



**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SoGSaR)**

**FACULTY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS, MARKETING AND ADVERTISING**

**THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN SHAPING CORPORATE  
SUSTAINABILITY NARRATIVES**

**BY**

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ARTS DEGREE IN STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT**

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**NOVEMBER, 2024**

## DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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## CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of dissertation laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication-Institute of Journalism, UniMAC-IJ.

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how organisations integrate sustainability into their communication strategies, examine the challenges and opportunities faced by public relations (PR) departments in promoting sustainability initiatives, and assess the influence of PR-driven sustainability narratives on stakeholder engagement and corporate reputation. Underpinned by Stakeholder Theory and Systems Theory, the research employed a qualitative approach, collecting data through in-depth interviews with ten PR professionals in Ghana. The findings indicated that organisations effectively utilise data-driven storytelling and tailored messaging to enhance credibility, though they often face challenges related to stakeholder scepticism and resource limitations. The analysis revealed that transparency and targeted communication were crucial in building trust and engaging diverse stakeholder groups. The study recommended stronger collaboration between PR and sustainability teams, increased education for stakeholders on the benefits of sustainable practices, and adaptive messaging strategies tailored to different audience needs. These strategies are vital for improving the impact of PR efforts and aligning corporate objectives with broader sustainability goals, particularly in the Ghanaian context where stakeholder expectations are rapidly evolving.

**Keywords:** Corporate Sustainability, ESG, Public Relations, Stakeholder Engagement, Sustainability Narratives

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to the Almighty God for the knowledge and guidance he gave me in accomplishing it. I also dedicate this to my mother and my partner who supported me financially and to the lecturers who imparted knowledge unto me.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

ESG – Environmental, Social, and Governance

GRI – Global Reporting Initiative

KPIs – Key Performance Indicators

PR – Public Relations

ROA – Return on Assets

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of Study

Corporate sustainability has emerged as a critical component of modern business strategy (Dartey-Baah & Amoako, 2021), driven by increasing awareness of environmental issues and the societal demand for more responsible corporate behaviour (Danso et al., 2019). This concept, initially developed in the context of developed economies, focuses on integrating environmental care, social equity, and economic health to ensure long-term business viability and positive societal impact (Ashrafi et al., 2018; Meuer et al., 2020). The evolution of sustainability practices reflects a significant shift in how businesses approach profitability and community welfare, with an increasing number adopting green policies and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Abugre & Anlesinya, 2020).

In the context of Ghana, the application and perception of corporate sustainability take on unique characteristics influenced by local economic conditions, cultural norms, and governance structures. Unlike in developed regions where stringent regulations and higher stakeholder expectations drive sustainability (Kinderman, 2020a; Wang et al., 2018), in Ghana, Adomako and Tran (2022) elucidate that these practices are often motivated by immediate economic benefits and community relations. This distinction underlines the importance of understanding local contexts in the implementation of global sustainability norms.

Public Relations (PR) plays a pivotal role in this process, serving as a bridge between corporations and the community, managing perceptions, and fostering a positive corporate image (Anani-Bossman & Mudzanani, 2020). In Ghana, PR professionals utilize a mix of traditional media and modern digital platforms to communicate sustainability efforts, tailoring messages to resonate with local audiences (Ayiku & Tandoh, 2020). The strategic

communication managed by PR not only supports transparency but also enhances stakeholder engagement. This in Amoako et al.'s (2018) view is crucial for the success of sustainability initiatives in regions with diverse socio-economic landscapes.

The challenges faced by businesses in Ghana regarding sustainability are manifold, including limited resources, less developed infrastructure, and fluctuating public policy. These obstacles, however, catalyse innovative approaches to sustainable practices. For example, analysis by Tetteh et al. (2024) point to local enterprises increasingly adopting circular economy models and community-based initiatives that not only address environmental concerns but also provide social benefits by engaging local populations. Such practices highlight the adaptive strategies businesses must undertake to align with both global sustainability trends and local needs.

The opportunities arising from these unique challenges are profound. Innovations driven by necessity have positioned Ghanaian businesses as potential leaders in sustainable practices adapted to the realities of the global south (Atanga, 2019). The role of PR in this setting extends beyond mere communication; it involves actively participating in the formulation of strategies that leverage local insights for broader applicability (Tandoh, 2020). Moreover, these sustainability narratives, shaped through effective PR, have the potential to attract international partnerships and investments, further integrating Ghana into the global economic system while promoting sustainable development.

In essence, this study offers valuable insights into how businesses can integrate sustainable practices in less traditional environments. By examining the interplay between public relations and sustainability within this specific geographical and economic context, significant contributions can be made to both theory and practice. Such insights not only enhance academic understanding but also provide practical guidance for businesses striving to balance profitability with social responsibility in the global south.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The evolving dynamics of global sustainability have placed significant emphasis on the corporate sector's role in advancing environmental and social governance (Aguilera et al., 2021). In developed economies, substantial research underscores the integration of public relations in facilitating effective sustainability practices (Capelle-Blancard & Petit, 2019; Kinderman, 2020b). However, such integration remains underexplored within the contexts of emerging economies like Ghana, where distinct socio-economic challenges influence corporate behaviours and public perceptions differently (Dzogbenuku & Keelson, 2019).

Furthermore, existing literature like Amo-Mensah (2022) and, Amo-Mensah & Tench, (2015) suggests that PR's role in shaping corporate sustainability narratives in the global south is not only under-studied but is often misaligned with local cultural and economic realities. Studies such as those by Daszyńska-Żygadło et al. (2022) and Amo-Mensah (2019) highlight a gap in understanding how PR can be strategically used to overcome barriers like limited resources, inadequate regulatory frameworks, and varied stakeholder expectations that are prevalent in these regions. This disconnect underscores an urgent need for empirical investigation into how PR practices can be tailored to enhance sustainability initiatives' effectiveness and acceptance in Ghana.

Moreover, empirical data indicate a rising trend in environmental degradation and social inequities in Ghana, conditions exacerbated by industrial activities that overlook sustainability for short-term gains (Eduful et al., 2020; Kyere-Boateng & Marek, 2021). The situation is compounded by a lack of robust engagement strategies that can mobilize community support and foster sustainable development initiatives (Annan-Aggrey et al., 2022). This scenario presents a compelling case for investigating how PR, as a strategic tool, can be optimized to address these issues. This can potentially transform corporate sustainability from a peripheral to a central strategy in business operations (Attah-Botchwey et al., 2022).

Therefore, the proposed study aims to fill these critical gaps by exploring how PR facilitates the embedding of sustainability within corporate strategies in Ghana. By understanding these mechanisms, the study could offer foundational insights that drive policy changes and business practices towards more sustainable models, not only in Ghana but also in similar contexts across the global south. Thus, the urgency and relevance of this research are underscored by its potential to influence broader economic, environmental, and social outcomes, contributing significantly to the literature and practice of both public relations and corporate sustainability.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The study aims to delve into the ways in PR influences corporate sustainability narratives within Ghanaian corporate entities. Essentially, the study seeks to uncover the strategic roles and perceptual impacts of PR on sustainability practices. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the interactions between PR activities and sustainability outcomes in the unique socio-economic context of Ghana. To this end, the study visualizes;

1. To explore how the organisations integrate sustainability into their communication strategies
2. To examine the challenges and opportunities faced by PR departments in promoting sustainability initiatives
3. To assess the influence of PR-driven sustainability narratives on stakeholder engagement and corporate reputation

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How do organisations integrate sustainability into their communication strategies?
2. What challenges and opportunities do PR departments face in promoting sustainability initiatives?

