



Development of public relations research in Ghana: A systematic review

Noel Nutsugah^{*,1}, Albert Anani-Bossman²

Department of Public Relations, Ghana Institute of Journalism, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Even though the extant literature has pointed to the steady growth of public relations research in different contexts, the developing economy context continues to be marginalised in terms of scholarship, theory development and, consequently, the practice of the discipline. This has necessitated calls from scholars to document research in the discipline to trigger future research agendas. This study was therefore undertaken to scientifically synthesise and analyze 26 peer-reviewed public relations studies in Ghana, which were published over a period of 10 years (2012–2021) to document the dominant issues, gaps, and future research avenues. Through a systematic review, the study found that there is an over-concentration on themes such as CSR and CSR communication, public relations within higher education institutions, and dialogic public relations at the expense of other key subject areas within the discipline. Methodologically, 65% of the studies reviewed have employed the qualitative methodology as opposed to the quantitative and mixed-method approaches, thereby reducing the ability to extrapolate their findings to other populations. The study has thoroughly discussed the implications for public relations scholarship, theory development and practice within Ghana and other emerging contexts.

1. Introduction

Extant literature has pointed to the development of public relations scholarship and practice in diverse cultures. Nonetheless, scholars have recognised the need for more documentation on the practice in under-represented parts of the world (Molleda et al., 2017). Despite over 50 years of public relations practice (Skinner, 2013), Africa remains one of the most underrepresented continents regarding public relations scholarship. Akpabio (2009) suggests that the lack of visibility of public relations practice and scholarship makes Africa's contribution to the discipline mostly unrecognised. Consequently, academics from other disciplines rush to fill the void by offering an outsider's perspective on the practice. Recent studies (Anani-Bossman, 2021b; Ngondo & Klyueva, 2023) have also demonstrated the lack of knowledge and understanding regarding public relations in Africa, despite more than 50 years of practice (Skinner, 2013). Scholars such as Sriramesh et al. (2013) have argued for an increase in the body of knowledge of public relations from different socio-cultural environments. In other words, public relations must be contextualised within a specific region or country to understand how the profession is practised in different

regions with unique political, social and economic realities (Thelen, 2021). Sriramesh and Vercic (2009) aver that public relations can benefit from descriptive reports of how the profession is practised in individual countries and predictions of how the profession can best be practised in other environments.

Even though the number of studies on public relations is growing, albeit gradually, there is currently no compilation of public relations research in Ghana that provides a comprehensive overview of the scholarship in the discipline. As a result, it is difficult to tell how public relations research in Ghana has progressed over the period. Most research studies on global public relations tend to underrepresent Africa or exclude it altogether. For instance, Ki and Ye (2017) investigated the progress of public relations research from 2001 to 2014 and found that Africa had only 11 publications compared to 69 from Asia, 64 from North America and 45 from Europe. Of those in Africa, six were from South Africa, two from Egypt, and Angola, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia had one each, with none coming from Ghana. Again, Moss et al. (2017) examined the structure of public relations departments, where they interviewed 26 chief communication officers across five continents. Only one was from Africa, with the others being

* Correspondence to: Department of Public Relations, Ghana Institute of Journalism, University of Media, Arts and Communication. No. 5 Alboran Street, South Legon (Dzorwulu Industrial Area), Ghana.

E-mail addresses: noel.nutsugah@gij.edu.gh (N. Nutsugah), albert.anani-bossman@gij.edu.gh (A. Anani-Bossman).

¹ ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0792-6650>

² ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3886-6403>

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from Europe (7), Latin America (7), North America (6), and Asia (3). Of the 36 countries with public relations associations identified by Yang and Taylor (2014) in their study, only South Africa made a list from Africa. This trend is a testament to the underrepresentation or exclusion of African countries in the global discussion of public relations.

To help address this gap, there is a need to highlight major patterns, gaps, and research opportunities in the existing literature to trigger the appropriate future scholarly response. Therefore, this study systematically analyses peer-reviewed articles published between 2012 and 2021 (a 10-year period). A systematic analysis of public relations research in Ghana is useful in helping public relations scholars identify directions for future studies to expand the body of knowledge in Ghana. As Tomaseello (2001) pointed out, evaluating published articles discloses researchers' diverse methodologies and subjects. Other scholars (e.g. Chaffee & Berger, 1987; Shoemaker et al., 2004) also suggest that scientific research should not only provide new information but also codify and organise data gathered from various sources by generations of researchers to aid in the development of the field's knowledge base.

2. Literature review

2.1. Public relations in Ghana

The development of public relations in Ghana, and much of Sub-Saharan Africa, is traced to the British Colonial Administration (Amoakohene, 2015). Public relations was used to disseminate information to the citizens and develop relationships with community and opinion leaders who had much influence at the time (Blankson, 2009). To bridge the communication gap between the colonial government and the people, the Department of Information Services was set up in 1949 (this was later changed to Information Services Department (ISD), a name it still goes by). After Ghana's independence in 1957, the first president of Ghana, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, employed the services of several journalists as information officers. The ISD served to promote the government's agenda and garner the support of the citizens of the newly independent nation. The Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) was later established in 1959 to train communication professionals. Public relations was not highly regarded as a profession during this period (Amoakohene, 2015). The period between 1966 and 1992 was primarily characterised by political instability due to several military coups and dictatorships. 1992 ushered in a new era of political dispensation when Ghana finally took the path of democracy. Since then, the country has been largely peaceful, with several elections and peaceful transitions from one government to another. Socio-economic development has also improved tremendously, with several multinationals currently operating in the country. Ghana is also host to several international institutions, including the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) secretariat.

