



SCHOOL OF GRADUATES STUDIES AND RESEARCH

INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL BRANDING, SOCIAL MEDIA AND
PUBLIC RELATIONS ON RURAL EDUCATION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

BY

ERIC ASARE-TROKPA

MASPRM24017

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND
COMMUNICATION-INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER IN ARTS DEGREE IN STRATEGIC
PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT.

DECEMBER, 2025

Contents


CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	vii
Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	2
1.3 Research Aim and Objectives.....	3
1.4 Research Questions.....	4
1.5 Significance of the Study	4
1.5.1 Contribution to Academic Knowledge	4
1.5.2 Contribution to Policy and Development	5
1.5.3 Contribution to Professional Practice	5
1.6 Limitations of the Study	6
1.6.1 Inability to generalize.....	6
1.6.2 Subjective Perceptions:.....	6
1.6.3 Stakeholder Scope:	6
1.7 Scope and Delimitation of Study.....	6
1.8 Organization of the Study	7
1.9 Chapter Summary	8
CHAPTER TWO	9
2.1 Chapter Introduction	9
2.2 Definition of Key Terms.....	9
2.3 Review of Related Literature	9
2.3.1 Educational branding and institutional reputation.....	9
2.3.2 Educational Institution and Community Relations	11
2.3.3 Social Media and Education	13
2.4 Theoretical Framework.....	14
CHAPTER THREE	16
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	16
3.1 Chapter Introduction	16
3.2 Research Paradigm.....	16
3.3 Research Approach	17

3.4 Research Design	17
3.5 Population.....	18
3.6 Sampling Strategy	18
3.7 Data Collection Technique	18
3.8 Data Collection Process.....	19
3.9 Ethical Considerations.....	19
3.10 Authenticity and Trustworthiness.....	20
3.11 Data Analysis Techniques.....	20
3.12 Chapter Summary	21
CHAPTER FOUR.....	21
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	21
4.3 Participant Demographics and Roles	24
4.5 Discussion of Findings	33
4.5.1 Academic Performance as a Resource Strategy	33
4.5.2 Public Relations as “Headteacher Diplomacy”	33
4.5.3 The Strategic Avoidance of Social Media.....	34
4.5.4 Parents as "Stockholders" of the School.....	34
4.5.5 Chapter Summary	35
CHAPTER FIVE	36
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	36
5.1 Introduction.....	36
5.2 Summary of Key Findings	36
5.2.1 The Nature of Rural Educational Branding	36
5.2.2 Public Relations as “Headteacher Diplomacy”	37
5.2.3 The Strategic Avoidance of Social Media.....	37
5.2.4 Impact on Resource Acquisition and Enrolment	37
5.3 Conclusions.....	38
5.4 Recommendations.....	38
5.4.1 Recommendations for Policy Makers (Ministry of Education / GES).....	38
5.4.2 Recommendations for School Administrators	39
5.4.3 Recommendations for Community Stakeholders (SMC/PTA)	39
5.5 Contributions to Knowledge	40
5.6 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research	40

5.7 Concluding Remark	40
References	42
APPENDIX.....	47
APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS.....	47
PREAMBLE & INFORMED CONSENT	47
INSTRUMENT I: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS (HEADTEACHERS)	47
INSTRUMENT II: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) GUIDE FOR PARENTS.....	49
INSTRUMENT III: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS.....	50
INSTRUMENT IV: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS (SMC/PTA EXECUTIVES).....	51
APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPTS OF DATA COLLECTION (EXCERPTS).....	52
TRANSCRIPT 1: INTERVIEW WITH HEADTEACHER (AC MEMORIAL SCHOOL)	52
TRANSCRIPT 2: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH PARENTS	53
TRANSCRIPT 3: INTERVIEW WITH TEACHING STAFF	54
TRANSCRIPT 4: INTERVIEW WITH STUDENT	54

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, hereby declare that this dissertation titled “Exploring the Impact of Educational Branding, Social Media, and Public Relations on Rural Education in Ghana: A Critical Analysis” is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere. All information sourced from the works of others has been duly acknowledged and referenced.

Name	Index Number	Signature	Date
Eric Asare-Trokpa	MASPRM24017		28 th December, 2025

CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

I hereby certify that this dissertation titled “Exploring the Impact of Educational Branding, Social Media, and Public Relations on Rural Education in Ghana: A Critical Analysis” submitted by Eric Asare-Trokpa was prepared under my supervision and meets the requirements for the award of the Master of Arts Degree in Strategic Public Relations Management at the University of Media, Arts and Communication.

Supervisor Name: Dr. Stanley K. M. Semarco.

Supervisor Signature:



Date : 28th December, 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am profoundly grateful to Almighty God for His guidance, strength, and sustaining grace throughout the course of this study.

My deepest appreciation goes to my supervisor, Dr. Stanley K. M. Sermaco, whose expert guidance, constructive feedback, and unwavering support were essential to the successful completion of this research. His commitment to academic excellence and his patience throughout the process have been truly inspiring.

I am sincerely grateful to the administrators, teachers, parents, and students of the selected schools in the Ekumfi District. Their openness, cooperation, and thoughtful contributions made this study possible. I am particularly thankful to the Headteachers and SMC/PTA members who generously dedicated their time to participate in interviews and discussions.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my beloved wife, Mrs. Sarah Asare-Trokpa, whose unwavering support, encouragement, and understanding sustained me throughout this academic journey. Her patience and belief in my abilities have been a constant source of strength. I also extend my appreciation to my family for their love and continuous motivation.

To my friends and colleagues who provided advice, shared resources, or offered encouragement along the way, I say thank you. Each of you contributed meaningfully to this accomplishment.

Finally, I acknowledge the scholars and institutions whose works informed and guided this study. Your intellectual contributions provided the foundation upon which this research was built.

To everyone who supported me in any capacity, I express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude.

ABSTRACT

Although strategic communication has gained prominence within the education sector, the use of branding, public relations, and social media in rural pre-tertiary institutions remains significantly underexplored. This study examines the forms, perceptions, and effects of these communication practices within the Ekumfi District of Ghana. Guided by Resource Dependence Theory, the research investigates how schools operating under severe resource constraints employ communication as a tool for institutional survival and community engagement.

Anchored in an interpretivist paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative multiple case study approach involving three purposively selected public pre-tertiary schools. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with school administrators and teachers, complemented by focus group discussions with parents and students, yielding a total of 28 participants. The data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, using Braun and Clarke's six-phase analytical framework, which facilitated the identification of recurring patterns in communication behavior and resource negotiation.

The findings reveal that rural educational branding is not driven by visual imagery or promotional materials but by "Performance Signaling," where academic achievement and student discipline function as the core indicators of institutional value. Public relations emerges as "Headteacher Diplomacy," characterized by the school leader's active participation in community social activities to build trust and legitimacy rather than through formal communication structures. The study further identifies a deliberate "Strategic Avoidance" of social media, shaped both by infrastructural limitations and by concerns about maintaining institutional credibility. Overall, the study concludes that communication in rural schools is fundamentally a survival strategy essential for attracting resources. The study recommends that policymakers design educational interventions that recognize and support these context-specific communication practices.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background

Educational institutions, like all other organizations, are not self-sufficient and must engage with their environment to secure the necessary resources they need to be successful (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). These resources include teachers, students, and educational materials. To be able to achieve the acquisition of these resources, educational institutions must build and manage relationships with their various publics through effective communication, which is a core function of public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

The perception of every community towards education is certainly important and gives the value or image of a school. The reputation of a school is shaped by community perception, and is crucial for the school-community relationship (Rizkita et al., 2020).

Academic literature confirms that educational branding, social media, and public relations are all impactful in the education sector. Educational branding is a key strategy for attracting prospective students and garnering public interest (Walid & Malik, 2023). In the educational sector, branding is the process of establishing a distinct identity that differentiates a school from its peers while influencing how stakeholders perceive its academic standing, trustworthiness, and overall prestige (Sarder et al., 2024).

“Public relations gives “legs” and life to brand attitudes and the essential brand promise by telling credible stories and providing support for the truth of a brand’s advertising images” (Mikáčová et al., 2014)

School public relations involves strategic communication tailored for schools—whether private or public—to support their mission of teaching and learning. (Kolwasi, 2012). Studies have shown that public relations in educational institution make the institution more visible and can create positive image (Zlatanović-Marković , 2022).

Building a strong brand and delivering excellent service enhances both institutional reputation and client loyalty (Ahmadi et al., 2024).

Social media present significant advantages to education (Faizi et al., 2013; Greenhow et al., 2019). Social media fosters a dynamic participatory culture where users engage in a constant exchange of information, updates, and opinions within their online communities, influencing decisions related to products, services, and activities (Ashman et al., 2015).

Over the past few years, Educational institutions especially Universities and International schools have demonstrated high interest in taking up institutional branding, increased adoption of Social Media, and purposeful management of their relationship with their publics. Studies show that a student's choice of a higher institution is influenced by branding, which is shaped by their experiences and expectations (Synadrou et al., 2024). Furthermore, the specific school attributes prioritized by parents serve as reliable predictors of their final institutional choice (Cheng et al., 2015).