3. How does PR-driven sustainability narrative influence stakeholder engagement and corporate reputation?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is multifaceted, primarily contributing to both academic knowledge and practical applications in the field of public relations and corporate sustainability. By investigating how Ghanaian corporations integrate sustainability into their communication strategies, this research fills a critical gap in the existing literature that largely focuses on developed economies. The insights derived enriched the academic discourse around sustainability practices in emerging markets, providing a localized understanding that can inform global theories about public relations and corporate social responsibility.

From a policy perspective, the findings of this study have the potential to influence the development of more effective regulations and guidelines that encourage corporations to adopt sustainable practices. By highlighting the specific challenges and opportunities faced by PR departments in Ghana, policymakers can tailor their approaches to better support these initiatives, leading to more robust and contextually relevant sustainability policies. This could result in a significant shift towards sustainable development in corporate Ghana, serving as a model for other countries within the global south.

In terms of practical implications, the study stands to benefit a broad array of stakeholders including corporate managers, PR professionals, and sustainability advocates. By providing detailed insights into how sustainability narratives can be effectively crafted and communicated, the study equips PR practitioners with strategic tools to enhance stakeholder engagement and improve corporate reputation through sustainability efforts. Additionally, corporations can leverage these insights to refine their sustainability strategies, potentially leading to improved environmental and social outcomes that can enhance their market competitiveness and community standing.

Moreover, the research paves the way for future studies in this field. By establishing a foundational understanding of the role of PR in shaping sustainability narratives in Ghana, subsequent research can explore comparative analyses across different regions or delve deeper into the impacts of specific PR strategies on sustainability outcomes. This could stimulate a broader examination of the interplay between public relations and sustainability, extending the research frontier and offering new directions for academic inquiry. Overall, the significance of this study lies in its comprehensive approach to understanding and enhancing the effectiveness of PR in driving corporate sustainability within the challenging and dynamic context of Ghana.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The study is delimited to focus on the role of Public Relations in shaping corporate sustainability narratives within the corporate sector of Ghana. It particularly concentrated on a selected array of industries known for their significant environmental and social impacts. The study also restricted its temporal frame to the current trends and practices, providing a contemporary snapshot that reflects the latest strategies and challenges. Moreover, the geographic limitation to Ghana provides a rich context for exploring these dynamics in an emerging economy, setting a precedent for similar research in other regions of the global south.

### **1.7 Operational Definition of Terms**

This section delineates the fundamental terms and concepts pivotal to the understanding of this study. Clarity in these definitions ensures coherence and enhances the precision of the discourse on public relations and corporate sustainability within the context of Ghana.

1. **Public Relations:** Defined as the strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics, PR involves the management of information between an organisation and its audience.

2. **Corporate Sustainability:** This refers to a business approach that creates long-term stakeholder value by embracing opportunities and managing risks derived from economic, environmental, and social developments.
3. **Stakeholder Engagement:** This involves the processes by which an organisation involves people who may be affected by the decisions it makes or can influence the implementation of its decisions, aiming to make these decisions more sustainable and inclusive.
4. **Corporate Reputation:** Often conceptualized as the stakeholders' perception of a company, corporate reputation represents the aggregate estimation of a corporation's ability to meet the expectations of its various stakeholders in terms of performance and behaviour.

### **1.8 Outline of the Study**

The structure of this study is organised into five comprehensive chapters. The first chapter sets the stage by providing an introduction to the study, outlining the research problem, objectives, and significance, and establishing the scope and definitions pertinent to the research. This foundational chapter ensures that all readers are aligned with the terms and concepts critical for navigating the subsequent discussions. Progressing to the second chapter, a review of related literature is conducted, synthesizing existing research on the integration of PR within corporate sustainability efforts, with a particular focus on contrasts and comparisons between global practices and those specific to Ghana. The third chapter details the methodology, describing the qualitative techniques and processes used to gather and analyse data, ensuring transparency and reproducibility of the research findings. In the fourth chapter, the data collected is presented and meticulously analysed, providing a deep dive into the current practices, challenges, and impacts of PR on sustainability within Ghanaian corporations. The study culminates in the fifth chapter, which not only summarizes the findings but also discusses their implications for theory, practice, and policy, offering recommendations for future

research and practical applications in the field. This structured approach provides a logical flow that guides the reader through the complex interactions between public relations and corporate sustainability in an emerging economy context.

### **1.9 Chapter Summary**

The chapter established a foundation for the investigation into the role of Public Relations in shaping corporate sustainability narratives within Ghana. It commenced by explaining the research problem and outlining the objectives aimed at exploring the strategic integration of sustainability practices in corporate communication. The significance of the study was articulated, highlighting its potential contributions to academic knowledge, policy formulation, and practical applications in corporate sustainability.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The chapter provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature that frames the study. It delves into key concepts, theories, and prior research to establish the foundation on which the study is built. The review explores how PR contributes to corporate sustainability by shaping organisational narratives and managing stakeholder relationships. Through this examination, the chapter draws on existing scholarship to highlight the interconnectedness of PR strategies and sustainability efforts within corporate settings, particularly in the Ghanaian context. The theoretical frameworks discussed offer essential insights into understanding the role of PR in achieving sustainability objectives.

#### **2.2 Conceptual Review**

##### **2.2.1 Public Relations**

Public Relations (PR) is integral to shaping an organisation's image, reputation, and relationship with its stakeholders. Scholars highlight that effective PR practices create trust, engagement, and a sense of transparency in both external and internal communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). In modern contexts, PR extends beyond mere promotion, focusing instead on maintaining relationships that are mutually beneficial. Heath (2013) describes PR as a strategic process that involves careful message crafting and dissemination, aiming to shape public opinion. Furthermore, PR professionals often engage in media relations, crisis communication, and brand management to safeguard the organisation's credibility. Such functions are crucial for fostering a positive organisational identity and ensuring continued stakeholder confidence (Cornelissen, 2017). PR, therefore, is not only about managing perceptions but about long-term relationship building.

### **2.2.2 Sustainability**

Sustainability has become a vital focus for organisations that seek to ensure long-term success and ethical corporate behaviour (Farley & Smith, 2020). Thiele (2024) point out that this concept involves balancing environmental, social, and economic factors in business operations to reduce negative impacts and create positive outcomes. By integrating these principles, companies not only meet regulatory requirements but also position themselves as responsible actors in the marketplace. In communication, sustainability is about conveying this commitment to stakeholders in a clear and compelling way, showing that the organisation prioritizes ethical practices and social responsibility (Munten et al., 2021).

Effective communication of sustainability efforts is crucial for building trust and enhancing a company's reputation (Khuong et al., 2021). As consumers increasingly favour businesses that prioritize ethical and sustainable practices, transparent reporting on sustainability initiatives becomes a key driver of brand value and competitive advantage (Benn et al., 2014). Organisations must consistently highlight their sustainability efforts to show an ongoing commitment to responsible practices (Bilderback, 2024). This not only aligns with the growing expectations of socially conscious consumers but also helps differentiate the organisation in a crowded market. Ultimately, clear and consistent communication on sustainability reinforces the company's dedication to ethical conduct, bolstering trust and loyalty among stakeholders.