All these developments have influenced the growth of the public relations industry in Ghana. Previously, the School of Communication Studies (now the Department of Communication Studies) of the University of Ghana was the only entity offering a master's course in public relations. However, the last two decades have seen public relations education flourishing, with several public and private universities running public relations courses at the diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The Institute of Public Relations (IPR, Ghana) has also been making efforts to promote professionalism among practitioners, improve the image of public relations in the country, and set standards for public relations practice in Ghana (Blankson, 2009). The association currently has a membership of over 1500. Many Ghanaian public relations practitioners occupy high positions within their organisations and play key roles in developing their organisations and society (Anani-Bossman, 2020a).

The onset of globalisation has also made it possible for the industry to grow further. Despite the positive outlook, public relations in Ghana still suffers from many challenges, including negative perceptions about

the profession, lack of understanding about the value of the profession by management and the placement of the public relations department under other functions such as marketing and human resource (Anani-Bossman, 2020a), as well as access to quality communication infrastructure, which, as Skinner (2013) and Rensburg (2013) noted, is an African problem. Regardless of the challenges, Wu and Baah-Boakye (2009) acknowledge that public relations is growing in Ghana, a position corroborated by other research works (e.g. Kwansah-Aidoo, 2008; Anani-Bossman, 2021b).

Given this, it is important that at this stage of the growth of public relations in Ghana, both in terms of scholarship and practice, a thorough assessment and analysis of the prevailing literature is done to highlight and amplify the existing gaps and deficiencies to engender future scholarship. This way, the appropriate areas of concern can be addressed by future research to drive the practice of the profession in Ghana.

2.2. Trend studies in public relations

Efforts have been made over the years to examine the state of public relations to gain insight into the state of the field. These studies fall into two broad categories: a) analysis of specific topics and b) analysis of the state of the field. The second category of studies examines the success of public relations research to provide a macro-level direction for future study (Lee & Yue, 2020). General evaluation in public relations has discovered a limited but growing concentration on theory building. For example, while Ferguson (2018) showed that only 4% of articles examined contributed to theory building, follow-up research by Sallot et al. (2003), nearly two decades later, found that the percentage had increased to 20%. Botan and Taylor (2004) traced the theoretical development of public relations and concluded that public relations theories were based on functional and co-creational categories. They surmised that the most significant shift in the field's scholarship over the last two decades has been from a functional to a co-creational approach. Pasadeos et al. (1999), after a bibliometric examination of public relations scholarship from 1990 to 1995, suggested the need for increased diversity in public relations topics and paradigms. Similarly, Ki et al. (2019) reviewed the most cited studies from the 2000s and the 1990s and concluded that public relations research has become theory-driven within that period.

Regarding topics, several studies have discovered a significant amount of research interest, including public relations professionalism (Pasadeos et al., 1999; Yang & Taylor, 2014), the status of organisational-public relationship (OPR) (Ki & Shin, 2006; Cheng, 2018), crisis communication (An & Cheng, 2010), corporate social responsibility (Ho Lee, 2017), online public relations research (Ye & KI, 2012), the status of social media public relations research (Ju et al., 2021), dialogue and digital dialogic research (Morehouse & Saffer, 2018), internal communication (Lee & Yue, 2020), and public engagement (Jelen-Sanchez, 2017). Whereas some studies have identified the dominance of qualitative techniques, others have found a dominance of quantitative approaches in specific areas. For instance, An and Cheng (2010), in their analysis of over three decades of published articles on crisis communication, found that most of the research employed qualitative techniques, with the quantitative technique being more of a recent approach. On the other hand, Ye and Ki (2012) found a dominance of the quantitative approach in the research of online public relations.

In assessing the status of research on global public relations from 2001 to 2004, Ki and Ye (2017) found the domination of quantitative methods (n = 77, 47%). However, there was no significant difference between the use of the qualitative approach (n = 54, 27.6%) and critical methods (n = 42, 25.8%). In Latin America, Thelen (2021) found a balanced use of quantitative (n = 42, 38.5%) and qualitative (n = 38, 34.9%) research methods. Although quantitative and qualitative methods were used more than mixed methods, the author found a growth in the use of mixed-method.

Although the above review has provided an understanding of the

status and future direction of public relations globally, there is limited information on the development of public relations research in Africa and Ghana in particular. The current study, therefore, aims to contribute to the literature. The following research questions will therefore guide the study:

RQ1: What is the current status of public relations scholarship addressing Ghana in peer-reviewed journals?

RQ2: What are the publication distribution per year, journal distribution per year, dominant industries, dominant methodologies, dominant theories, and dominant themes addressing public relations research in Ghana in peer-reviewed journals?

RQ3: What are the major gaps and future research avenues addressing public relations research in Ghana in peer-reviewed journals?