A school's reputation is shaped by a mix of direct parent experiences, strategic marketing, and informal word-of-mouth. Consequently, school administrators must identify the specific qualities parents associate with educational excellence. By aligning institutional goals with these values, leaders can develop targeted public relations and marketing strategies that effectively enhance the school's public image (Oplatka & Nupar, 2012). Reputation influences teachers' and students' preference of educational institutions (Sagir, Dos & Cetin, 2014)

Despite the increasing importance of these concepts, their application in pre-tertiary education in rural Ghana remains critically understudied. This research intends to explore the perceptions and practices of public relations, educational branding, and social media within this specific context.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As the education sector grows more competitive, strategic public relations, institutional branding, and social media have become essential for schools to attract students, secure resources, and build community trust. In Ghana, this trend is particularly visible in tertiary institutions and international

schools that actively invest in managing their reputation. Successful branding boosts reputation, enhances student loyalty, and strengthens faculty and alumni engagement (Yamin, 2024). It also plays a key role in influencing a student's commitment to choosing a school (Rofi & Kusumawati, 2020).

Social media's role in this process is to bring the institution closer to its audience. Public relations leverage social media to build a school's brand by showcasing its quality, activities, and achievements (Atika et al., 2025).

While there have been few studies on educational branding , public relations and social media in education, little is known about their application in the pre-tertiary sector of rural Ghana.

A significant knowledge gap exists regarding how rural schools use public relations, branding, and social media. The application of urban-centric social media strategies in rural areas might be difficult and lead to exclusion.

This gap limits their ability to compete, build reputation, attract qualified teachers, and secure community support, potentially widening the rural-urban educational divide. This is further worsened by the digital divide which is a potential barrier to social media usage in rural Ghana. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the utilization and impact of these strategies in rural Ghanaian pre-tertiary schools.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore the nature and perception of public relations, educational branding, and social media practices within the pre-tertiary education sector of rural Ghana and the impact they have on rural education in Ghana.

To achieve this aim the following specific research objectives are set;

1. To identify the public relations, branding, and social media practices used by pre-tertiary schools and perceptions of the practices held by key stakeholders.

2. To assess the perceived impact of these practices on key institutional outcomes, particularly school reputation and acquisition of community resources.
3. To investigate the influence of a school's communication efforts on parental engagement and decisions related to student enrolment.
4. To analyze the challenges that hinder effective communication between educational institutions and the community in rural Ghana

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the public relations, branding, and social media practices of pre-tertiary schools in rural Ghana, and how are they perceived by key stakeholders?
2. How do these branding, public relations and social media practices impact the school's reputation and its ability to acquire community resources?
3. How does schools' communication effort influence parental engagement and enrolment in pre-tertiary schools in rural Ghana?
4. What challenges do pre-tertiary educational institutions face with communication between the institutions and the community in rural Ghana?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to be significant for academia, educational policy, and professional practice in Ghana.

1.5.1 Contribution to Academic Knowledge

This research will address a significant gap in the existing literature. While there exist extensive research on branding, public relations and social media in Western and urban educational contexts,

this study will provide crucial empirical data on how Educational branding , public relations and Social media are understood and applied in under-researched, Ghanaian rural setting

1.5.2 Contribution to Policy and Development

This study will be valuable to policy makers in education. It will provide evidence-based insights into the communication challenges and opportunities at the pre-tertiary level in the context of Rural Ghana. This can inform the development of more relevant, context-aware policies and support systems to improve school-community relation. This study will also guide non-governmental organizations and individuals who have interest in rural education to identify and implement effective communication strategies for enhanced relations management among the schools, the community in which the schools are situated and the organization.

1.5.3 Contribution to Professional Practice

This study will directly benefit school administrators and managers of rural pre-tertiary schools by identifying low-cost, effective branding and public relations strategies and incorporating social media in managing communications and relationships with their stakeholders. The study will provide guidance for school administrators on improving the institution's reputation, enhance parental engagement, increase enrolment, build stronger community relations and build support networks with limited resources. This study will offer an in-depth understanding of the values stakeholders place on school image and identity with regards to pre-tertiary education in Rural Ghana and empowering schools to communicate and manage public relations effectively.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that outline its scope and highlight opportunities for future research. These limitations include:

1.6.1 Inability to generalize

The study is exploratory and focuses on a small number of pre-tertiary schools in the Ekumfi District, providing rich insights but limiting statistical generalizability to all rural Ghanaian schools.

1.6.2 Subjective Perceptions:

The study relies on self-reported data from administrators, teachers, and parents, which is inherently subjective and may be influenced by social biases. This tendency will be mitigated by confidentiality and rapport building.

1.6.3 Stakeholder Scope:

The study focuses on key school stakeholders, excluding others like District Education Office officials or non-parent community members. Future research could benefit from a broader range of perspectives.

These limitations highlight the study's boundaries while emphasizing its potential for analytical insights and future research directions.

1.7 Scope and Delimitation of Study

This study is thematically delimited to exploring the practice and perception of public relations, educational branding, and social media within the pre-tertiary education sector. It focuses specifically on how these institutions distinguish themselves, manage stakeholder relations, and employ communication strategies in a rural Ghanaian context

The study draws insights from practitioners as educational administrators, teachers, school management coordinators, parents, and students. The study primarily engages stakeholders of pre-tertiary education in rural Ghana, specifically the Ekumfi District in the Central Region.

Geographically, the research is delimited to the Ekumfi District in the Central Region, a representative rural educational environment. The study will draw insights from a range of key stakeholders, including educational administrators, teachers, school management coordinators, parents, and students, to provide a holistic perspective.

Methodologically, the study does not seek to quantify the impact of these strategies. Instead, it adopts a qualitative approach to capture the rich, narrative accounts of the lived experiences of educational practitioners and their stakeholders.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the research by presenting the background, problem statement, research objectives and questions, scope of the study, and the significance of the study.

Chapter Two reviews relevant literature on educational branding, public relations and social media in education, and outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

Chapter Three details the research methodology, including the research paradigm, research design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four presents and discusses the findings, drawing connections between participants' experiences and the existing literature and theory.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, concludes the study by summarizing key insights, offering practical recommendations for policy and practice, and suggests directions for future research.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the study by providing a comprehensive background on the role of public relations, branding, and social media in the education sector. It has defined a clear research problem, highlighting the knowledge gap concerning pre-tertiary schools in rural Ghana. It outlined the problem of limited scholarly attention to public relations, branding, and social media in rural education, establishing the need for an exploratory inquiry. The chapter presented the overarching aim, specific objectives, and research questions guiding the study, and underscored its significance for academic, policy development and professionals. Finally, it delineated the scope of the research, focusing specifically on how pre-tertiary institutions distinguish themselves in the mind of their stakeholders among others, manage relations with their stakeholders and how social media is utilized in communications.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing academic literature relevant to the study's core themes of educational branding, social media, and public relations. Building upon the research problem identified in Chapter One—the knowledge gap concerning communication strategies in rural Ghanaian schools—this review establishes foundations that will guide this inquiry.

2.2 Definition of Key Terms

2.2.1 Educational Branding: Educational branding is the process of shaping an institution's core identity and public image to attract and retain students, staff, and supporters. It focuses on highlighting the school's unique strengths and values to build credibility and loyalty among its key community members.

2.2.2 School Reputation: School reputation is the sum of parents' perceptions towards six aspects of school and schooling: academic achievement, quality of the students, special attention to students, school violence and discipline, degree of satisfaction with the school, and quality of the teaching staff (Oplatka et al., 2012)

2.3 Review of Related Literature

2.3.1 Educational branding and institutional reputation.

Research indicates that institutional reputation is deeply impacted by branding efforts within the education sector. Specifically, the development of a distinct brand personality helps bridge the gap between the institution and its stakeholders, fostering a more meaningful and lasting connection (Ahmadi et al., 2024). The impact of branding is particularly significant in the current educational

landscape, where the focus has migrated from foundational personal growth to the pursuit of career advancement and social mobility. In this context, education serves as a tool for social stratification; enrolling in prestigious institutions is often a strategic move to secure a higher social status and align oneself with an elite peer group. (Shahbaz et al., 2022). In rural Ghana, social standing is not defined only by wealth and association with the elite but also includes moral discipline.

Ankith et al. (2024) sought to explore the critical role of branding in the education sector in India, specifically focusing on its impact on student admissions by examining how branding influences perceptions, attracts prospective students, and fosters engagement with stakeholders. They employed qualitative exploratory research approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of branding and brand management in the Indian education sector.

The study conducted a survey among prospective and enrolled students revealed a clear link between branding and student enrolment decisions by a significant portion of about 72% of the respondents citing reasons including reputation and prestige, online presence and digital branding. Insight from interviews also mentioned differentiation and competitive advantages, and trust and credibility.

The study concluded that branding education is a necessity. Educational institutions must prioritize brand management to achieve sustained growth, reputation, and student engagement. The study was done in India at the Tertiary education level, in a very different setting with different socio economic situations. Exploring the impact of branding in rural education in Ghana will provide insight into designing educational branding strategies in rural education to differentiate and offer competitive advantage to schools.

Shahbaz et al. (2022) offers strong empirical support for the idea that educational branding is a primary factor for parental school selection. Their mixed-methods study in Pakistan's Islamabad's competitive private school market revealed that a school's reputation built on perceptions of academic quality and student discipline was the most critical brand asset. The study found that parents' choices were heavily influenced by both a school's facilities, and its perceived social standing. The authors concluded that in today's competitive educational market, branding is no longer an option but a necessity for attracting and keeping students. The study's concentration on

an urban and private school context restricts its transferability and reveals a significant contextual gap that the current research aims to fill. The relationship between institutional reputation and school selection in an under-resourced, rural Ghanaian environment has not yet been investigated.

2.3.2 Educational Institution and Community Relations

“To an extent, continued existence of a school in any community depends on the relationship level between the school and its immediate community”, Orunbon (2023).

Public relations in education deals with management of reciprocal communication between a school and its community to achieve common interests. This role is especially crucial in the current digital era, where information spreads with unprecedented speed and reach (Afandi et al., 2025).