### **2.2.3 Communication Strategy**

A robust communication strategy is essential for ensuring that an organisation's goals and objectives are clearly conveyed and understood by its stakeholders (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021). This concept is built around four core elements: the sender, the message, the channel, and the audience. Each of these components plays a vital role in the communication process, contributing to the overall effectiveness of the strategy. According to Zainal et al. (2021) the sender initiates the communication, ensuring that the message aligns with the organisation's vision, mission, and values. The message itself must be clear, relevant, and consistent,

addressing the needs and expectations of the audience while also reflecting the organisation's strategic priorities (Yadav & Mishra, 2020). The selection of the appropriate channel—whether traditional media or digital platforms—is critical, as it influences how the message is received. Finally, the audience's reception of the message ultimately determines its impact, making it crucial to tailor the communication to their values, beliefs, and preferences.

The sender is responsible for crafting a message that is aligned with the organisation's core principles (Holtzhausen et al., 2021). This requires a deep understanding of the organisation's strategic direction and an ability to convey these elements clearly. The message must be designed to engage the audience meaningfully, ensuring that it is not only informative but also relevant to their interests. Consistency in the message reinforces the organisation's goals and strengthens its public image (Clampitt, 2016). Choosing the right communication channel plays a critical role in the success of the strategy. Different channels, such as press releases or social media, cater to different audiences and message types (Argenti, 2015). Additionally, the timing and cultural context must be carefully considered to avoid misunderstandings or negative perceptions. When all these elements are aligned, the communication strategy becomes a powerful tool for gaining stakeholder support and advancing organisational objectives.

#### **2.2.4 Challenges and Opportunities in Promoting Sustainability Initiatives**

Sustainability refers to the practice of integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations into organisational operations, ensuring that long-term impacts are minimized while positive contributions to society are maximized (Rout et al., 2020). Tam et al. (2020) argue that while the promotion of sustainability initiatives offers considerable opportunities for the public relations industry, it also brings about substantial challenges that must be navigated. One of the primary challenges stems from the complexity of aligning sustainability goals with short-term business objectives. Many organisations may prioritize immediate profitability over long-term sustainability, leading to resistance from stakeholders or internal decision-makers (Journeault et al., 2021). Additionally, the issue of greenwashing, where companies falsely

claim to be environmentally friendly, has led to increased scepticism among the public. This scepticism puts pressure on PR professionals to demonstrate transparency and authenticity in their messaging, which can be difficult when navigating corporate interests that are not always aligned with genuine sustainability goals (Bernardino, 2021; Moscato, 2023).

However, alongside these challenges lie substantial opportunities. A well-executed sustainability initiative can enhance an organisation's reputation and build trust with increasingly socially conscious consumers. Transparency in communication allows organisations to differentiate themselves by showcasing their genuine commitment to sustainability (McGrath et al., 2021). Furthermore, the rise of digital platforms provides PR departments with new avenues to engage diverse audiences more effectively, using real-time data to communicate sustainability efforts and demonstrate progress (Sivarajah et al., 2020). By leveraging these tools, PR professionals can craft compelling narratives around sustainability, positioning their organisations as leaders in responsible business practices. These opportunities, when capitalized upon, help organisations not only meet regulatory requirements but also gain a competitive advantage in an increasingly eco-conscious marketplace (Heath, 2013).

### **2.2.5 Influence of Sustainability Narratives**

Sustainability narratives have increasingly been shaped by PR strategies, which have a direct bearing on stakeholder engagement and corporate reputation (Blau et al., 2022). Defined as stories that communicate an organisation's commitment to social, environmental, and economic responsibility, sustainability narratives help companies align with contemporary demands for corporate accountability (Foust & St John III, 2024; Nyagadza et al., 2020). Stakeholders are drawn to these narratives as they signal ethical governance and long-term value creation, fostering trust and loyalty. Pompper (2020) notes that PR by crafting and disseminating these narratives, plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception, allowing organisations to manage their social capital effectively. Research indicates that when PR-

driven sustainability narratives align with stakeholder values, they significantly enhance engagement, creating a positive feedback loop where greater transparency results in deeper commitment from stakeholders (Demetrious, 2022; Illia et al., 2013; Mahmood & Uddin, 2021).

Furthermore, sustainability narratives, particularly those disseminated through PR channels, serve to enhance corporate reputation (Weder et al., 2021). Companies that demonstrate a genuine commitment to sustainability are often viewed more favourably in the marketplace, leading to higher levels of trust and brand loyalty (D'Amato, 2021). In the financial services sector, for instance, where trust is paramount, sustainability narratives are instrumental in mitigating risks associated with reputational damage (Du & Vieira, 2012). The integration of these narratives into the corporate communication strategy signals long-term stability and ethical leadership. The effectiveness of these narratives is amplified when companies engage in two-way communication with stakeholders, thereby fostering not only goodwill but also stronger corporate reputations (Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.3.1 Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder Theory, pioneered by Freeman (1984), challenges traditional business models focused solely on shareholders. It expands the scope by asserting that organisations must consider the interests of all stakeholders—those affected by its operations. The theory assumes that businesses will succeed when they balance stakeholder interests, which include employees, customers, suppliers, and the community. Key concepts center on stakeholder identification, engagement, and ethical responsibility. The purpose is to ensure that organisations act in ways that benefit multiple parties, rather than exclusively pursuing profit maximization. The scope includes corporate governance, ethics, and sustainability practices.

A key strength of Stakeholder Theory is its broad applicability across industries, providing a flexible framework for decision-making (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). By prioritizing ethics and social responsibility, it promotes trust and cooperation among stakeholders. However, its broad nature can also present challenges. Balancing conflicting stakeholder interests can be complex and difficult to operationalize (Jensen, 2002). Moreover, the theory offers limited guidance on how organisations should prioritize among competing stakeholders. Despite these challenges, the theory remains influential in advancing ethical business practices and sustainability.

### **2.3.2 Systems Theory**

Systems Theory, developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), conceptualizes organisations as complex, interconnected systems. It assumes that organisations consist of multiple subsystems, each influencing one another and the external environment. The theory's key concepts include feedback loops, interdependence, and equilibrium, reflecting the dynamic nature of systems. The purpose of the theory is to explain how organisations adapt and maintain stability within changing environments. Its scope extends beyond organisations, encompassing biological, social, and technological systems.

Systems Theory is praised for its holistic approach, which offers insight into how different organisational elements interact and adapt to external forces (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This allows for a comprehensive understanding of organisational dynamics and change. However, the theory's complexity is a noted limitation. Its broad perspective can obscure specific causal relationships, making it harder to implement in practice. Despite this, Systems Theory remains valuable for understanding organisational behaviour within a wider environmental context.

### **2.3.3 Significance of Theories for the Study**

Stakeholder Theory and Systems Theory offer comprehensive perspectives for examining this study. Stakeholder Theory aligns closely with the research objective of exploring how public

relations shapes sustainability narratives within corporate Ghana. Public relations serves as a strategic tool for managing relationships between organisations and their diverse stakeholders, such as local communities, employees, investors, and regulators. This theory supports the notion that sustainability initiatives are not only designed for profit generation but must also cater to the broader concerns of stakeholders who hold the company accountable for its environmental and social impacts. By using Stakeholder Theory, the study can assess how public relations professionals manage communication to balance conflicting stakeholder interests and foster more inclusive, transparent engagement, thereby advancing corporate sustainability efforts in Ghana.