3. Methodology

The study followed the systematic review approach due to its objective of scientifically synthesising research in public relations within the Ghanaian context. As argued by Volk (2016), systematic reviews allow the researcher to go beyond their subjectivity in gathering scholarly resources. Again, Hayhoe (2020) argued that the systematic review provides a researcher with an avenue for synthesising research in a rigorous and transparent manner. This increases the study’s validity and can become easily reproducible. This approach is also consistent with that of researchers such as Ao and Huang (2019), Volk (2016), and Wang et al. (2021).

3.1. Scope of the review

The scope of the review explains the parameters within which resources were collected for the review. For this study, the scope was predetermined based on the origin and credibility of the resources, the language, the year, and the databases in which they were published.

3.1.1. Origin and credibility

Based on the focus of this study which is to sample and synthesise research works done in the field of public relations within the Ghanaian context, only articles that collected data from subjects in Ghana and self-identified as falling within the broad public relations discipline were utilised. Subject areas such as community relations, corporate social responsibility, ethics in public relations, reputation management, corporate communication, and digital public relations, among other allied communication disciplines, were chosen. Articles with Ghanaian authors but collected data outside the jurisdiction of Ghana were judged as not focusing on the Ghanaian context and were excluded as a result. Likewise, studies done by authors who are not Ghanaians but conducted research within Ghana were included.

Again, for academic rigour, the researchers focused on the credibility of the resources under review. As such, the scope of the review was only limited to peer-reviewed journal articles due to their guaranteed quality and reliability. This is partly owing to the thoroughness, and objectivity reviewers take them through before they are accepted for publication (Lee et al., 2012). As such, grey resources such as dissertations, conference posters, case studies, and executive summaries were excluded.

3.1.2. Language

To satisfy our primary target readers fully and based on the researchers’ language capabilities, the scope of the articles selected was limited to English language articles only. Any resource that was not published in the English language but has collected data from Ghana and made public relations its primary focus, even though falling within the scope of this study, was excluded based on language. This criterion is consistent with that of Volk (2016) and Odoom et al. (2017).

3.1.3. Year

Another issue of utmost concern to the researchers was the age of the resources. Even though there is no universally accepted age of resources that should be used for a review, typically, a 10-year period suffices in most instances (Thomson, 2013). As a result, the scope of the review was limited to articles published from 2012 to 2021.

3.1.4. Database

The search was limited to only academic search engines, specifically Science Direct, Emerald, Sage Journals, JStor, and Google Scholar. This guaranteed that the resources were within the scope of scholarly journals.

3.2. Approach to literature search

The search methodology followed the propositions of Fatehi et al. (2013), who asserted that to scan databases successfully, researchers could input keywords relating to their scope and objectives and perform a search. Again, they suggested that researchers could apply exclusion and inclusion criteria and other advanced search mechanisms to reduce the resources to fit the search purposes. In consonance with these thoughts, this study searched for resources using a combination of the following keywords: public relations in Ghana OR corporate communication in Ghana OR reputation management in Ghana OR communication in Ghana. The search of these keywords on all the above databases led to a cumulative total of 76 resources popping up. After applying filters such as “articles”, “year range (2012 – 2021)”, and “English language”, the resources dropped to 36. The 36 articles were manually checked to ensure that they had made public relations their primary focus and were conducted in the Ghanaian context. Again, some duplications were detected because the resources were sourced from multiple databases. These duplications were deleted, thereby further reducing the number of resources for the review to 26 articles. The 26 articles eventually formed the basis for our review analysis. Fig. 1 below gives a pictorial overview of the exclusion and inclusion processes.

4. Findings

4.1. Publication distribution per year

One of the findings of this study is the distribution of public relations research in Ghana across the ten years under review. Fig. 2 below shows a lack of consistency regarding the number of publications per year. For example, the years 2012 (n = 1, 3.8%), 2013 (n = 1, 3.8%), 2016 (n = 1, 3.8%), 2018 (n = 1, 3.8%) and 2019 (n = 1, 3.8%) witnessed the lowest number of publications. There were slight improvements in 2014 (n = 3, 11.5%), 2017 (n = 3, 11.5%), and 2020 (n = 4, 15.3). The

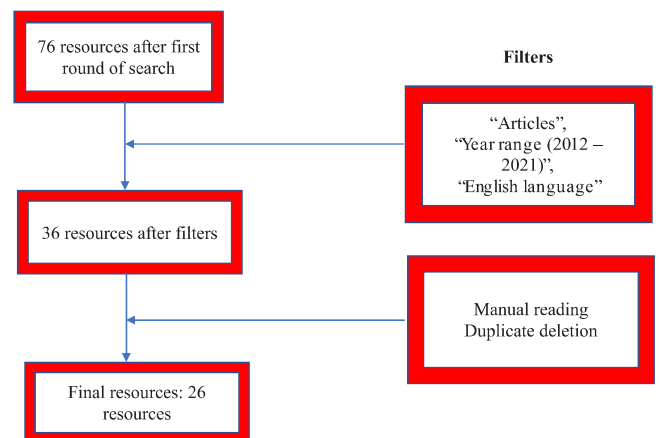


Fig. 1. (Inclusion and exclusion processes).

