2020).

In 2011 for instance, Associate Press laid certain guidelines for its employees in its revised social media policy. In the policy it read,

“...everyone who works for AP must be mindful that opinions he or she expresses may damage the AP's reputation as an unbiased source of news. AP employees must refrain from declaring their views on contentious public issues in any public forum and must not take part in demonstrations in support of causes or movements. This includes liking and following pages and groups that are associated with these causes or movements...” (PRMRInc., 2020)

Having a social media policy helps set boundaries before-hand for employees so that they would be no major fallouts.

Also, media relations encompasses all types of initiatives which includes maintaining and updating media contacts, disseminating news releases, organizing press conferences, offering content and responding to media queries (Waters et al., 2010; Pang, Chiong and Hassan, 2014). By performing some or most of the work that journalists seek, practitioners aim to further organizational objectives and promote organizational agendas and build corporate reputation (Pang, Chiong and Hassan, 2014). Proverb (2020) argues that there are a number of monitoring tools available. Organizations should therefore put in place system should be in place to monitor what is being said about the organization both in traditional and new media. This could include the use of media scanning and press cutting.

After an assessment of the literature and reconciling with reality, the study recommends that reputation management be given more attention especially in the case of corporate organizations. This could be in the form of instituting policies that will embed PR into the dominant coalition so that practitioners can make inputs that will help carve a path for this line for the concept. This will then proceed to becoming a norm in the corporate limelight as well as in governmental agencies. Also, further studies can be done along the lines of replicating the study in other sectors such as the governance, sports among others.

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