Additionally, Systems Theory complements this study by addressing the complex, interconnected nature of organisations and their environments. Public relations in this context is not merely an internal function but a component of a larger system of interactions between organisations and external forces such as government policies, market pressures, and cultural expectations. Systems Theory allows for a deeper investigation into how public relations strategies are adapted to fit within the broader socio-economic and environmental context of Ghana. This theory also provides a framework for understanding the feedback loops between corporate actions and societal responses, which is essential for analysing the effectiveness of sustainability communication. As businesses navigate the challenges posed by limited resources and fluctuating policies, Systems Theory provides a lens through which to examine the dynamic nature of corporate sustainability initiatives.

These theories are particularly relevant for this study because they provide a dual framework for understanding both the relational and systemic aspects of public relations. Stakeholder Theory offers a focused view of the relational dynamics between organisations and their various publics, which is critical for assessing how sustainability narratives are tailored to resonate with different audiences. Systems Theory, on the other hand, expands this focus to encompass the broader, multifaceted interactions between organisations and their external

environments. Together, these theories not only capture the internal-external dynamic that is essential to the study of public relations but also offer insights into how sustainability practices are embedded within complex, evolving systems. This combination ensures a thorough exploration of public relations' role in driving corporate sustainability in the unique socio-economic context of Ghana.

## **2.4 Empirical Review**

Amo-Mensah (2022) explores the complexities multinational corporations face in communicating CSR activities, focusing on a prominent company in Ghana. The study identifies CSR communication as a 'double-edged sword,' where the value of transparent communication is often overshadowed by the difficulty of ensuring stakeholder recognition. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews with CSR communication managers and informed stakeholders, the research uncovers nuanced challenges within this context. The findings highlight factors such as the financial burden of communication, perceptions of multinational corporations as inexhaustible 'cash cows,' heightened expectations for CSR initiatives, and an inflexible media environment. These insights underline the importance of understanding how contextual and cultural dynamics shape CSR communication strategies. This contribution addresses a gap in the literature, offering theoretical and practical perspectives on managing these challenges, particularly in the sub-Saharan African region.

Building upon this focus on sub-Saharan Africa, Tilt et al. (2021) extend the discussion by investigating sustainability reporting practices across 48 countries in the region. Recognising the scarcity of studies in this domain, the research examines the motivations and barriers companies face in adopting sustainability reporting frameworks. Using New Institutional Economics as a guiding lens, the authors combine data from the Global Reporting Initiative, qualitative analyses of standalone reports, and interviews with report producers. Their findings

reveal significant barriers, including underdeveloped institutional frameworks and informal norms, which impede reporting practices. Nonetheless, voluntary mechanisms such as reporting frameworks serve as vital tools in bridging these gaps, fostering governance improvements and enhancing accountability. By contextualising sustainability reporting within sub-Saharan Africa, this study not only complements Amo-Mensah's (2022) work on CSR communication challenges but also highlights broader institutional dynamics influencing corporate sustainability narratives.

The relationship between sustainability reporting and organisational performance is further examined by Attah-Botchwey et al. (2022), who focus on banks in Africa. Unlike prior research, this study integrates both accounting measures, such as return on assets (ROA), and market-based indicators, such as Tobin's Q, to assess firm performance. Analysing ten years of data from 20 listed banks across Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, the researchers utilise a sustainability framework aligned with the Global Reporting Initiative to quantify disclosures related to economic, governance, social, and environmental dimensions. The findings indicate a significant positive correlation between sustainability disclosures and performance, with economic, social, and governance reporting influencing both ROA and Tobin's Q. However, environmental reporting was only significantly associated with ROA. These results provide robust evidence that enhanced sustainability reporting contributes to long-term organisational performance, thereby reinforcing the strategic importance of transparent sustainability communication for financial institutions.

The strategic value of communication in sustainability narratives also emerges prominently in Blau et al. (2022), who investigate the role of digital storytelling in corporate sustainability efforts. Focusing on globally operating companies in Germany, the study relies on qualitative data from 14 semi-structured interviews with communication practitioners to explore how digital narratives influence strategic outcomes. The findings reveal that digital storytelling enhances intangible success factors, notably corporate reputation, which subsequently drives

tangible value creation. By linking communicative efforts to value creation through the DPRG/ICV Framework, the research provides a novel contribution to the field, demonstrating how digital communication can act as a catalyst for achieving sustainability goals. This study not only underscores the critical role of communication in sustainability but also broadens the discussion by integrating innovative storytelling techniques into the strategic toolkit for corporations.

Expanding on the impact of sustainability communication, Capelle-Blancard and Petit (2019) investigate the stock market's response to news related to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues. Using a dataset of approximately 33,000 ESG-related news items targeting 100 listed companies between 2002 and 2010, the study employs an empirical approach to evaluate the market's reaction. The findings indicate that negative ESG news results in an average market value loss of 0.1%, while positive news has no significant impact. Interestingly, media reports elicited stronger reactions from market participants than press releases or disclosures by non-governmental organisations. Sectoral reputation, cultural proximity, and the lexical content of ESG disclosures were also identified as key factors influencing market responses. This research underscores the sensitivity of financial markets to sustainability narratives, providing critical insights into how corporate communications can shape stakeholder perceptions and drive strategic outcomes. Together with the preceding studies, these findings illuminate the multifaceted role of public relations in crafting and communicating sustainability narratives that resonate across diverse stakeholder groups.

## **2.5 Chapter Summary**

The chapter outlined the literature that underpins the study's investigation into PR as a driver of corporate sustainability. It synthesised existing research on the interaction between PR practices and sustainability communication, drawing on key theoretical perspectives such as Stakeholder Theory and Systems Theory. The chapter also examined the challenges and opportunities PR professionals face in aligning sustainability initiatives with corporate goals.

Through the literature review, the chapter provided a conceptual and theoretical grounding for the research, enabling a clearer understanding of how PR can foster sustainable business practices within organisations.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

The chapter outlines the research methodology used to achieve the objectives of the study. This chapter details the processes employed in gathering, analysing, and interpreting data. It also provides insights into the rationale behind the chosen research approach, design, sampling methods, and data collection instruments. The methodology was designed to align with the research goals, ensuring that the methods were rigorous and capable of yielding meaningful results. By clearly articulating the steps involved in data collection and analysis, this chapter establishes the foundation for the credibility and validity of the research findings.

#### 3.2 Research Approach

This study has employed a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research approach is one that focuses on understanding phenomena from the perspective of the participants involved (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Rather than relying on numerical data, qualitative research is concerned with exploring how people interpret and make sense of their experiences, behaviours, and the world around them. This approach typically uses methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations to collect detailed, descriptive data. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research enables the researcher to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. The richness and depth of qualitative data allow researchers to uncover complex, contextual insights that quantitative methods may overlook.

This approach is particularly effective when the research question aims to explore the “how” or “why” behind certain behaviours, interactions, or phenomena. Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to generalize findings across populations, qualitative research emphasises the detailed understanding of specific contexts and cases. It is especially useful in fields where

human behaviour, cultural norms, and social processes are at the core of the inquiry (Creswell, 2014). By allowing researchers to interact closely with participants, qualitative methods offer a holistic view of the issues under study, taking into account the socio-cultural, historical, and institutional contexts that shape individual and collective experiences.

A qualitative research approach is particularly suitable for this study because it seeks to explore the role of PR in driving corporate sustainability within selected organisations in Ghana. The nature of PR work, which involves crafting narratives, managing relationships, and engaging stakeholders, is inherently tied to human interactions and social dynamics. A qualitative approach allows for a deep exploration of these complex processes by engaging directly with PR professionals, sustainability officers, and corporate managers to gain insights into their strategies, experiences, and challenges.