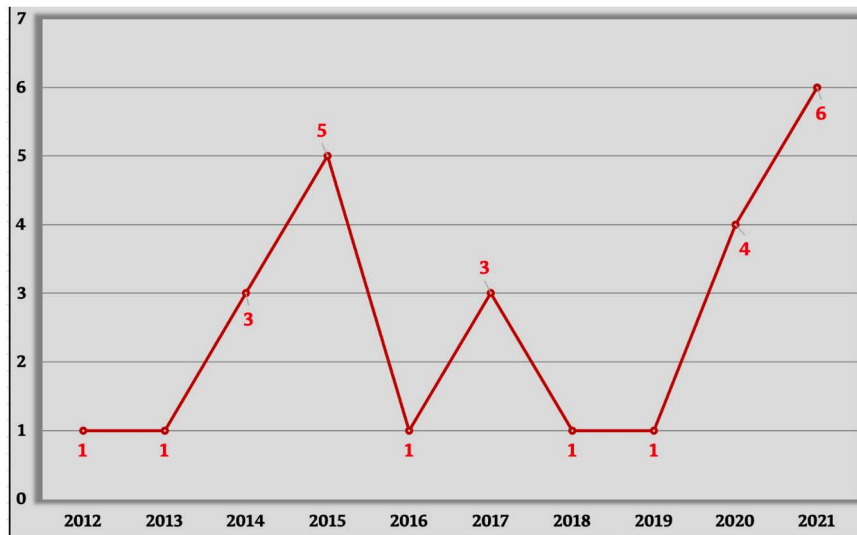


Fig. 2. (Publication distribution per year).

highest number of publications was recorded in 2015 (n = 5, 19.2%) and 2021 (n = 6, 23%). There is no specific trend identified in the yearly distribution, except to say that from the year 2020, there has been exponential growth in public relations studies.

4.2. Journal distributions per year

This section discusses the major journals that published public relations research in Ghana over the ten years under review. This is important because it will help future researchers to easily identify journals, their scope, and interest, as well as why they are interested in public relations research, to ease the publication process. In all, 21 different journals account for the 26 publications under review. Most publications were found in the following journals: *Communicare*, *Corporate Reputation Review*, *Information Development*, *International Journal of ICT and Management*, and *Journal of Communication Management*. The five journals have published 10 of the 26 articles under review. The years in which they made the most and least publications are also shown in Fig. 3 below.

4.3. Dominant industries

Another point of focus is the industries in which public relations research in Ghana has been conducted. This is important for future researchers because it indicates the industries that have received less scholarly attention and provides justifications for future research in those areas. The results show that studies that have gathered data across multiple industries (Abugre & Nyuur, 2015; Anani-Bossman & Bruce, 2021; Anani-Bossman & Mudzanani, 2021; Anani-Bossman & Tella, 2017; Anani-Bossman, 2020b; Anani-Bossman, 2021a; Dornyo, 2014; Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2014) have dominated the research. They make up eight (30.8%) of the 26 articles. Again, the Education and Finance industries are the most studied single industries. Each of the two industries constitutes 23% of the 26 articles under review. Others, such as the Telecommunication and Insurance sectors, had two (2 each). However, the least studied single industry is Oil and Gas and the Media with one (1 each).

Ser.	Journals	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
1	Communicare						*				*	2
2	Corporate Reputation Review									*	*	2
3	Information Development			*	*							2
4	International Journal of ICT and Management			*	*							2
5	Journal of Communication Management					*		*				2
6	Africa Development									*		1
7	Afro-Asian Journal of Social Sciences				*							1
8	China Media Research			*								1
9	Corporate Communications: An International Journal									*		1
10	Covenant Journal of Communication									*		1
11	Globus		*									1
12	International Journal of Bank Marketing	*										1
13	International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management								*			1
14	Journal of Consumer Marketing										*	1
15	Journal of Development and Communication Studies										*	1
16	Journal of Global Responsibility						*					1
17	Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society						*					1
18	Marketing Communications in Emerging Economies										*	1
19	Public Relations Inquiry										*	1
20	Social Responsibility Journal				*							1
21	New Media and Mass Communication				*							1
Grand Total		1	1	3	5	1	3	1	1	4	6	26

Fig. 3. (Journal distribution per year).

4.4. Dominant methodological approaches

A discussion on methodology is important to every meaningful review because it helps future researchers to understand the means through which previous studies have gathered and analysed data, thereby establishing methodological gaps that their research can fill. For this purpose, this study unravelled the dominant methodologies underpinning public relations research in Ghana. The result shows a dominance of the qualitative research method. This is reflected in 17 (65%) of the 26 articles. This is followed by quantitative research (23%) and the mixed-method approach (11.5%).

4.5. Dominant concepts and theories

Another issue of utmost interest was the dominant theories or concepts that undergirded research in Ghana’s public relations. Overall, 8 (30.8%) of the 26 articles neither used nor specifically mentioned any theory or concept. However, the most dominant theory that underpinned research in public relations in Ghana is the Excellence Theory (n = 8, 30.8%), followed by the Dialogic Communication Theory (n = 3, 11.5%) and the Stakeholder Engagement Theory (n = 2, 7.7%). Even though theories such as the Social Exchange Theory, PR Roles Theory, and the Signalling Theory were utilised, they were relatively marginalised. Fig. 4.