This has become an inseparable part of quality school governance as it facilitates the distribution of information and is expected by the community to cultivate a positive institutional image.

The bond between a school and its local community is a complex, reciprocal relationship that shapes both student achievement and regional growth. These two entities exist in a state of mutual dependence; while the school serves as the laboratory for academic instruction, the community acts as the real-world arena where that knowledge is tested and applied (Damwah, 2025).

A study by Damwah (2025) presents a direct Ghanaian context for this research, exploring the link between school-community relationships and academic performance in the Yendi Municipality. The study adopted a qualitative case study approach.

The study found low community involvement, resulting from poor communication and poor school leadership, had negatively affected educational outcomes, including high student failure rates.

These findings provide strong, local evidence that the school-community relationship affects academic performance. Damwah (2025) suggests that effective public relations is not just a tool

for communicating a school's reputation, but an essential factor in ensuring academic performance on which a school's reputation is built.

In a comparative study of rural and urban communities in Cyprus concerning the perceptions of primary school teachers and community stakeholders as regards school–community relations by Anaxagorou (2023) adopting a qualitative approach, data collection was done with semi structured interviewing techniques amongst primary school teachers and community stakeholders. The finding of the studies showed analysis of the qualitative data demonstrates that both primary teachers and community stakeholders whether in a rural or an urban area consider school–community cooperation as a positive and important factor in their respective spheres of interest. This study was conducted in Cyprus, exploring the school's relation with the community in the rural Ghanaian context is required.

A qualitative study in Indonesia by Mukarohmah et al. (2023) frames school public relations as a deliberate management process for increasing parental participation. The study highlights a practical three-stage model of planning, implementation, and evaluation as the foundation for effective engagement.

Crucially, the study also identifies that real-world socio-economic factors, such as parents' livelihoods, significantly influence their ability to participate. This provides a valuable, non-Western framework for analyzing the procedural nature of school-community relations and for investigating similar socio-economic barriers within the rural Ghanaian context.

A qualitative case study by Daman (2021) on public relations management in schools provides a crucial framework for linking a school's actions to its reputation. The study argues that a positive school image and community participation are achieved when public relations is understood as the practical implementation of the institution's core vision and mission, rather than just a communications function.

Daman (2021) posits public relations in educational institutions as public relations that implement the goals, visions and missions that have been set in real terms. To make this a success requires the active role of various components in the educational institution. Positive public opinion towards an educational institution can be realized based on customer

Satisfaction.

2.3.3 Social Media and Education

The integration of social media in rural education is very beneficial as it promotes connectivity among students, teachers, and communities, enabling effective communication and knowledge sharing.

Social media platforms provide a cost-effective means of communication and information dissemination, bridging the digital divide that often exists in rural areas and also promote institutional visibility (Sobiya & Sneka , 2023).

Social media has been identified as a useful teaching tool, especially in situations where access to more conventional educational resources may be limited or unavailable (Lin, 2025). Social media has the potential to enhance organization-public relationships by increasing and improving community relations (Valentine. Kruckeberg and Starck, 2012). Social media is an indispensable tool for schools to communicate effectively, engage their communities. Schools can reach wide audiences and promote transparency by strategically leveraging social media platform (Okwerede et al., 2025). Social media has been found to be adequate for rural school education to sustain equity among learners when proper planning goes before its implementation. Social media is part of the daily lives of students and has an inevitable impact on their educational endeavors and achievements and impacts the acquisition of resources including educational materials.

Studies have posited social media as a central, rather than peripheral, component of modern educational branding. A recent study by Sarder and Mustaqeem (2024) argues that social media marketing is now an indispensable tool for shaping an institution's brand identity.

The authors employed a mixed method approach that includes case studies of renowned educational institutions in Bangladesh to analyze how social media platforms influence brand identity, credibility, and student decision-making. Social media analytics tools such as engagement rates, impressions, and follower growth were used to measure branding success.

The findings highlighted the unique roles each social media platform plays in contributing to a multifaceted branding strategy emphasizing the need for institutions to integrate multiple social media platforms into their marketing efforts to be better positioned to engage with diverse audiences, from prospective students to alumni and corporate stakeholders to achieve brand cohesion. The findings also indicated effective use of social media has influence on Student recruitment, retention, and institutional reputation and also enhanced engagement and community building (Ashman et al., 2015).

Sarder and Mustaqeem (2024) offer an essential digitally-driven benchmark for modern educational branding. While important, their focus on well-resourced tertiary institutions in Bangladesh inherently creates a geographical and contextual gap. This digital divide serves as a point of contrast for the current investigation, which specifically targets a rural Ghanaian context. The digital divide is highlighted by the contrast between this established digital ideal and the actual situation in rural Ghana where access to reliable internet connectivity and devices are a challenge and reliance on traditional, non-digital strategies is common. The clear disparity between the two contexts provides sufficient grounds to define and pursue the aims of this study which seeks to explore the impact of social media in rural education in the pre-tertiary sector in Ghana.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 The Resource Dependence Theory

The Resource Dependence Theory as propounded by Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978 postulates that every organization operates in an environment and no organization is self-contained. Given that no organization is self-sufficient, organizations will depend on its environment for resources it needs to thrive. Schools are "open systems" that cannot generate all their own resources (students, quality teachers). The institutions will fall on its operating environment to secure material and human resources including teachers, students, and infrastructure, just to mention a few , which they do not control.

2.5 Relevance of Theory

This theory is relevant for this study because it underscores the need for the education sector to build mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders- the community in order to acquire the resources needed. Branding, public relations and use of social media are essential strategies for managing managing these dependencies and ensuring the school's survival and success.

This also underscores the need for schools to meet the expectation of the community on what a reputable school must be like.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This review has established two key principles: first, that educational institutions are resource dependent, and second, that they leverage branding and public relations to build the reputation needed to secure those resources, particularly students and staff. However, a critical limitation of the current body of work is its heavy focus on urban and well-resourced contexts. This has created a significant knowledge gap concerning the realities of rural Ghanaian pre-tertiary schools. The present study is therefore positioned to address this specific gap, and the methodology for this inquiry is detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter details the research methodology employed in this study. It provides a systematic explanation of the study's design, beginning with the foundational research paradigm and its associated philosophical underpinnings. The chapter also justifies the selection of a qualitative approach to the study. It also provides the setting for the study and the strategies for participant sampling, and the techniques used for data collection. The chapter concludes by addressing the vital principles of ethical conduct, the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, and the analytical techniques applied to the data.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study seeks to explore the perceived impact of branding, social media and public relations on pre-tertiary education in rural Ghana. To comprehend the subjective nature of meanings and lived experiences central to this study, the research is based on the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm focuses on understanding how people make sense of their social world. Instead of searching for universal laws, it explores the meanings, experiences, and perspectives individuals hold (Nickerson 2024). This paradigm deals with the subjective notion of a social context (Mokhtar et al., 2022).

An interpretivist lens is therefore best suited for exploring the complex and subjective perceptions surrounding a school's brand and the impact of its public relations, as it prioritizes the contextual and subjective viewpoints of the participants involved

3.3 Research Approach

Consistent with an interpretivist philosophy, a qualitative research approach was selected for this investigation. The research questions, which are exploratory in nature and focus on the "how" and "what" of the phenomenon, require in-depth, descriptive accounts rather than numerical measurement. Qualitative approach to research deals with in-depth investigation of how and why phenomena occur, focusing on their quality, meaning, manifestations, and the context or perspectives of those involved. It specifically excludes the study of numerical data such as frequency, range, or generalized cause-and-effect relationships (Hyginus et al., 2023).

Qualitative methods are uniquely suited to gathering the rich, narrative data necessary to understand the nuances of school-community relations and the complex factors shaping perceptions of institutional branding in a real-world setting.

3.4 Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative case study design. A case study allows for an empirical inquiry to investigate the phenomenon under study in depth and in its real-world context (Yin, 2018).

This design was selected because the practice of public relations, educational branding and utilization of social media in education in the Ekumfi District cannot be understood in isolation from the specific socio-economic and cultural realities of the rural environment. Phenomenology aims to illuminate the specific and to challenge structural or normative assumptions by revealing the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals (McLeod 2024). Unlike phenomenology, the case study approach allows the researcher to investigate the processes, interactions, and organizational structures of the schools, alongside the perspectives of the stakeholders (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Given that the use of public relations, branding, and social media in rural Ghanaian schools is an under-researched area, an exploratory case study approach was adopted. This design is well-suited

to generating detailed, holistic insights through multiple evidence sources, such as interviews and focus group discussions. Focusing on pre-tertiary schools in the Ekumfi District as the primary unit of analysis allows for a deep investigation into the specific challenges and adaptive strategies used to manage reputation and community relationships in a resource-limited setting.

3.5 Population.

The target population for this qualitative inquiry, which seeks to explore the impact of educational branding, social media, and public relations on rural education, is composed of key stakeholders within the public pre-tertiary school system of the Ekumfi District, Central Region. This district was selected as a representative case of the rural Ghanaian educational environment at the heart of this study. The study will be conducted using three selected pre-tertiary educational institutions in the district - three basic schools.

3.6 Sampling Strategy

Participants for this study were selected using a purposive sampling strategy. This non-probability sampling method involves the deliberate selection of individuals who possess specific knowledge and experience relevant to the research topic (Patton, 2015). This ensures that the data collected is rich and directly pertinent to the study's objectives. To achieve a comprehensive perspective, participants were chosen from a cross-section of the school community, including: School administrators who in the context of this study are Headteachers, Teachers, Members of the School Management Committee, Parents and guardians and Final-year students

3.7 Data Collection Technique

A multi-method approach to data collection was used to enable comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The primary techniques were: Semi-Structured Interviews: These were conducted with school administrators and teachers to facilitate in-depth, focused conversations

about their strategies, challenges, and perspectives on branding, social media and community relations.