Moreover, qualitative methods are essential in understanding the specific socio-economic and cultural context of Ghana, which influences how sustainability is perceived and implemented in corporate environments. Since the study aims to explore subjective perceptions, communication strategies, and the narratives around sustainability, a qualitative approach provides the flexibility to capture nuanced perspectives that would not be possible through quantitative data alone. The focus on understanding “how” PR strategies are integrated into sustainability efforts aligns well with qualitative research’s goal of exploring complex phenomena within their real-world contexts.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This study has utilized a case study research design. A case study is a detailed and in-depth examination of a particular subject, organisation, or phenomenon within its real-life context. It allows researchers to focus on a single case or a small number of cases, providing a rich and thorough understanding of the subject matter. According to Al-Worafi (2023), the case study method is particularly effective in situations where the boundaries between the phenomenon

and the context are not clear. It offers a holistic approach to research, allowing for the collection of multiple types of data—such as interviews, documents, and observations—to develop a comprehensive picture of the issue under investigation. By using various data sources, the case study design supports the triangulation of findings, enhancing the reliability and depth of the analysis.

A case study is well-suited for exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory research, particularly when the researcher is seeking to understand how and why certain phenomena occur. This method allows for the investigation of complex social processes and the interactions between different actors within a specific setting (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Stake, 1995). Case studies are often used in fields like social sciences, business, and education, where understanding the interplay between different elements—such as organisational behaviour, decision-making, or communication strategies—is crucial. Because of its focus on real-world examples, the case study design provides insights that can be directly applicable to practice, making it a valuable approach for studies involving organisational dynamics and strategic processes.

The case study design is ideal for this research, which aims to investigate how public relations influences corporate sustainability positioning within selected organisations in Ghana. The in-depth nature of a case study allows for a focused examination of these organisations, offering detailed insights into how PR strategies are formulated and implemented to drive sustainability. Since the study involves exploring a specific phenomenon (PR's role in sustainability) within its real-life context (Ghanaian organisations), the case study design enables the researcher to delve into the intricacies of these processes, examining them from multiple angles. Furthermore, the case study design facilitates the exploration of real-life examples of how sustainability initiatives are communicated, managed, and perceived by different stakeholders within each organisation. This aligns with the study's objectives of understanding both the internal (corporate) and external (community and stakeholder) perspectives.

### **3.4 Study Population**

A study population refers to the entire group of individuals or entities that share specific characteristics and from which a researcher draws their sample for study (Clark et al., 2021). It includes all members of the group who are relevant to the research question and are affected by or knowledgeable about the subject being studied. The study population is critical in defining the scope of the research and ensuring that the findings are relevant and reliable. Neuman (2014) explains that selecting the appropriate population allows researchers to gather meaningful data that reflects the perspectives of those who are most involved in or impacted by the phenomenon under investigation. This study has employed a well-defined study population consisting of PR professionals, sustainability officers, and corporate managers within selected organisations in Ghana. The chosen study population of PR professionals, sustainability officers, and corporate managers is appropriate for this research because these individuals are directly responsible for developing and implementing sustainability strategies within their organisations.

### **3.5 Sampling Procedures and Rationale**

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of individuals or units from a larger population to represent the whole. The aim of sampling is to gather data from a manageable portion of the population, which can then be used to draw conclusions about the entire population. The two primary types of sampling are probability and non-probability sampling. In probability sampling, every member of the population has a known and equal chance of being selected, making the results more generalizable (Creswell, 2014). In contrast, non-probability sampling does not provide every member of the population an equal chance of selection. Instead, it relies on the researcher's judgment to select participants who are most likely to provide relevant insights for the study (Etikan et al., 2016).

Non-probability sampling is particularly suited for qualitative research, where the goal is not to generalize findings to the entire population but to gain in-depth understanding of specific

phenomena. This method allows researchers to focus on participants who possess relevant knowledge, experience, or characteristics that are central to answering the research questions (Subedi, 2021). In this study, non-probability sampling is appropriate because it enables the selection of individuals who are directly involved in PR activities and corporate sustainability initiatives, thus providing valuable insights into the role of PR in shaping sustainability narratives.

This research employs purposive sampling, a common non-probability sampling method. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on specific criteria or characteristics that are important to the research. In purposive sampling, the researcher deliberately chooses individuals who are expected to contribute rich, relevant data to the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). This method is particularly effective in qualitative research, where the goal is to deeply explore a particular subject or issue within a specific context. According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling ensures that the selected participants possess the necessary experience or knowledge to address the research objectives.

In the context of this study, purposive sampling allows the researcher to target PR professionals, sustainability officers, and corporate managers within selected organisations that actively engage in sustainability practices. This method ensures that the sample is composed of individuals who are knowledgeable about both PR strategies and sustainability efforts, making them well-positioned to provide meaningful insights into the intersection of these fields. By focusing on a sample of 10 participants, the study gathered detailed, context-rich data that reflects the specific experiences and perspectives of those responsible for managing sustainability narratives within their organisations.

The choice of a sample size of 10 participants is based on the need for detailed, qualitative insights rather than statistical generalization. In qualitative research, sample sizes are typically smaller because the focus is on gathering in-depth, rich data from each participant (Staller,

2021). This sample size is manageable, ensuring that the researcher can conduct thorough interviews or engage in detailed data collection without sacrificing depth. With 10 participants, the study had sufficient data to identify key themes and trends while allowing for a deep exploration of each individual's experiences and perspectives on the role of PR in corporate sustainability.

### **3.6 Data Collection**

This study utilized interviews as the primary method of data collection. Specifically, semi-structured interviews was employed, guided by an interview guide designed to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for participants to provide rich, detailed responses. Interviews are a widely used data collection method in qualitative research, offering the researcher an opportunity to engage directly with participants, exploring their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). In this case, interviews are ideal because the study seeks to understand the complex and context-specific role of PR in promoting corporate sustainability in Ghana. Semi-structured interviews, in particular, are well-suited to this task, as they combine structure with flexibility. While the interview guide ensures that all relevant topics are covered, participants have the freedom to elaborate on their experiences and raise additional points that the researcher might not have anticipated (Thelwall & Nevill, 2021).

The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to probe participants' experiences with PR strategies, sustainability initiatives, and their perceptions of stakeholder engagement. Open-ended questions are critical in qualitative research because they encourage participants to share detailed insights without being constrained by predefined response options (Patton, 2015). The guide was organised around key themes such as corporate sustainability practices, PR-driven narratives, challenges in stakeholder engagement, and organisational reputation. This structure ensures that all interviews cover the same core topics while remaining open to the unique perspectives each participant may bring.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face or virtually, depending on participant availability and logistical considerations. Each interview was recorded with the participant's consent to ensure accurate data capture, and notes were taken to supplement the recordings. Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, providing enough time for participants to express their views fully while keeping the session manageable. The choice of semi-structured interviews is justified because they allow for both comparability across interviews and depth in individual responses, which is essential in a study that seeks to capture the nuanced roles of PR professionals in different organisational contexts.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

This study employed thematic analysis to analyse the interview data. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It provides a flexible yet rigorous framework for organizing and interpreting qualitative data, allowing researchers to derive meaning from participants' narratives by grouping their responses into coherent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

Thematic analysis involves several stages, starting with familiarization with the data. After conducting and transcribing the interviews, the researcher began by reading and re-reading the transcripts to immerse themselves in the data, noting initial impressions and recurring ideas. This step is crucial for ensuring that the researcher becomes deeply acquainted with the content of the interviews before moving into more formal coding (Nowell et al., 2017). During this phase, key phrases, concepts, and recurring patterns was highlighted as potential themes.