4.6. Dominant themes

A thematic analysis was used to determine the major themes from the articles reviewed. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and CSR Communication (Abugre & Nyuur, 2015; Afiuc et al., 2021; Appiah et al., 2016; Boateng & Abdul-Hamid, 2017; Kpinpuo & Tuokuu, 2017) turned out to be the dominant research themes, followed by Educational PR (Aikins & Adu-Oppong, 2015; Dornyo & Adiku, 2015; Narteh et al., 2013), and Dialogic Communication (Hinson et al., 2012; Hinson et al., 2014; Ibrahim et al., 2015). Digital PR (Andoh-Quainoo & Annor-Antwi, 2015; Dornyo, 2014), Corporate Reputation (Anani-Bossman, 2020; Narteh & Braimah, 2019), as well as PR and Globalization (Anani-Bossman & Bruce, 2021; Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2014). Other themes such as PR Education (Thompson, 2018), Crisis Communication (Tella et al., 2020), and Strategic PR Management (Anani-Bossman, 2021a) have received relatively minimal attention within the literature, even though they form very important components of the PR discipline. For this review, attention will be given to only the dominant themes.

4.6.1. CSR and CSR communication

Afiuc et al. (2021) conducted a study that explored CSR’s

implications on customer retention in the telecommunication industry. The justification is that when coordinated well, CSR portrays businesses as law-abiding and ethical and may affect customer retention. The study found that CSR had a direct and positive correlation with the corporate image of the organisation engaging in it, and customers were more likely to be retained as a result.

Kpinpuo and Tuokuu (2017) also conducted a study that sought to examine the implementation of Tullow Ghana’s CSR strategy and its effects on their beneficiary fishing communities. Through a qualitative inquiry, they found a lack of congruity between what is captured in Tullow Ghana’s CSR reports and the beneficiary communities’ experiences. Whereas Tullow Ghana’s CSR reports show a considerable positive impact in these fishing communities, the beneficiaries lament the lack of basic social amenities and stakeholder engagement. The study concluded that Tullow Ghana must deploy more inclusive community strategies to implement CSR for an improved relationship with the beneficiary communities.

On CSR communication, Abugre and Nyuur (2015) sought to explore organisations’ commitment to CSR and their dominant CSR activities. The study also sought to explore the communication channels these organisations deployed to communicate their CSR activities to various stakeholders. Through a quantitative methodology, the study found that even though many organisations were making efforts to engage in CSR activities, these activities were largely limited to philanthropic CSR only, marginalising other important CSR aspects. The study also found that organisations largely relied on annual reports, project engagement and the media to communicate with key stakeholders on their CSR activities. Similarly, Boateng and Abdul-Hamid (2017) found that organisations in Ghana deployed company websites and other digital platforms to communicate their CSR activities. During the communication, they deployed impression management strategies such as assertive and boasting impression management.

Again, Appiah et al. (2016) explored the factors that determine how companies within the insurance industry report their CSR activities online. They concluded that factors such as the age, origin, and size of the firm determine the CSR reporting activities of firms within the insurance industry in Ghana.

4.6.2. Educational PR

Educational PR explains the practice of public relations within educational institutions (Veena et al., 2012) to boost the image and overall outlook in the eyes of the publics. Aikins and Adu-Oppong (2015) conducted a study to explore the extent to which public relations was utilised to enhance and project the image of the University of Education, Winneba, one of the leading public universities in Ghana. The study employed the qualitative research approach and solicited

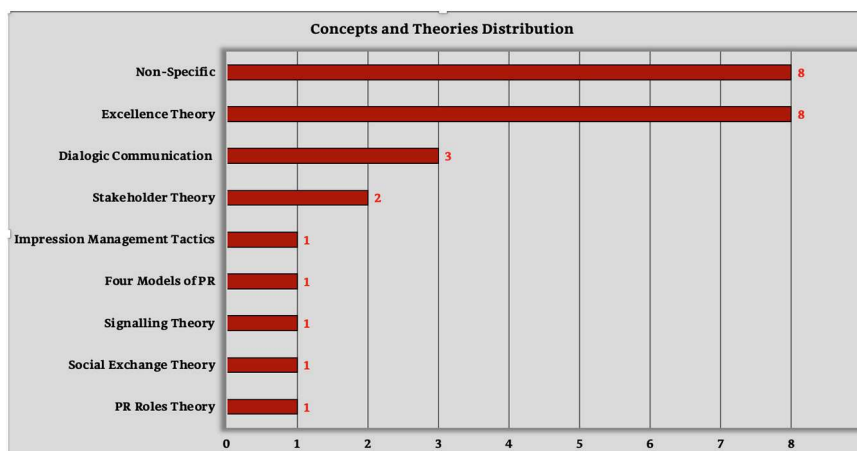


Fig. 4. (Dominant industries).

responses from selected university staff. The findings show that the public relations department was poorly resourced, and some of the staff at the department were not adequately trained in the discipline. In effect, their activities were hampered. The study also established that the public relations head was not within management and was rarely involved in any managerial and strategic decision-making. This is inconsistent with the generic principles of the Excellence Theory by Dozier et al. (2013), who argue that excellent public relations practice can only be achieved if the public relations lead is situated within management (dominant coalition). That way, they can keep an eye on and contribute to the overall business strategy. The study concluded that for the university to maximise the utility of the public relations department, it ought to strategically resource it and offer training opportunities to its staff to attain their objective of propagating the vision and mission of the university.