Focus Group Discussions: This method was utilized with parents to explore collective viewpoints and community norms. Focus Group Discussion is utilized to observe and record the responses, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the participants in the study (Shabina et al., 2024). The interactive nature of focus groups is particularly effective for uncovering shared perceptions of school branding, social media and public relations in pre-tertiary education in rural Ghana.

3.8 Data Collection Process

The fieldwork commenced upon receiving clearance from the headteachers, who for the context of this study are also referred to as education or school administrators of the selected schools. Potential participants were then contacted and invited to join the study. All data collection was scheduled at locations and times that were convenient for the participants to ensure minimal disruption to their routines. With explicit permission, all interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy, and this was supplemented by the taking of detailed field notes.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in strict adherence to ethical guidelines. Every participant was provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose and procedures before providing informed consent. They were also explicitly informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and their institutions, all names have been replaced with codes in the final report. All data, including audio recordings and transcripts, are stored securely on a password-encrypted device.

3.10 Authenticity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the authenticity and trustworthiness of this qualitative inquiry, the following measures were implemented.

Guided by the principles of trustworthiness outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was enhanced by the implementation of data triangulation for the purpose of utilizing multiple data sources to confirm the consistency of findings, interviews and focus group discussions. Member checking was implemented by selecting participants to review the transcripts and the final thematic interpretations to confirm that the findings accurately represent their lived experiences and perspectives. Given that in rural settings, getting parents to review transcripts can be difficult due to literacy or time constraints, key points from interviews and focus group discussions were verbally summarized to participants for confirmation.

Transferability was achieved through the provision of "thick description," aimed to provide a rich, detailed, and nuanced account of the phenomenon, moving beyond surface-level observations to reveal the underlying meanings, motivations, and social dynamics at play in the Ekumfi District to enable readers to judge if the findings are applicable to other similar settings.(McLeod 2024).

Finally, dependability and confirmability was addressed by the implementation of the audit trail. Detailed record of all research processes, including interview protocols, transcription files, initial codes, theme development, and reflective notes, to allow for scrutiny of the analytical process to ensure that the findings are demonstrably linked to the raw data.

3.11 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis technique was in two phases. The first phase was a detailed description of the case setting—the selected schools in the Ekumfi District—was developed. This involved analyzing the field notes and interview transcripts to provide a "thick description" of the context, including the schools' current resources, existing communication channels, and community dynamics. This step ensured that subsequent themes were understood within the specific reality of the rural environment.

The second phase was the analysis of the data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions using Thematic Analysis, following the well-established six-phase

process developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This systematic method involves an iterative process of: (1) data familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts; (2) generating initial codes; (3) collating codes into potential themes; (4) reviewing and refining those themes; (5) defining and naming the final themes; and (6) producing the analytical narrative. This structured approach facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and significant insights related to school branding, PR, and social media perceptions in the rural Ghanaian education discussed.

3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the methodological foundation of the research. It has justified the selection of an interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative approach, and a multiple case study design. The specific methods for participant sampling, data collection, and thematic analysis were outlined. Furthermore, the chapter affirmed the study's commitment to ethical conduct and the strategies employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, setting the stage for the presentation of the analysis in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the empirical data generated from the fieldwork conducted in the Ekumfi District. It offers a systematic examination of the key themes that emerged from interviews and focus group discussions with a cross-section of educational stakeholders. To ensure continuity with the conceptual and empirical foundations established in Chapter Two, each thematic finding is first introduced and illustrated with direct participant quotations, preserving the authenticity of respondents' voices. This is followed by a critical discussion that explicitly

connects the emergent findings to the core arguments and debates outlined in the literature review. In particular, each theme is interpreted through the analytical lens of Resource Dependence Theory, allowing the chapter to interrogate how patterns of resource acquisition, negotiation, and dependence observed in the field reflect—or diverge from—existing scholarly insights. In doing so, the analysis not only builds upon the theoretical propositions and empirical evidence presented in Chapter Two but also identifies areas where the Ekumfi District case either supports, extends, or challenges the established literature.

4.2 Preliminary Descriptions of the Study Context

To provide a grounded framework for addressing the research questions regarding the impact of branding, public relations, and social media on rural education and how they influence resource acquisition, it is essential to first characterize the setting in which these interactions occur. The study was situated within the Ekumfi District, a predominantly rural setting where educational institutions operate within a close-knit, farming community structure.

Consistent with Resource Dependence Theory, the Ekumfi District is analyzed here not merely as a geographical location, but as the external resource environment upon which the selected schools depend for their survival and legitimacy.

4.2.1 Institutional Profile of Selected Schools

The inquiry focused on three public pre-tertiary institutions, selected to represent the typical infrastructural and operational realities of rural education. These institutions serve as the primary units of analysis for exploring branding and public relations as practiced in the absence of formal marketing and public relations structures and social media utilized in the face of infrastructural challenges with regards to internet connectivity. These schools were also identified as open systems that are not self-sufficient and must actively negotiate with their environment to secure critical inputs such as student enrolment, teacher retention, and infrastructural support. To ensure confidentiality pseudonyms were assigned to the selected schools.

- "AA Basic School": A government-assisted basic school situated in a smaller settlement, heavily reliant on community goodwill for maintenance.
- "AB Junior High School": A mid-sized school serving a cluster of villages, facing stiff competition for enrolment from nearby private institutions.
- "AC Memorial School": A larger, more established school with a historical legacy in the district, often used as a benchmark for academic performance in the area.

4.2.2 The Environmental Context and Constraints

The socio-communicative environment of the Ekumfi District is shaped by distinct socio-economic conditions that fundamentally influence how educational institutions access, negotiate, and utilise resources. As outlined in the contextual studies reviewed in Chapter Two, rural areas often rely on high-context, relationship-driven communication systems due to limited technological infrastructure. Ekumfi reflects this pattern. The district is characterized by strong communal ties, where information flows predominantly through interpersonal networks such as family relations, community leaders, and face-to-face interactions. Although digital channels are present, their penetration, affordability, and strategic use remain limited, rendering them supplementary rather than primary modes of communication.

These structural constraints align with the broader literature on the Digital Divide, which emphasizes how infrastructural limitations restrict institutions' ability to adopt modern communication and resource-mobilization strategies. In the Ekumfi context, this divide directly shapes institutional behavior: schools are compelled to operate within an environment where resource acquisition depends less on digital visibility and more on physical presence, relational capital, and embeddedness within local social systems.

Interpreted through the lens of Resource Dependence Theory, this environment imposes a set of communication-based dependencies that schools must continuously manage. Rather than leveraging digital platforms to diversify their resource channels—as RDT suggests organizations might do when seeking autonomy—schools in Ekumfi remain reliant on traditional networks that constrain their strategic options. Resource acquisition becomes a socially negotiated process rooted in compliance with community expectations rather than market-oriented outreach. This

environmental context not only limits institutional independence but also shapes the nature and direction of the dependencies schools must navigate.

4.3 Participant Demographics and Roles

Data was gathered from a diverse cohort of 28 stakeholders, purposively selected to represent the key functional areas of the school-community ecosystem. The recruitment of these participants was directly aligned with the specific objectives of the study, ensuring that each group contributed distinct insights relevant to the research questions:

- School Administrators (3 Headmasters): Key decision-makers interviewed to explicate the strategic intent behind current PR, branding and social media efforts, directly addressing RQ1 (Strategies).
- Teaching Staff (6 Teachers): Engaged to assess internal brand identity and to evaluate their dual function as educators and "brand ambassadors" within the community.
- Community Leaders (3 SMC/PTA Executives): Recruited to illuminate the mechanisms of resource acquisition and the nature of community-school partnerships, providing critical data for RQ2 (Resource Dependence).
- Parents (12 Focus Group Participants): Selected to investigate the external determinants of school choice, specifically the factors influencing enrolment decisions and parental engagement as explored in RQ3 (Enrolment).
- Students (4 Final-Year Students): Interviewed to capture the "lived experience" of the school brand and to provide realistic data on digital consumption habits among the youth, offering a counter-perspective for RQ1 & RQ4 (Challenges).