Next, the researcher proceeded to generate initial codes. Coding involves labeling segments of the data that appear significant in relation to the research questions. In this study, codes might include references to specific PR strategies, challenges in sustainability communication, or stakeholder engagement techniques. The coding process helps break down the data into smaller, manageable pieces, each representing a particular aspect of the participants'

experiences or perceptions. This stage is critical because it allows the researcher to begin organizing the data in a systematic way (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

After coding, the researcher searched for themes by grouping similar codes together to form broader categories. A theme captures something important about the data concerning the research questions and represents a patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2023). For example, themes might emerge around the influence of local culture on sustainability narratives, the role of PR in managing corporate reputation, or the challenges of limited resources in promoting sustainability initiatives.

Once themes are identified, they were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflect the data and are coherent. During this phase, the researcher may merge similar themes, break larger themes into sub-themes, or discard themes that do not provide significant insight. This process ensures that the final set of themes is both comprehensive and clearly related to the research objectives (Terry et al., 2017).

The final stage involves defining and naming themes. At this point, the researcher wrote detailed descriptions of each theme, explaining how it relates to the overall research question and providing illustrative quotes from the data. These descriptions formed the basis for the findings section of the study, where each theme were discussed in detail to show how it contributes to understanding the role of PR in promoting corporate sustainability in Ghana.

Thematic analysis is particularly suited to this study because it allows the researcher to distill complex and diverse data into clear, coherent themes that capture the essence of participants' experiences. Its flexibility enables the researcher to adapt the analysis as new patterns emerge, ensuring that the analysis remains closely aligned with the data. Furthermore, the focus on themes allows for a detailed exploration of how PR strategies are used to communicate sustainability narratives, how organisations engage stakeholders, and the impact of these efforts on corporate reputation (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

This study implemented several key ethical considerations to ensure the research maintained high academic integrity and protected the rights and well-being of participants. First, informed consent was obtained from all participants before any data collection began. Each participant received a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. This ensured that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants were fully aware of their involvement.

To protect the privacy of the participants, confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and any identifying details were removed from the data. All data were securely stored in password-protected files to prevent unauthorized access. Only the researcher and relevant supervisory staff had access to the raw data. Furthermore, all recordings and transcriptions were securely deleted after the data had been processed.

The study also sought to minimize any potential harm to participants. The interview questions were crafted to avoid sensitive topics that could cause discomfort or distress. Additionally, participants were encouraged to skip any questions they were uncomfortable answering. The research was reviewed and approved by DRID, which ensured that the study adhered to all ethical guidelines required for responsible and respectful academic research. By following these ethical protocols, the research ensured the protection of participants' rights and the integrity of the study.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

The chapter presented the methodology used in this study. It covered the research approach, design, sampling strategy, and data collection methods. The chapter also outlined the data analysis procedures and the ethical considerations that were adhered to throughout the research

process. By providing a clear description of these elements, the chapter ensured that the research was both systematic and transparent. It offered a comprehensive overview of the methods employed, enabling the reader to understand how the study's findings were derived. The ethical framework followed was crucial in maintaining the integrity of the research.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter offers a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the data collected, centred on the perspectives of participants about the integration of sustainability into corporate communication strategies. It explores the challenges encountered by public relations (PR) departments and examines the effects of these efforts on stakeholder engagement. The analysis connects the findings with existing literature, shedding light on areas of consensus, emerging patterns, and distinct insights provided by the participants. To protect the confidentiality of participants and address ethical considerations, pseudonyms were used. Each participant is referred to as Parti-1 through Parti-10, allowing for a coherent discussion while maintaining anonymity and safeguarding sensitive organisational information.

##### **4.1.1 Demographic Overview**

The participants, represented by pseudonyms Parti-1 to Parti-10, held various positions within their respective organisations, ranging from senior PR managers to communication strategists. Most participants possessed extensive experience in the field, with work histories spanning between 5 to 20 years. This level of experience provided a diverse range of insights into the evolving landscape of sustainability communication. For instance, Parti-1, Parti-3, and Parti-5 had over 15 years of experience and held senior managerial roles, focusing primarily on strategic communication. Meanwhile, Parti-2, Parti-4, and Parti-7 had mid-level roles with around 8 to 12 years of experience, often handling operational aspects of PR and stakeholder engagement. Parti-6, Parti-8, and Parti-10 represented a newer generation of PR professionals with approximately 5 years of experience, offering fresh perspectives on the integration of digital strategies and sustainability narratives.

The diversity in experience and position allowed for a comprehensive examination of sustainability communication practices across different organisational levels. Participants with senior roles, such as Parti-1 and Parti-5, provided insights into high-level strategy and decision-making processes, while mid-level managers like Parti-4 and Parti-7 shared practical challenges in implementing these strategies. The inclusion of less experienced professionals, such as Parti-8 and Parti-10, added value by highlighting recent trends and emerging digital approaches in sustainability messaging. This range of perspectives ensured a well-rounded understanding of the dynamics involved in shaping and promoting corporate sustainability narratives.

## **4.2 Integrating Sustainability into Organisational PR Strategies**

### **4.2.1 Understanding PR's Contribution to Organisational Sustainability**

The study sought to understand the role public relations play in organisations' efforts to embed sustainability within their broader communication strategies. The role of PR in shaping organisational sustainability narratives emerged as a dominant theme throughout the participants' accounts, reflecting its strategic significance in corporate communication. The participants generally agreed that PR is integral in conveying a company's sustainability efforts to both internal and external stakeholders, highlighting its essential function in building trust and fostering positive corporate images. This perspective is consistent with previous scholarship by Anani-Bossman and Mudzanani (2020), who posited that PR in Ghana often employs tailored communication strategies aimed at enhancing stakeholder engagement, aligning closely with the regional context's socio-economic nuances.

The data indicated a shared understanding among participants that PR serves as a crucial bridge, connecting the organisation's sustainability initiatives with the broader public. This role was explicitly echoed by Parti-2, who described PR as pivotal in communicating the company's efforts transparently, thereby grounding its reputation in environmental and social responsibility. Similarly, Parti-5 highlighted PR's function in framing the organisation's actions

within a societal context, which resonates with the findings of Bernardino (2021), who underscored the importance of aligning corporate sustainability efforts with stakeholder expectations to enhance credibility. These views align well with Stakeholder Theory, as proposed by Freeman (1984), which emphasises the necessity of addressing the interests of diverse stakeholders to foster mutual trust and cooperation. The focus on transparency and engagement suggests that participants view PR as a vital mechanism for navigating complex stakeholder relationships.

While the overall consensus pointed towards the strategic role of PR in communicating sustainability, there were differences in emphasis among the participants. Parti-3 and Parti-7 articulated that PR not only promotes sustainability efforts but also educates audiences about the underlying reasons for these initiatives. This approach was noted as essential for making sustainability commitments “visible and tangible,” thereby linking them to real-world impacts. The educational aspect of PR, as outlined by these participants, reflects the insights of Munten et al. (2021), who argued that effective communication of sustainability efforts is key to building trust and enhancing corporate reputation. This perspective also aligns with Systems Theory, which views organisations as interconnected systems where effective communication is necessary for adapting to environmental changes and maintaining equilibrium.