In a similar study, Dornyo and Adiku (2015) examined public relations practices in two private universities in Ghana (Valley View University and Islamic University College) through the lens of the Excellence Theory. The study employed in-depth interviews and collected data from the public relations practitioners in the universities on how they manage public relations, the nature of their practice and the kinds of roles they perform. They found that public relations practice within the universities was not driven by any strategy. Again, the study discovered that media relations was the most dominant public relations practice, making the departments overly reliant on media publications rather than strategic overall public relations management. These findings were somewhat consistent with those of Aikins and Adu-Oppong (2015) because, in both instances, “excellence” as described in the Excellence Theory was non-existent.

Narteh et al. (2013) also conducted a study to examine the public relations practices within three private universities in Ghana. Employing in-depth interviews, the study investigated how public relations roles were performed in these universities and the effect of that on the perception and image of these universities. Consistent with the findings of Aikins and Adu-Oppong (2015), Narteh et al. (2013) found that the public relations roles were not effectively performed because of logistical constraints and a lack of personnel training. The study also found that there were no public relations representatives on the university governing councils of the three universities. These councils are the highest decision-making bodies within the universities, and the absence of public relations representatives implies that they had no input into strategic decisions of the university, a phenomenon that impedes the practice.

4.6.3. Dialogic communication

Dialogic communication, as opined by Kent and Taylor (1998), is said to occur when parties engage in ethical, genuine, and honest communication with each other. This concept has become the centre of attention for many public relations scholars (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2018; Kent, 2017; Toledano, 2018) as it hinges on ethics and genuineness toward stakeholders within any communication frame. Hinson et al. (2012) conducted a study to examine the dialogic nature of the websites of selected banks in Ghana. The study was underpinned by the dialogic communication framework and gathered data through quantitative content analysis. They discovered that most of the banks under review had many of the dialogic features on their websites, making them highly dialogic. However, the study found that the principle of return visit was largely absent on the websites studied. The principle of return visit looks at the willingness of website visitors to return to the website because information on the website is updated frequently and consistently.

Similarly, Hinson et al. (2014) conducted a study on insurance companies in Ghana and found that they incorporated dialogic communication principles in their website to a large extent. Again, the principle of the dialogic loop was the most profound. Moreover, many local insurance companies had more dialogic websites than their foreign

counterparts operating in Ghana.

A study by Ibrahim et al. (2015) on the websites of selected universities in Ghana to explore their use of dialogic features to interact with key stakeholders found that many of the universities had websites that incorporated dialogic features to a very large extent. They revealed a preponderance of the principle of the dialogic loop, which is consistent with the findings of Hinson et al. (2012). The study, however, found a deficiency in the principle of return visit.

4.6.4. Digital PR

Digital public relations explains how digital tools and computer-mediated communication are deployed in public relations. This has become an important conversation as many organisations seek to change and democratise how they interact with the publics (Cornelissen, 2020; Lattimore et al., 2012). As such, research in this area is trendy and important for the discipline.

Andoh-Quainoo and Annor-Antwi (2015) investigated how businesses in Ghana use social media as a public relations tool to engage and interact with their existing and potential customers. The study used content analysis and mined data from four businesses that were purposively sampled from the financial sector. Results showed that despite its frequent usage by practitioners, social media was mostly premised on one-way communication. This means that the businesses only made posts and paid little attention to replying to comments. Based on the findings, the authors recommended activities that engendered two-way communication and higher levels of interactivity.

In a similar study, Dornyo (2014) examined the role of social media in the practice of public relations in Ghana. Utilising in-depth interviews, the study collected data from selected corporate institutions that had membership in the Institute of Public Relations – Ghana, the professional body that superintends public relations practice in Ghana. Participants from the study recognised social media as a vital tool for engaging and communicating with the publics in modern times. The study also found a high level of interactivity on social media platforms, where participants asserted that interactivity was important for enhancing relationships with the publics.

4.6.5. Corporate reputation

To have deeper insights into the contributions public relations can make toward building and sustaining the corporate reputation of organisations from emerging markets, Anani-Bossman (2020) conducted a study that employed in-depth interviews in soliciting responses from public relations managers of selected multinational companies in Ghana. Results indicated that practitioners used public relations tools such as internal communication, corporate social responsibility, and publicity to enhance the corporate reputation of the brands they managed. In addition, public relations practice was situated within the strategic management of these companies, and that made the practice fluid and effective.

Narteh and Braimah (2019) also conducted a study that explored the relationship corporate reputation has with service provider selection within the banking sector of Ghana. The study was underpinned by the quantitative paradigm and gathered data from 540 customers of various retail banks. It was established that service quality, customer centricity, and overall corporate performance were among some of the top corporate reputation dimensions that influenced customers' choice of retail banks in Ghana. The study concluded that organisations must pay more attention to corporate reputation as it has demonstrable effects on customer choice.

4.6.6. PR and globalization

Globalisation continues to shape the practice of public relations across geographical jurisdictions and poses threats and opportunities for the practice (L'Etang, 2009). As such, an interest in how the phenomenon is shaping the practice in Ghana was examined in the study by Anani-Bossman and Bruce (2021), who employed qualitative interviews

and collected data from selected practitioners in Ghana. Though practitioners are trying to leverage the opportunities that globalisation presents, they face challenges in technological skills and general communication infrastructural deficiencies. Therefore, the study recommended that practitioners improve their skills, especially in digital communication, to remain relevant amidst the competition and challenges that come with globalisation.