Participant Category	Specific Role	No. of Participant	Gender	
			Male	Female
		Total		
School Administrators	Headmasters / Heads of School	3	2	1
Teaching Staff	Senior & Junior Staff	6	3	3
Community Leaders	SMC / PTA Executives	3	2	1
Parents	Focus Group Participants	12	5	7
Students	Final-Year Students	4	2	2

Table 1 . Distribution of Participant

Distribution of Participant by Role and Gender

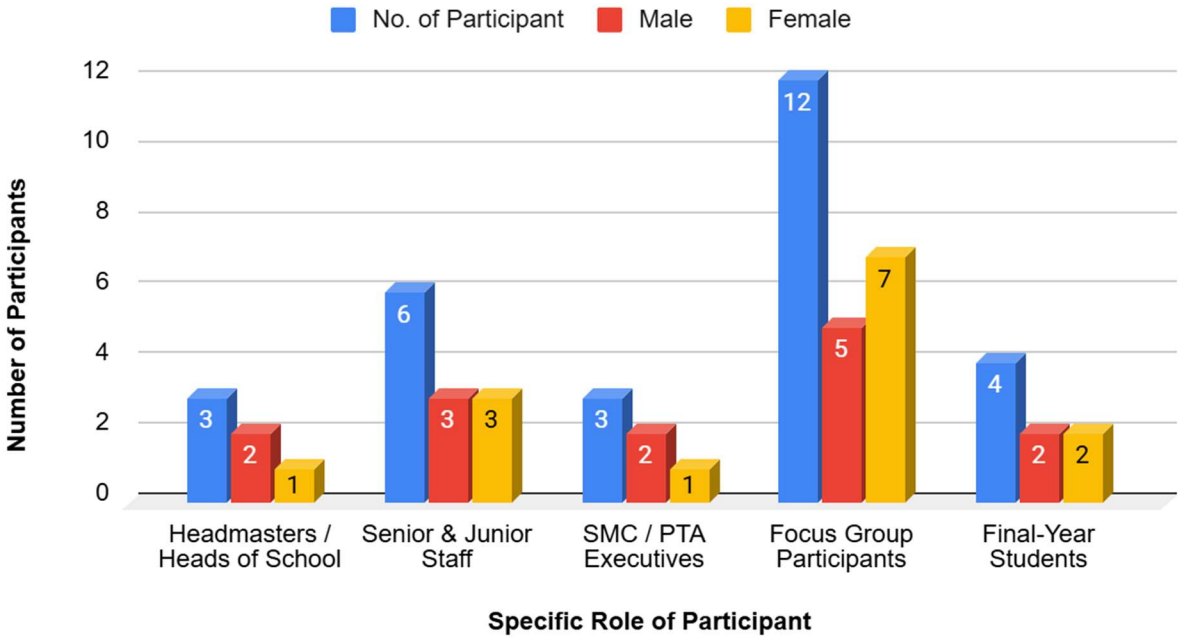


Figure 1. Distribution of participants by role and gender

The empirical data derived from the Ekumfi District is delineated below. In alignment with the study's theoretical framework, the findings are analyzed to demonstrate how communication strategies function as mechanisms for managing environmental dependencies and securing critical institutional resources.

Research Question 1: What are the public relations, branding, and social media practices of pre-tertiary schools in rural Ghana, and how are they perceived by key stakeholders?

The investigation revealed that communication practices in rural schools are not merely informational but are strategic behaviors aimed at securing legitimacy and support from the resource environment.

- Theme 1: Informal branding built on operational output. The findings indicate that the branding practices employed by pre-tertiary educational institutions is an “informal branding”. Schools in the rural Ghana do not practices formal branding where institutions use logos, schools uniforms, showcasing achievement, using billboards and communicating visually and verbally across touchpoints. Pre-tertiary institutions in rural Ghana adopts informal branding strategy where academic performance and student discipline define the brand identity of the institution, differentiating it from others. This "informal branding" strategy serves as a signaling mechanism to the community that the school is a worthy investment. Stakeholders conceptualize the school "brand" as synonymous with operational output—specifically, academic metrics and student discipline.
 - *Resource Implication:* By projecting a brand identity built on academic performance and discipline, schools distinguish themselves from others and effectively advertise their identity, uniqueness and efficiency to their stakeholders who are also the resource suppliers (parents and community leaders). A strong performance record project the identity and the image of the school and also validates its utility, making the community more willing to supply resources.
 - *Evidence:* Administrators eschewed formal branding for substantive results. As the Headteacher of AC Memorial School noted, "Our reputation is our BECE

performance... the results speak for us. This indicates that reputation which is a receipt of brand promise and consistency of delivery is what define brand in rural pre-tertiary education. "This confirms that in this context, the "brand" is the currency used to negotiate legitimacy.

- Theme 2: The headteacher as the chief public relations officer and resource negotiator. The centralization of public relations within the Headmaster's office suggests that PR is fundamentally a function of relationship management with key resource providers. The Headmaster's social visibility—attending funerals, church services, and festivals—is a strategic effort to embed the school within the community's social network which underscore the boundary spanning and environmental scanning roles of public relations practitioners. The headteacher's visibility and involvement in communal social activities helps in bridging the school and the community- sending the school to the community and bringing the community to the school.
 - *Resource Implication:* This personalized approach reduces environmental uncertainty. By building personal trust, bridging the school and community through the boundary spanning and environmental scanning roles of the headteacher, the school secures a stable flow of goodwill, which is a prerequisite for requesting material support.
 - *Evidence:* An SMC Chairman noted, "Our Headteacher is a good man... We see him as part of us," directly linking the leader's social integration, which is an informal boundary spanning role to the community's willingness to support the school.

- Theme 3: The social media avoidance. The findings indicate that the practice and utilization of social media was characterized by near-total avoidance. Literacy levels in the rural area could be a reason for this but the reason was cited to be a strategic avoidance to protect the reputation of the school. Administrators view digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook as high-risk environments, where unverified rumours or publicly aired grievances can by-pass established conflict-resolution channels and potentially damage the school's reputation

- *Evidence:* As the headteacher of AC noted “When you open these digital spaces, anyone can say anything. A parent can wake up and put a false story about a teacher on the group. Once it is out there, you cannot take it back. We prefer the face-to-face meetings because with social media, it is difficult to control. We want to protect the school's name from unnecessary rumours.”

Research Question 2: How do these branding, public relations and social media practices impact the school’s reputation and its ability to acquire community resources?

The second research question established the direct causal link between the communication strategies identified above and the successful acquisition of tangible and intangible resources.

- Theme 1: Institutional Image as a driver of human capital acquisition.

The findings reveal that reputation, which is a receipt of brand promise is also critical for acquiring human resources (teachers). Academic performance and students discipline define the brand of the schools. In a rural context where posting rejection rates can be high, a school’s brand perceived through its reputation helps attract and retain motivated staff.

- *Resource Implication:* Schools with positive brand equity reduce the "cost" of retaining talent. Teachers are willing to stay in resource-constrained environments if the school offers the professional prestige of academic success and discipline
- *Evidence:* A teacher at AC Memorial School stated, "You want to be at a place where you can be proud of the results," indicating that the school's brand value is a critical factor in labor supply.

- Theme 2: "Headteacher Diplomacy" as a Bridge to Social Capital

Public relations practices, specifically the social integration of the school leader, which constitute the boundary spanning and environmental scanning role of public relations was found to be the primary drivers of community trust thereby imbedding the school in the

social network of the communities. By participating in local social activities, the Headteacher creates a "social contract" that reduces environmental uncertainty.

- Resource Implication: This "Bridging Strategy" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) allows schools to bypass formal bureaucratic delays. When the school needs emergency repairs or teacher accommodation, the Headteacher leverages personal relationships to secure local support.
- Evidence: As one parent stated, "Exactly. Because we see him as one of us, when he asks for cement or roofing sheets, we cannot say no. We trust him." This confirms that PR in rural schools is fundamentally about building the social capital required for resource mobilization.

- Theme 3: The Impact of "Strategic Avoidance" on External Resource Channels

While the schools strategically uses the traditional means of communicating via face-to-face interaction and other traditional means as strategic avoidance of social media to protect the school's local legitimacy, it creates a "resource boundary" that limits the school's reach.

- Resource Implication: The lack of a digital footprint (social media/website) hinders the school's ability to connect with its external Alumni and external NGOs. Consequently, the school remains heavily dependent on the local, often low-income, agrarian economy for support.
- Evidence: Administrators acknowledged that while avoiding social media protect the local reputation of the school, it "geofences" their fundraising efforts, making them entirely dependent on the immediate community. This was indicated by one headteacher, "It is a difficult one, we can't reach out to the world using social media. We know it would help but for fear damaging the reputation of the school we are not using it"

Research Question 3: How do schools' communication efforts influence parental engagement and enrolment in pre-tertiary schools in rural Ghana?

The third dimension examined how schools secure their most vital resource—the student body—and maintain the support of the parents who control that resource.

- Theme 1: The PTA as a formal Resource Maintenance Mechanism.

The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) acts as the primary formal channel of communication between the schools and their communities and also a structure for coupling the school with its environment. When schools communicate effectively beyond just requesting funds parents feel a sense of responsibility. High-quality communication during meetings improves school-community engagements.

- *Resource Implication:* Effective communication during PTA meetings is essential for "resource maintenance"—ensuring parents continue to pay levies and support school policies. Poor communication threatens this supply line.
 - *Evidence:* Parents expressed dissatisfaction when engagement was purely transactional ("listing needs"), suggesting that sustainable resource acquisition requires two-way dialogue rather than just extraction. One parent indicated, “They only call us when they need money. It feels like they are just listing needs. We need desks, we need chalk, pay this levy. They don't ask us about our opinions on the teaching. It shouldn't just be about money”.
- Theme 2: Intergenerational Word-of-Mouth" as the Primary Enrolment Driver.
- The study established that the acquisition of new students (enrolment) is driven by historical reputation rather than active marketing. Enrolment in rural pre-tertiary schools is rarely influenced by modern communication means (digital ads, social media post, print communications etc.). Instead, it is driven by a "Trust-Referral System" fueled by the school's historical communication of its successes

- *Resource Implication:* Student enrolment is the school's lifeline for Capitation Grants and survival. This resource is secured through a "trust-based referral system" where previous outputs (successful graduates) validate the school to new parents.
 - *Evidence:* One parent explained, "My elder brother's children came to this school, and they all passed... So I also brought my son here." This confirms that the school's past performance is the primary asset used to secure future student resources.
- Theme 3: "Headteacher diplomacy" as enrolment driver.

The study found parental school choice as often a communal decision. The Headteacher's visibility in the community which is a boundary spanner role of the school's informal public relations reinforces the school's image as a "safe and disciplined" environment, which is the top priority for rural parents.