Moreover, some participants highlighted PR’s role in strategic storytelling. Parti-8 pointed out that PR was responsible for narrating the company’s sustainability journey, ensuring recognition of its efforts while providing contextual evidence of impact. This perspective attunes with the conceptual review by Foust and St John III (2024), who observed that strategic storytelling in PR helps organisations craft compelling narratives that resonate with stakeholders and foster deeper engagement. The notion of crafting a cohesive sustainability narrative was further echoed by Parti-10, who emphasised the importance of creating clear and compelling messages that connect the company’s environmental goals with its broader corporate vision. This mirrors the argument made by Ayiku and Tandoh (2020), who noted that

effective communication strategies are instrumental in advancing corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Ghanaian organisations, particularly in building and maintaining a strong corporate image.

The data also revealed a shared belief in the accountability aspect of PR, as noted by Parti-9, who highlighted the role of PR in keeping the company accountable to its sustainability goals by informing the public about ongoing projects and their outcomes. This perspective aligns with the principles of transparent communication advocated by Tam et al. (2022), who argued that consistent and honest reporting of sustainability initiatives enhances corporate credibility and mitigates scepticism, particularly in regions where greenwashing concerns are prevalent. Additionally, Parti-4 and Parti-6 emphasised the amplification role of PR, noting that it leverages various media channels to ensure public awareness of the company's sustainability actions. This view reflects the observations of Kinderman (2020), who asserted that PR professionals are often at the forefront of amplifying sustainability narratives, utilising both traditional and digital platforms to engage stakeholders effectively.

A deeper synthesis of the findings suggests that the role of PR extends beyond mere promotion. It involves a strategic process of framing, educating, and engaging, as highlighted by multiple participants. Parti-7, for instance, succinctly summarised this sentiment:

The role of PR in sustainability is pivotal. We do not just promote; we educate. We make sure our audience understands the reasons behind our initiatives, building a narrative that reflects genuine corporate responsibility. It is about creating a dialogue that resonates with our stakeholders and reflects our commitment to long-term ecological and social well-being.

This emphasis on dialogue and education reflects the findings of Pompper (2020), who noted that PR's role in sustainability often involves crafting narratives that foster two-way communication, thereby enhancing corporate reputation and stakeholder trust.

In contrast, some participants like Parti-1 and Parti-4 placed greater emphasis on the foundational role of PR in shaping perceptions and building a positive corporate image. Parti-

1 specifically noted that PR “helps shape the narrative, ensuring that stakeholders see the organisation’s sustainability efforts clearly,” a sentiment that is consistent with the strategic communication frameworks discussed by Holtzhausen et al. (2021), which highlight the importance of clarity and alignment in organisational messaging.

In synthesising these perspectives, it is evident that the participants collectively view PR as an integral component of sustainability strategies, functioning as both a communicator and an advocate. The educational and storytelling aspects highlighted by participants like Parti-3, Parti-7, and Parti-8 align strongly with Systems Theory, which posits that effective communication is key to organisational adaptation and stability within complex environments. Stakeholder Theory, on the other hand, underpins the emphasis on transparency and engagement, as reflected in the responses of Parti-2, Parti-5, and Parti-9, who viewed PR as essential in managing stakeholder relationships and enhancing credibility through open communication.

The analysis reveals a coherent narrative that positions PR as a vital force in shaping corporate sustainability, not only through promotional activities but also through strategic engagement and transparent communication. This reinforces the broader understanding of PR’s role as articulated in the academic literature, bridging theory and practice in a way that highlights its significance within the corporate sustainability agenda in Ghana.

#### **4.2.2 Strategic Integration of Sustainability in Communication Planning**

The investigation focused on examining methods by which communication teams ensured the integration of sustainability as a core element in their strategic messaging frameworks. It was necessary to examine this aspect to gauge the extent to which sustainability principles are prioritised in corporate communication, reflecting evolving practices and stakeholder expectations. The participants’ perspectives underscored the strategic integration of sustainability as a key element within their communication efforts, revealing a shared

commitment to embedding environmental and social themes into corporate narratives. The findings highlighted a variety of approaches to ensuring sustainability remained a focal point, though the underlying intent echoed a common goal of fostering authenticity and alignment with corporate values.

Parti-6 and Parti-10 emphasised the deliberate inclusion of clear sustainability goals from the outset, underscoring the importance of setting specific targets to maintain focus. Parti-10 noted that

We ensure that every strategy includes clear sustainability goals. From the outset, we outline key messages that highlight our green initiatives. We then use various channels to communicate these messages consistently, keeping the focus on our long-term environmental vision.

Their strategies mirrored the practices outlined by Tetteh et al. (2024), who observed that predefined objectives in sustainability communication help streamline efforts and enhance message clarity within corporate narratives. This alignment suggests a methodical approach to sustaining visibility and consistency across different channels, reinforcing the organisation's long-term environmental vision.

Conversely, Parti-2 and Parti-3 placed a stronger emphasis on research and internal collaboration as mechanisms for embedding sustainability themes. Parti-3 articulated, “we work closely with our sustainability officers. This collaboration ensures that the messaging reflects the actual initiatives we are implementing. It is about consistency and alignment, making sure every piece of communication reinforces our sustainability commitments.” This approach is consistent with Munten et al.’s (2021) assertion that effective sustainability communication must reflect real actions and align with corporate policies to avoid perceptions of greenwashing. Additionally, Parti-2’s focus on audience research harmonises with the principles of Systems Theory, as it highlights the need for adaptive strategies that respond to stakeholder interests and evolving trends in sustainability discourse (Suprayitno et al., 2024).

Several participants, including Parti-4 and Parti-8, indicated a strong reliance on storytelling as a means of integrating sustainability into their communication strategies. Parti-8 elaborated:

We integrate sustainability by focusing on storytelling. We do not just present facts; we create compelling narratives around our initiatives. By sharing stories of the positive impact we are making, we keep sustainability as a central theme in all our communications. This helps build a consistent and honest image of our efforts.

This storytelling approach is reflective of Pompper's (2020) work, which highlighted that narratives can effectively bridge the gap between corporate actions and stakeholder expectations by making sustainability themes relatable and memorable. The emphasis on storytelling also mirrors Ayiku and Tandoh's (2020) observations on the use of dialogic public relations tools to enhance transparency and foster deeper engagement within the Ghanaian corporate context.

A consistent theme across the data was the prioritisation of sustainability from the initial planning stages. Parti-1 articulated that "every campaign begins with an assessment of alignment with environmental and social goals, a process aimed at centralising sustainability within the broader communication framework." This perspective was echoed by Parti-5, who elaborated on using data and real-life examples to substantiate sustainability claims, thereby building credibility. Their approach synchronises with the recommendations of Meuer et al. (2020), who argued that using empirical evidence strengthens the authenticity of corporate sustainability narratives and enhances stakeholder trust.

In summary, the data revealed a cohesive strategy focused on aligning communication with the organisation's sustainability goals, bolstered by research, collaboration, storytelling, and target-setting. The emphasis on adaptive, stakeholder-centred communication is best explained by Systems Theory, as it captures the dynamic interactions between corporate actions, communication strategies, and external feedback mechanisms. This theoretical framework provides a lens through which the interconnected nature of sustainability and corporate

messaging can be understood, supporting the participants' approaches to maintaining relevance and credibility in their communication efforts.