In a similar study, [Wu and Baah-Boakye \(2014\)](#) investigated the influence of globalisation on public relations in Ghana by collecting data through a quantitative survey. They found that practitioners were grossly engaged in cultural interpretation for clients that are new to the Ghanaian business environment.

5. Discussions

The main aim of this study was to scientifically aggregate and synthesise existing public relations research in Ghana in order to highlight the existing trends and gaps in the literature, in line with the calls made by [Molleda et al., \(2017\)](#) that more documentation of public relations research is needed to advance practice and, to an extent, scholarship. The significance of this is to engender the appropriate future research response from Ghanaian public relations scholars with regard to public relations research in Ghana. Again, the study was necessitated by the marginalisation of public relations research from the context of developing economies despite the practice in Africa spanning more than half a century ([Skinner, 2013](#)).

The findings show that whereas there has been some progress in public relations scholarship in Ghana over the past ten years, there is still a lot to be done as only 26 peer-reviewed articles were found to be published over a 10-year period based on our inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Public relations research in Ghana has overly concentrated on topics such as CSR and CSR communication, public relations within higher education institutions, dialogic public relations, digital public relations, corporate reputation, and public relations and globalisation. Other important areas such as stakeholder engagement, business-to-business communication, public relations strategy and planning, investor relations, lobbying and governmental relations, media relations, ethics and professionalism in public relations, issues and crisis management, copywriting, and event public relations, among others have all received minimal attention within the public relations research in Ghana. These findings contradict [Thelen \(2021\)](#), who found that the most researched topic in Latin America is professionalism in public relations. Interestingly, the result shows that, for instance, in the case of CSR, most of the articles were not from PR and communication but marketing and other business perspectives. In other words, minimal scholarship on CSR research comes from public relations scholars. This means that public relations scholars may not see research on CSR as essential, especially when CSR or community relations is a core part of the practice. Clearly, the current status of PR scholarship that addresses Ghana in peer-reviewed journals is quite limited, and this has implications for contribution to the body of knowledge from a Ghanaian perspective and an African perspective. Scholars (e.g. [Anani-Bossman, 2021b](#); [Skinner, 2013](#); [Tella et al., 2020](#)) have long bemoaned the lack of public relations scholarship in Africa. The situation appears to be much worse in Ghana, as the result shows.

The findings have also shown that about 65% of the studies have employed qualitative methodology as opposed to the quantitative (23.5%) and mixed-method (11.5%) approaches. This could be attributable to the nature of the topics the studies explored. However, this could also mean a lack of skill in analysing and interpreting quantitative work, especially one that deals with highly technical statistical analysis. This result is in direct contrast to similar trend analyses in public relations like that of [Lee and Yue \(2020\)](#) and [Thelen \(2021\)](#), who found a general balance between qualitative and quantitative methods.

In terms of journals with the highest number of publications, journals

such as *Communicare* (n = 2), *Corporate Reputation Review* (n = 2), *Information Development* (n = 2), *International Journal of ICT and Management* (n = 2), and *Journal of Communication Management* (n = 2) have published the most in the area. Contrary to the findings of [Thelen \(2021\)](#) and [Jain et al. \(2014\)](#), other public relations-focused journals, such as *Corporate Communication: An International Journal*, have made minimal publications. Significantly, the research did not find any Ghanaian public relations scholarship from PR-specific journals such as *Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations*. The fact that there are very few publications in other communication journals, as shown above, indicates that Ghanaian public relations scholars do not publish in journals that can give them and the state of public relations scholarship global visibility.

About 31% of the studies under review were conducted in multiple industries. However, the Education and Finance industries are the two most studied single industries in public relations research in Ghana. They make up 26% each of all the studies under review. Industries such as Telecommunication, Oil and Gas, Small and Medium Enterprises, Construction, Mining, Transport and Aviation, and Hospitality, among others, have all been given little or no attention.

Again, about 69% of the studies on public relations in Ghana have been grounded theoretically, with the Excellence Theory being the most utilised public relations theory, constituting 23% of all the studies under review. The overemphasis on the Excellence Theory is consistent with the findings of [Ye and Ki \(2012\)](#) and [Sallot et al. \(2003\)](#). Also consistent with the findings of [Thelen \(2021\)](#) is the relative dominance of the Dialogic Theory compared to other theories, such as the Stakeholder Engagement Theory and the Social Exchange Theory.

The excellence theory is one of the most discussed and debated theories in public relations and communication. It is, therefore, not surprising to find it the most dominant theory used in public relations scholarship in Ghana. This is a trend found in Africa as well. Africa currently does not have its own theory/model that reflects the African worldview. Studies over the years on public relations in Africa ([Anani-Bossman, 2022](#); [Mersham et al., 2011](#)) show an over-reliance on “Eurocentric philosophies” ([Mersham et al., 2011](#), p. 196) that do not work within the African context. African Scholars (e.g. see [Mersham et al., 2011](#); [Ngonzo & Klyueva, 2023](#)) have called the development of an Afro-centric model which demonstrates the role of PR practitioners as not only change agents in society but also frames “communication practice as activism” ([Tindall & Holtzhausen, 2012](#), p. 373). The result demonstrates that Africans, and for that matter, Ghanaian PR scholars, continue to apply western models/theories in their research without much attempt to develop any framework or model that speaks to the African context.