- *Evidence:* One parent indicated, "Oh, the relationship is strong. You know, in this community, if the Headteacher isolates himself, he will fail. But this one, he is everywhere. He comes to our funerals, he comes to the festivals. Our Headteacher is a good man... We see him as part of us."

Research Question 4: What challenges do pre-tertiary educational institutions face with communication between the institutions and the community in rural Ghana?

The final inquiry highlights the environmental constraints that hinder efficient communication and, by extension, resource acquisition.

- Theme 1: The Digital Divide as a Resource Barrier

Infrastructural deficits (cost of data, lack of devices) create a barrier to modernizing resource acquisition strategies.

- *Resource Implication:* The inability to use social media limits the school's ability to reach potential donors or alumni outside the immediate geographic vicinity, thereby restricting the pool of potential resources to the local, agrarian economy.

- *Evidence:* Headmasters cited "prohibitive costs" as a barrier, acknowledging that their resource acquisition strategies are geofenced by their lack of digital reach.
- Theme 2: Governance Risks in Digital Spaces.

The reluctance to use platforms like WhatsApp stems from a fear of losing control over the institutional narrative, which could damage legitimacy.

- *Resource Implication:* In Resource Dependence Theory, *legitimacy* is a critical resource. Administrators fear that "uncontrolled negative commentary" on social media could devalue the school's brand, thereby threatening the trust required to secure parental support.
- *Evidence:* The explicit administrative preference for face-to-face interaction ("It is difficult to control") reveals a protective strategy to safeguard the school's reputation from the volatility of digital discourse.

- Theme 4: "Boundary Spanning" Fatigue

The findings shows that the headteacher is the sole "Public Relations Officer," The reliance on personal presence (funerals, church services, festivals) creates immense pressure on school leadership.

- *Sustainability Risk:* If a headteacher is not naturally "social" or "diplomatic," the school-community relationship collapses. There is a lack of institutionalized PR structures to maintain these ties when leadership changes.
- *Resource Implication:* The dependency on a single individual for "Social Capital" makes the school's resource supply line highly unstable.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

This section interprets the study's findings using Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). It explored how rural schools utilize communication strategies not merely for information dissemination, but as essential mechanisms to secure resources and ensure institutional survival.

4.5.1 Academic Performance as a Resource Strategy

The findings regarding educational branding in the Ekumfi District challenge the corporate definitions often found in Western literature. While studies by Ankith et al. (2024) focus on visual identity and digital presence, this study reveals that branding in rural Ghana is pragmatic rather than aesthetic.

Consistent with Oplatka and Nupar (2012), a rural school's "brand" is constructed primarily on academic output (BECE results) and discipline. Through the lens of Resource Dependence Theory, this focus on performance is a strategic signaling mechanism. In an environment where government funding is often insufficient, schools depend on voluntary community contributions. By projecting a brand identity of academic success, schools signal to the community that they are a worthy investment. This secures the legitimacy required to acquire tangible resources, such as labor and building materials, from local stakeholders.

4.5.2 Public Relations as "Headteacher Diplomacy"

The study finds that Public Relations (PR) in rural schools is not a formal administrative function but a personal responsibility of the school leadership, described here as "Headteacher Diplomacy."

Unlike the formal PR models described by Grunig and Hunt (1984), communication in the Ekumfi District relies on the Headmaster's visibility in social rituals, such as funerals and festivals. Theoretically, this behavior represents a bridging strategy to reduce environmental uncertainty. By embedding themselves in the local social fabric, administrators build "social capital." This personal

trust is then leveraged to negotiate for resources or resolve conflicts. The findings suggest that in this context, the school's reputation is inseparable from the personal reputation of the Headmaster.

4.5.3 The Strategic Avoidance of Social Media

A significant finding of this study is the limited use of social media, which contrasts with literature suggesting digital platforms are indispensable for education (Sarder & Mustaqeem, 2024). Schools in the Ekumfi District exhibit a "strategic avoidance" of social media.

Beyond the constraints of the Digital Divide, this avoidance appears to be a rational decision based on the local resource environment. First, the primary resource providers (older community members) are rarely active on digital platforms. Second, administrators perceive social media as a source of uncontrolled risk rather than opportunity. To protect their legitimacy, schools prefer traditional, high-context communication channels—such as word-of-mouth—where they can better control the institutional narrative.

4.5.4 Parents as "Stockholders" of the School

The findings redefine the role of parents in rural education. Unlike in private urban settings where parents are viewed as customers, in the Ekumfi District, they function as "stockholders."

The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) acts as the primary structure connecting the school to its environment. The study indicates that effective communication is vital for resource acquisition and maintenance, ensuring parents continue to support the school during delays in government funding. However, the data shows that engagement declines when communication becomes purely transactional (only requesting funds). This confirms Mukarohmah et al. (2023) assertion that

socio-economic factors influence participation; therefore, effective PR must demonstrate accountability to sustain parental support.

4.5.5 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates that branding, PR, and social media operate under different logics in rural Ghana compared to urban contexts.

- Branding is used for survival signaling worthiness.
- PR is used for social integration (building trust).
- Social Media is often viewed as a liability rather than an asset.

These findings support the central premise of Resource Dependence Theory: organizational behavior is fundamentally shaped by the need to acquire and sustain resources from the immediate environment.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The overarching purpose of this study was to examine the nature, perceptions, and implications of public relations, educational branding, and social media practices within the pre-tertiary education sector of rural Ghana. Focusing specifically on the Ekumfi District, the study sought to understand how schools operating in resource-constrained environments employ communication strategies to secure institutional survival, mobilize resources, and maintain productive relationships with their surrounding communities.

This final chapter synthesizes the major findings emerging from the data analysis. It presents a summary of the key outcomes aligned with the study's objectives, draws conclusions grounded in the Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), and offers actionable recommendations for policymakers, school administrators, and community stakeholders. The chapter concludes by outlining areas for future scholarly inquiry.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The study revealed that, despite lacking formal public relations units or professional marketing infrastructure, rural schools engage in highly intentional communication practices that function as essential survival strategies. The key findings, organized around the research objectives, are summarized below.

5.2.1 The Nature of Rural Educational Branding

The findings indicated that branding in rural pre-tertiary schools differs fundamentally from the corporate-style branding typically associated with urban or private educational institutions. In the Ekumfi District, branding is anchored in what can be described as “Performance Signaling.”

Stakeholders interpret a school's brand predominantly through its academic achievements, especially BECE outcomes, and its record of student discipline. This “performance brand” functions as a community signal of institutional credibility, increasing the likelihood of voluntary community support and validating the school's continued relevance.

5.2.2 Public Relations as “Headteacher Diplomacy”

The study demonstrated that public relations in rural schools is neither formalized nor institutionalized, but rather personalized in the figure of the Headteacher. This practice—termed “Headteacher Diplomacy”—involves the school leader's active participation in community social events such as funerals, festivals, and religious services. Through this presence, the Headteacher cultivates social trust and embeds the school within the local cultural fabric. Consequently, the school's institutional reputation becomes closely linked to the personal integrity and visibility of its leader.

5.2.3 The Strategic Avoidance of Social Media

A significant discovery was the deliberate “Strategic Avoidance” of social media platforms. Although infrastructural limitations—such as data costs and lack of devices—contribute to digital exclusion, administrators also refrain from social media engagement to preserve institutional legitimacy. Concerns over negative rumours, uncontrolled discourse, and governance risks lead schools to rely on high-context, face-to-face communication channels that allow greater message control and risk mitigation.

5.2.4 Impact on Resource Acquisition and Enrolment

Consistent with Resource Dependence Theory, the study confirmed that communication strategies directly influence a school's ability to acquire resources. Schools with a strong performance-based reputation found it easier to secure community labor contributions, financial levies, and other forms of support. Enrolment decisions were driven not by promotional activities but by intergenerational trust networks; parents selected schools based on the documented success of former students within their families or local communities.

5.3 Conclusions

Drawing on the empirical findings and the interpretive lens of Resource Dependence Theory, the study reaches the following conclusions:

1. **Survival Drives Communication Strategy:** In rural Ghana, public relations and branding are not optional enhancements but necessary mechanisms for institutional survival. Rural schools operate as open systems, heavily dependent on their communities for students, infrastructure, and staff retention. Consequently, every communication action is a calculated effort to manage environmental uncertainty and secure essential resources.
2. **Social Capital Operates as a Core Resource:** In contexts where financial resources and governmental support are insufficient, social capital becomes the primary medium of exchange. The headteacher's relational networks and the trust generated through consistent academic performance serve as "currencies" used to mobilize community assistance. Schools that lack strong social capital struggle to meet basic operational needs.
3. **The Digital Divide Produces a Communication Strategy Divide:** National efforts to digitalize education often overlook the distinct realities of rural communities. In the Ekumfi context, social media is not an effective engagement tool because the primary resource providers—parents, elders, and community leaders—are largely outside digital communication spaces. Consequently, rural schools have developed a unique communication logic that privileges physical presence over digital visibility.

5.4 Recommendations

The findings have important implications for educational policy and institutional practice. The following recommendations are proposed:

5.4.1 Recommendations for Policy Makers (Ministry of Education / GES)

Develop Context-Specific Communication Policies: Policies promoting digitalization must be sensitive to the infrastructural disparities across regions. Effective implementation in rural areas requires accompanying support in the form of data packages, devices, and training.

Strengthen Decentralized Resource Support: Given the reliance of rural schools on community contributions, policy frameworks should formally acknowledge and incentivize local participation. Instruments such as matching grants for PTA/SMC-initiated projects can enhance school-community collaboration.

5.4.2 Recommendations for School Administrators

Institutionalize Public Relations Functions: Relying solely on the Headteacher’s personal relationships exposes schools to vulnerability during leadership transitions. Schools should establish communication committees comprising teachers and student representatives to ensure continuity in community engagement.

Engage and Mobilize Alumni Networks: Alumni—particularly those who have achieved academic or professional success—can serve as valuable brand ambassadors and potential resource mobilizers. Schools should systematically track and maintain relationships with their graduates.

Communicate Performance Proactively: Instead of waiting for annual BECE results, schools should communicate incremental achievements (e.g., quiz successes, behavioral records) to maintain a consistent narrative of excellence.

5.4.3 Recommendations for Community Stakeholders (SMC/PTA)

Transition from Passive Observers to Active Partners: Community stakeholders must recognize their strategic role in safeguarding the school’s reputation and supporting its operations. They should mediate conflicts, dispel rumours, and foster unity between parents and school leadership.

Engage in Evidence-Based Advocacy: Using the school’s performance data, SMCs can advocate more effectively for district-level support and additional resources.

5.5 Contributions to Knowledge

This study extends scholarly discussions on educational branding by reframing it in the context of resource scarcity. It introduces the concept of “Survival Branding,” which posits that branding in under-resourced settings serves primarily to secure essential operational resources rather than to compete for market share. The study also enriches the literature on the digital divide, demonstrating that digital exclusion is not merely an infrastructural issue but also a governance and legitimacy concern for rural administrators.

5.6 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although the study provides rich qualitative insights, its single-district case study design limits broad generalization. Future research could include:

- Quantitative Studies: Surveying multiple rural districts to statistically examine the relationship between headteacher visibility and resource acquisition.
- Comparative Regional Studies: Investigating rural schools in other regions—such as the Northern or Ashanti regions—to explore how cultural differences shape public relations practices.
- Student-Centered Research: Examining how limited digital engagement affects students’ digital literacy, tertiary preparedness, and long-term educational outcomes.

5.7 Concluding Remark

Rural schools in Ghana demonstrated remarkable resilience, navigating systemic challenges through creativity, social negotiation, and community embeddedness. While these schools may not adopt the vocabulary of corporate branding, they consistently managed their reputations to

secure survival and legitimacy. By recognizing and supporting these contextually grounded communication practices, stakeholders can empower rural schools to transform resource limitations into opportunities for sustainable educational achievement.

References

- Afandi, M. A., Muadin, A., & Ridani, A. (2025). The Role of Public Relations in Improving the Quality of Education in Schools. *Nidhomiyah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 6(1), 37–52. <https://doi.org/10.38073/nidhomiyah.v6i1.2119>
- Ahmadi, R., Shafei, R., & Ahmadizad, A. (2024). The Effects of Branding on the Renown and Reputation of Educational Institutions: A Study on the Marketing of the Education Industry. *Journal of School Administration*, 12(4), 52–70. https://jsa.uok.ac.ir/article_63531_47e2954ef8d68c4298cf2ac44e26ad36.pdf
- Ankith J, & Sreeramana Aithal. (2024). Importance of Branding and Brand Management in the Indian Education Sector. *Emerging Trends in Management Science 2024*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14562840>
- Ashman, R., Solomon, M. R., & Wolny, J. (2015). An old model for a new age: Consumer decision making in participatory digital culture. *Journal of Customer Behaviour*, 14(2), 127–146. <https://doi.org/10.1362/147539215x14373846805743>
- Ayun Hafifatul Mukarohmah, & Hj. Siti Fatimah. (2023). Implementation of Public Relations Management in Increasing Parental Participation in Elementary Schools. *Jurnal Multidisiplin Indonesia*, 2(11), 3606–3611. <https://doi.org/10.58344/jmi.v2i11.969>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cheng, A., Trivitt, J. R., & Wolf, P. J. (2015). School Choice and the Branding of Milwaukee Private Schools*. *Social Science Quarterly*, 97(2), 362–375. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12222>

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design Choosing among Five Approaches. 4th Edition, SAGE Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks.*
- Daman, R. S. H. (2021). Public Relations Management in Efforts to Improve School Image and Community Participation. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 4(2), 3204–3212. <https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v4i2.2053>
- Damwah, A. K. (2025). *Exploring the Effect of School-Community Relationship on Students' Academic Performance.* 5(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.52589/bjce-3tgv4xzv>
- Faizi, R., El Afia, A., & Chiheb, R. (2013). Exploring the Potential Benefits of Using Social Media in Education. *International Journal of Engineering Pedagogy (IJEP)*, 3(4), 50–53. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijep.v3i4.2836>
- Greenhow, C., Galvin, S. M., & Staudt Willet, K. B. (2019). What Should Be the Role of Social Media in Education? *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 6(2), 178–185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732219865290>
- Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing Public Relations.* Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Kowalski, T. J. (2011). *Public relations in schools* (Fifth Edition). Pearson Education, Inc.
- Lin, H. (2025). The Role of Social Media in Enhancing Collaborative Learning in Online Education. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 51, 65–70. <https://doi.org/10.54097/07fqa170>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 9(4), 289–331. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(85\)90062-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8)
- McLeod, S. (2024, June 18). *Phenomenology In Qualitative Research.* Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/phenomenology-in-qualitative-research.html>

- McLeod, S. (2024, December 12). *Thick Description In Qualitative Research*. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/thick-description.html>
- Mikáčová, L., & Gavlaková, P. (2014). The Role of Public Relations in Branding. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 110(110), 832–840.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.12.928>
- Nickerson, C. (2024). *Interpretivism Paradigm & Research Philosophy*. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/interpretivism-paradigm.html>
- Nurudeen Orunbon, & Adawi Adeola. (2023, May 3). *SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370492082_SCHOOL-COMMUNITY_RELATIONSHIP
- Oplatka, I., & Nupar, I. (2012). The Components and Determinants of School Reputation: Insights from Parents' Voices. *Education and Society*, 30(1), 37–52.
<https://doi.org/10.7459/es/30.1.04>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). Sampling, Qualitative (Purposeful). *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeoss012.pub2>
- Pervin, N., & Mokhtar, M. (2022). *The Interpretivist Research Paradigm: A Subjective Notion of a Social Context*. ResearchGate; Human Resource Management Academic Research Society. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v11-i2/12938>
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. (1978). The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective. *Contemporary Sociology*, 8(4), 612.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2065200>

- Putri Dea Novita, None Amilda, & Nyimas Atika. (2025). Public Relations Strategy in Creating School Branding Through Social Media. *Studia Manageria*, 6(2), 127–140.
<https://doi.org/10.19109/studiamanageria.v6i2.25390>
- Rizkita, K., Dedi Prestiadi, Maisyaroh, Milanitaqwa Asri Pratiwi, & Fitri Wulan Purnama. (2020). Public Relations Techniques in Elementary School. *6th International Conference on Education and Technology (ICET 2020)*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201204.041>
- Sagir, M., Dos, I., & Cetin, R. (2014). Identifying School Reputation. *International J. Soc. Sci. & Education*, 5(1), 2223–4934. <https://ijsse.com/sites/default/files/issues/2014/v4-i5-2014/Paper-17.pdf>
- Sarder, M. A. U., & Mustaqeem, K. M. (2024). The Role of Social Media Marketing in Shaping Educational Institution Branding. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, VIII(IIIS), 4574–4588. <https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2024.803333s>
- Shabina, S., Amit, T. K., & Eram, P. (2024). Focus Group Discussion: An Emerging Qualitative Tool for Educational Research. *International Journal of Research and Review*, 11(9), 302–308. <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20240932>
- Shahbaz, S., Hussain, S., & Hassan, M. ul. (2022). Nexus between Branding of Education and Parental School Choice: Evidence from Islamabad, Pakistan. *Review of Applied Management and Social Sciences*, 5(3), 323–343.
<https://doi.org/10.47067/ramss.v5i3.242>
- Snadrou, D., & Haoucha, M. (2024). Understanding the Crucial Role of Brand Image in the Students' Higher Education Institution Choice: A Review of the Literature of Higher Education Branding. *Journal of Marketing Research and Case Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.5171/2024.224523>

- Sofyan Rofi, & Dahani Kusumawati. (2020). The Effect of School Branding on the Reputation of Islamic Schools. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Community Development (ICCD 2020)*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201017.142>
- Ugwu, C. N., & Hyginus, V. (2023, January). *Qualitative Research*. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367221023_Qualitative_Research
- Valentini, C., Kruckeberg, D., & Starck, K. (2012). Public relations and community: A persistent covenant. *Public Relations Review*, 38(5), 873–879. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.06.001>
- Walid, A., & Malik, Abd. (2023). Increasing Public Interest through School Image Branding through a Trending Approach. *Educazione: Journal of Education and Learning*, 1(1), 41–53. <https://doi.org/10.61987/educazione.v1i1.492>
- Yamin, A. B. (2024). Impact of University Branding on Student Enrollment: Market Trends and Strategic Approaches in Private Higher Education. *Journal of Fareast International University*, 7(1), 49–58. <https://hal.science/hal-04971666>
- Zlatanović-Marković, V., Biljana Nikolić, Stakić, M. M., & Milovan Mitić. (2022). Public relations in the educational system. *Megatrend Revija*, 19(1), 267–282. <https://doi.org/10.5937/megrev2201267z>

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

PREAMBLE & INFORMED CONSENT

(To be read to all participants prior to the commencement of data collection)

Study Title: Exploring the Impact of Educational Branding, Social Media, and Public Relations on Rural Education: A Critical Analysis

Researcher: Eric Asare-Trokpa

Introduction: Good Morning/Afternoon. My name is Eric Asare-Trokpa, a researcher from the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC). I am conducting a study to understand how rural schools communicate with their communities and how this affects the support they receive.