5.1. Implications for public relations scholarship and practice

The result has implications for the teaching and practice of public relations, as well as the contribution to the global body of knowledge from a Ghanaian and African perspective. The present findings mean that scholarly contribution to the public relations body of knowledge is severely limited. As [Anani-Bossman \(2021a\)](#) notes, public relations is growing in Ghana. Nevertheless, the extent of the nature of growth and development is not fully known. This hampers other scholars’ efforts to raise the banner of public relations management in Africa.

Slow progress in the field’s scholarship in Ghana also means that academics will continue to depend on western forms of theories and books to teach in a different cultural environment. [Thompson \(2018\)](#), for instance, discovered that public relations education in Ghana is premised on Grunigen and other western-based concepts. Thus, public relations students graduate without adequate knowledge about how their environment influences the practice and end up attempting to use western-based concepts, which scholars (e.g. [Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009](#); [Mersham et al., 2011](#)) have demonstrated do not work well on the continent.

Also, the gap in scholarship, especially in critical areas such as crisis communication, reputational management, measurement and evaluation, and professionalism, among others, means that the nature of practice within key areas cannot be determined to enable practitioners to develop the right strategies that will enhance their work.

Again, this is likely to affect the practice itself as practitioners are likely to work with concepts that are foreign to Ghana's socio-cultural environment. Research leads to policy and framework developments, and a lack of this will lure practitioners into a false sense of belief that they know and understand the profession. It may also contribute to a lack of understanding and acceptance among practitioners about the importance of theory to practice.

5.2. Conclusion, limitations, and suggestions for future research

Overall, the research finds that the current status of public relations scholarship is very limited and narrowly focused, despite the progress in recent years. The focus on CSR and CSR communication is not surprising, especially in Ghana and Africa in general. Due to the lack of development, organisations are expected to contribute to the growth and development of society within the African context. Therefore, public relations and communication in Africa are practised from a societal perspective to enhance social legitimacy (Alaimo, 2020).

Regardless, the gap in research in key areas identified earlier is problematic. If public relations is to grow and reach the level of the developed countries truly, and even South Africa, which has a relatively matured PR industry, Ghanaian PR scholars will have to up the ante. The profession needs more studies that contribute to the body of knowledge, especially theory development. In this era of digital evolution, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), PR scholars in Ghana can develop the research stream in the country further. This calls for an intensification of PR research which must also be of high quality to be published in top PR and communication journals.

The scattered nature of the journal distribution of the articles also does not give a good impression of the journals Ghanaian scholars access. For instance, of the total number of journals accessed, only seven (7) are PR and communication-related. The rest are either marketing-related or journals focusing on humanities and social sciences. Authors need to target world-class PR and communication journals if their publications are to generate visibility.

Even though this study has made valuable contributions to the extant literature on public relations research in Ghana, it is not bereft of some limitations. Firstly, there is a chance that due to the databases employed for the search and the inclusion and exclusion criteria used, some useful resources may have been excluded. Future research can consider expanding on our search criteria. Secondly, some information-rich articles may have been excluded because they do not fall within our search period, 2012–2021, even though the period is sufficient. Future research can consider expanding the duration of the study. What is more, other useful research resources such as book chapters, conference proceedings and executive summaries were omitted because the study focused only on peer-reviewed journal articles. Future research can include such resources to expand the discussion.

Again, this study was limited to public relations research conducted in Ghana. Whereas this is useful, future research can expand the study to cover many other African countries to make their findings representative enough of the developing economy context. Furthermore, as discussed above, future researchers can focus on some of the underexplored areas within the public relations discipline. This will create a good balance within the extant literature. From a methodological standpoint, there is a marginalisation of research that employed quantitative and mixed-method approaches. Future studies can utilise these methods to increase their ability to extrapolate their findings to broader populations. In terms of the industries studied, future research should consider the industries that have been largely disregarded. Finally, but not least, even though a good number of studies have been grounded in

existing theories, future researchers can focus on utilising some of the underexplored theories or building new theories that fit with the emerging market contexts as proposed by Anani-Bossman and Tandoh (2022).

It is worth noting that this research contributes to the body of knowledge on public relations research as it is the first study to examine the state of public relations research in Ghana. Despite the increase in PR research in recent years, literature is still scanty compared to African countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and the west. More efforts must be made to develop PR research in Ghana and Africa in general.

Declaration of Competing Interest

We declare that there are no conflicts of interest or competing interests. We declare that this is our original work and that those works used but do not belong to us were duly cited. We also declare that this study is currently not under consideration elsewhere.

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Noel Nutsugah is a lecturer in the Department of Public Relations at the Ghana Institute of Journalism. He holds a Master of Philosophy degree in Communication and Media Studies from the University of Education, Winneba, and a Master of Arts degree in Corporate Communications and Public Relations from the University of Leeds, England. As a former member of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and currently a member of the Communication Educators' Association of Ghana (CEAG) and the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) – Ghana, Noel is passionate about public relations and digital communication research.

Albert Anani-Bossman (PhD) is a lecturer in public relations in the Department of Public Relations at the Ghana Institute of Journalism. His research area of interest includes PR research & evaluation, Public relations practices, organisational communication, Reputation management, and Crisis Communication.