Ethical Statement: Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. All responses will be anonymized. With your permission, I will audio record this session for analysis purposes only.

INSTRUMENT I: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS (HEADTEACHERS)

Rationale: To explore strategic intent, resource negotiation, and governance challenges.

SECTION A: PR & BRANDING PRACTICES (Mapping to RQ1)

Focus: Investigating "Performance Signaling" and "Headteacher Diplomacy"

1. Defining the Brand: In the absence of a marketing department, how do you define the "image" of this school? Is it built on sports, discipline, or academic results?

2. Headteacher Diplomacy: How do you view your personal role in the community? Do you consider attending local funerals, festivals, or church harvests as part of your official duties? Why?
3. Community Signaling: When you speak to community elders, what specific achievements do you mention to prove the school is doing well?

SECTION B: IMPACT ON RESOURCES & REPUTATION (Mapping to RQ2)

Focus: Investigating Academic Reputation as Currency

4. Resource Negotiation: Does the school's performance in the BECE affect how willing the community is to provide material support (e.g., cement, communal labor)?
5. Legitimacy: Have you ever experienced a time when a drop in discipline or performance made it difficult to ask the community for help?
6. Staffing: Does the school's reputation help in retaining teachers who might otherwise want to leave for the city?

SECTION C: ENROLMENT & ENGAGEMENT (Mapping to RQ3)

Focus: Investigating Parental "Stockholder" Status

7. Parental Relations: Do you view parents merely as clients, or as partners who hold a stake in the school's survival?
8. Retention: How do you communicate with parents to ensure they continue paying levies or supporting the school during difficult economic times?

SECTION D: CHALLENGES & SOCIAL MEDIA (Mapping to RQ4)

Focus: Investigating "Strategic Avoidance" and the Digital Divide

9. Strategic Avoidance: We observe limited official use of social media (Facebook/WhatsApp) by the school. Is this a deliberate choice? If so, what are you protecting the school from?

10. Governance Risks: Are you concerned that using social media might lead to uncontrolled rumours or negative comments that could damage the school's name? 11. Infrastructure: To what extent do data costs and lack of devices hinder your ability to communicate digitally?

INSTRUMENT II: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Rationale: To explore enrolment drivers and the nature of "Stockholder" engagement.

SECTION A: ENROLMENT DECISIONS (Mapping to RQ3)

Focus: Investigating "Intergenerational Word-of-Mouth"

1. Selection Factors: Why did you choose this specific school for your child? Was it based on the school's current adverts, or the history of the school?
2. Referral Networks: Did the experience of a family member (e.g., an older child or relative) attending this school influence your decision?
3. Brand Perception (RQ1): When you hear the name of this school in town, what is the first thing that comes to mind? (e.g., "Strict," "Smart," "Old").

SECTION B: RESOURCE SUPPORT (Mapping to RQ2)

Focus: Investigating Voluntary Contributions

4. Motivation to Give: What motivates you to pay PTA levies or contribute cement to the school? Is it the Headteacher's behavior or the students' results?
5. Withholding Support: What would the school have to do wrong for you to stop supporting them or remove your child?

SECTION C: COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES (Mapping to RQ4)

Focus: Investigating the Digital Divide from the Parent's view

6. Preferred Channels: How do you prefer the school to send you messages? (Letters, Town Crier, Church announcements, or WhatsApp?)

7. Digital Barriers: If the school sent reports via WhatsApp or email, would that be easy or difficult for you to access?

INSTRUMENT III: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Rationale: To assess internal brand identity and staff retention factors.

SECTION A: BRAND PERCEPTION (Mapping to RQ1)

1. Identity: How do you describe this school to your colleagues in other districts?
2. Ambassadorship: Do you feel it is your duty to "sell" the school to parents in the community?

SECTION B: IMPACT ON RESOURCES (HUMAN CAPITAL) (Mapping to RQ2)

3. Retention: Does the school's reputation for academic performance or discipline make you more willing to stay teaching here, despite the rural challenges?
4. Community Respect: How does the community treat you as a teacher of *this* specific school? Does the school's image affect your social standing?

SECTION C: CHALLENGES (Mapping to RQ4)

5. Rumour Management: How does the school handle gossip or rumours? Do you feel you have the right information to correct false stories in town?

INSTRUMENT IV: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS (SMC/PTA EXECUTIVES)

Rationale: To understand the mechanism of resource acquisition and community coupling.

SECTION A: PRACTICES & PERCEPTIONS (Mapping to RQ1)

1. Leadership Evaluation: How do you evaluate if the Headteacher is doing a good job regarding public relations? Is it about their letters, or their presence at community gatherings?

SECTION B: RESOURCE ACQUISITION (Mapping to RQ2)

2. The "Ask": When the school needs major help (e.g., a new block), how is that negotiated? Does the school's past performance determine the community's answer?

SECTION C: CHALLENGES (Mapping to RQ4)

3. Conflict: What are the biggest challenges in keeping the peace between the town and the school?

APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPTS OF DATA COLLECTION (EXCERPTS)

Note: *The following transcripts represent key excerpts from the fieldwork conducted in the Ekumfi District. Participant names and school identities have been anonymized to match the pseudonyms used in Chapter Four (e.g., AC Memorial School, AB Junior High).*

TRANSCRIPT 1: INTERVIEW WITH HEADTEACHER (AC MEMORIAL SCHOOL)

Participant Code: HEAD-AC (Headteacher) Context: *Discussion regarding Branding and Social Media usage.*

Interviewer: So, Sir, looking at the private schools in the cities, they often use logos, colours, and brochures to market themselves. In this rural setting, how do you handle your branding?

HEAD-AC: You see, here in Ekumfi, the parents are not interested in colourful brochures or nice logos. They are farmers and traders; they want value for their toil. We don't do posters. Our reputation is our BECE performance... the results speak for us. If the results are good, the brand is good. If the results are bad, no amount of painting the walls will bring the students.

Interviewer: That is very clear. Now, moving to communication channels. I noticed you don't use a general WhatsApp platform for the PTA. Is that due to network issues?

HEAD-AC: The network is part of it—sometimes the costs are prohibitive costs for the parents. But honestly, it is a management decision.

Interviewer: How so?

HEAD-AC: When you open these digital spaces, anyone can say anything. A parent can wake up and put a false story about a teacher on the group. Once it is out there, you cannot take it back. We prefer the face-to-face meetings because, with social media, it is difficult to control. We want to protect the school's name from unnecessary rumours.

Interviewer: How do you connect with the global world in this digital age to acquire resources in for under-resourced school like yours?

HEAD-AC: It is a difficult one, we can't reach out to the world using social media. We know it would help but for fear damaging the reputation of the school we are not using it.

TRANSCRIPT 2: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH PARENTS

Participants: Mixed group of parents

Context: Discussion on Enrolment Decisions and Headteacher Relations.

Interviewer: I want to ask about how you chose this school. There is a private school nearby, and another government school in the next town. Why did you bring your child here?

Parent 3 (Female): For me, I didn't look at the building. I looked at the history. My elder brother's children came to this school, and they all passed... So I also brought my son here. It is a family tradition of trust. We know this school produces graduates who go to secondary school.

Interviewer: So the history matters. Now, looking at the leadership, how is your relationship with the administration?

Parent 4: Oh, the relationship is strong. You know, in this community, if the Headteacher isolates himself, he will fail. But this one, he is everywhere. He comes to our funerals, he comes to the festivals. Our Headteacher is a good man... We see him as part of us.

Interviewer: Does that make you want to help the school?

Parent 4: Exactly. Because we see him as one of us, when he asks for cement or roofing sheets, we cannot say no. We trust him.

Parent 2 (Male): (Interjects) But sometimes, the communication at the PTA meetings worries me.

Interviewer: How so?

Parent 2: "They only call us when they need money. It feels like they are just listing needs. "We need desks, we need chalk, pay this levy." They don't ask us about our opinions on the teaching. It shouldn't just be about money".

TRANSCRIPT 3: INTERVIEW WITH TEACHING STAFF

Participant Code: TCH-02 (Teacher, AC Memorial School) Context:

Discussion on Staff Retention and School Image.

Interviewer: As a professional teacher, you could have asked for a transfer to a bigger town or maybe Cape Coast. What keeps you teaching here in Ekumfi?

TCH-02: It is not easy, I will admit. The resources are not there like in the city. But there is satisfaction here. When you walk in town, people respect you because they know the school is performing.

Interviewer: So the school's performance affects you personally?

TCH-02: Definitely. It motivates us to stay. As a teacher, you want to be at a place where you can be proud of the results. When the BECE results come and your students get single aggregates, you feel good. You feel that your labor is not in vain. That prestige keeps us here.

TRANSCRIPT 4: INTERVIEW WITH STUDENT

Participant Code: STU-04 (Final Year Student) Context: *Discussion on Digital Habits.*

Interviewer: Do you use social media? Maybe Facebook or TikTok?

STU-04: I use my mother's phone sometimes for TikTok, but not for school things.

Interviewer: Does the school have a page where you can see pictures of events?

STU-04: No, Sir. If we want to know something, the Headmaster announces it at assembly. Or sometimes we hear it from the town.

Interviewer: Do you wish the school was on social media?

STU-04: Ideally, yes. But the teachers say it causes trouble. And also, buying data is hard. So we just rely on what the teachers tell us