### **4.2.3 Incorporating ESG Factors into Corporate Narratives**

The analysis aimed to identify specific approaches utilised to incorporate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors into corporate communication narratives. The responses demonstrated a comprehensive approach to incorporating ESG factors into corporate messaging, revealing a shared recognition of the significance of these elements in shaping the company's public image. The data illustrated various strategies that participants employed to embed these factors across different communication channels, focusing on themes of transparency, ethical leadership, and community engagement.

Several participants, including Parti-3 and Parti-9, underscored the importance of using data to validate environmental achievements in their messaging. Parti-3 specifically noted, "we use data to illustrate our environmental achievements, such as reductions in carbon emissions. Social elements focus on our charity work and inclusive hiring practices. Governance messaging centres on strong leadership and accountability measures." This emphasis on quantitative evidence reflects the argument made by Meuer et al. (2020), who posited that incorporating measurable outcomes into sustainability communication enhances credibility and reassures stakeholders of the company's genuine commitment to ESG principles.

A notable theme in the findings was the use of visual and storytelling techniques to highlight environmental initiatives. Parti-2 and Parti-8 both emphasised the role of storytelling in showcasing the company's green projects. Parti-2 explained, "we use visual storytelling to show our progress on environmental initiatives, such as tree planting or clean energy projects. Social aspects are communicated through our partnerships with local communities." This approach mirrors the observations of Ayiku and Tandoh (2020), who argued that visual

narratives help make sustainability efforts more tangible and relatable, particularly in contexts where public trust must be actively cultivated.

Governance was consistently highlighted across the responses as a key component of ESG messaging, often tied to transparency and ethical leadership. Parti-4 and Parti-5 focused on governance by emphasising responsible decision-making and adherence to ethical standards. Parti-5 noted, “For governance, we share insights into our board's decisions and ethical policies,” aligning with the principles of Stakeholder Theory, which prioritises the need for ethical practices to foster trust among diverse stakeholder groups. This alignment suggests a strategic effort to enhance corporate accountability through transparent communication, reflecting the findings of Nyagadza et al. (2020), who argued that ethical governance practices are essential for maintaining stakeholder confidence.

A number of participants, including Parti-1 and Parti-6, discussed the importance of embedding ESG elements from the outset of communication planning. Parti-6 stated:

Our communication strategy revolves around ESG factors. We prioritise environmental messaging by detailing our pollution control measures. Social aspects are incorporated through storytelling about our community development projects. Governance factors are emphasised by showcasing our compliance with industry regulations and our ethical framework.

This integrated approach reflects the broader recommendations in the literature by Tetteh et al. (2024), who noted that effective ESG communication must be holistic, addressing all three factors consistently across the organisation’s messaging efforts.

On the social front, participants highlighted a variety of initiatives, with many focusing on community engagement and employee welfare. Parti-7 pointed out that social responsibility is central to their corporate narrative, stating, “we weave ESG factors into our corporate narrative. Social responsibility is communicated by highlighting our support for local charities.” This view aligns well with the observations of Dartey-Baah and Amoako (2021), who argued that

social sustainability must be integrated into corporate strategies to meet the expectations of socially conscious stakeholders.

While there was substantial agreement on the importance of integrating ESG factors, some participants differed in their approach to communicating these elements. For example, Parti-10 and Parti-8 prioritised education and awareness in their messaging, focusing on informing the audience about the company's long-term environmental and social goals. Parti-10 explained, "we start by educating our audience about our environmental goals. Social factors are communicated through our community engagement activities. Governance is highlighted by sharing updates on our compliance and ethical practices." This educational emphasis reflects Munten et al.'s (2021) assertion that informed stakeholders are more likely to support and engage with corporate sustainability initiatives, reinforcing the effectiveness of this approach.

In terms of governance, the focus on ethical leadership was prevalent, with participants like Parti-4 and Parti-9 emphasising strong corporate oversight and adherence to compliance standards. Parti-9 noted, "governance is discussed through our regular reports on ethical conduct," echoing the argument made by Bilderback (2024), who stressed the importance of transparent governance communication in building trust and mitigating potential risks. This consistent focus on ethical governance corresponds with Systems Theory, which views governance as a stabilising force within complex organisational environments, ensuring that corporate actions align with broader societal expectations (John, 2023).

The data revealed a cohesive strategy for integrating ESG factors into corporate messaging, characterised by a blend of visual storytelling, data-driven validation, and a strong emphasis on transparency and ethical leadership. The use of storytelling and data to highlight environmental initiatives resonates well with Systems Theory, which emphasises the need for coherent, adaptive communication strategies in response to stakeholder feedback. Additionally, the prioritisation of ethical governance and social engagement supports the principles of

Stakeholder Theory, indicating a commitment to addressing the diverse interests of the corporate audience. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for understanding the strategic integration of ESG factors into corporate communication, showcasing the interconnected nature of environmental, social, and governance themes within the broader context of organisational messaging.

#### **4.2.4 Identifying Relevant Sustainability Topics for Target Audiences**

The study explored mechanisms for determining the sustainability topics deemed most pertinent to organisational audiences, aiming to align messaging effectively. This exploration was warranted because aligning sustainability topics with audience interests directly influences the resonance and effectiveness of corporate messaging. The participants' strategies for determining relevant sustainability topics reflected a blend of data-driven analysis, stakeholder engagement, and industry trend monitoring. Parti-10 and Parti-6 highlighted the importance of social media monitoring and industry data analysis, illustrating a data-centric approach to gauging audience interests. Parti-10 explained that, "we listen to our audience through multiple channels. Social media monitoring helps us track which topics get the most engagement. We also review survey results and industry data to identify the most pressing sustainability issues." This approach resonates with Kinderman's (2020) assertion that leveraging digital analytics tools enables organisations to identify the most pressing issues in real-time and adjust their messaging accordingly.

In contrast, Parti-3 and Parti-9 underscored the value of direct stakeholder engagement, citing focus groups and interviews as key methods for gathering insights. Parti-9 stated, "we conduct stakeholder interviews to understand their concerns. We also review global sustainability trends to ensure our topics remain timely and relevant." Their emphasis on direct feedback suggests a more personalised approach, one that attunes with the stakeholder engagement principles outlined by Freeman (1984). This method addresses the informational needs of

stakeholders and facilitates a two-way communication process that enhances mutual understanding and relationship-building, as noted by Annan-Aggrey et al. (2022).

Several participants, including Parti-1 and Parti-5, prioritised public sentiment analysis and social listening to identify relevant sustainability topics. Parti-5 highlighted:

We prioritise sustainability topics by analysing public sentiment. Our team reviews online discussions and media coverage. This helps us identify what is currently important to our audience. We then tailor our messaging to reflect these concerns, ensuring our communications resonate with the public.

This strategy reflects Moscato's (2023) findings on the importance of aligning corporate messaging with prevailing public sentiments to maintain credibility and relevance in environmental communications.

Parti-4 and Parti-7 placed a stronger emphasis on the importance of identifying industry-specific trends and competitor messaging. Parti-4 noted that "regular reviews of industry reports provided valuable insights into the sustainability issues that were most talked about," particularly concerning climate change and social equity. This approach is consistent with the findings of Danso et al. (2019), who argued that aligning corporate messaging with industry trends enhances the resonance and impact of sustainability communication in competitive markets.

To summarise, the strategies for identifying relevant sustainability topics encompassed a combination of data analysis, direct engagement, and industry trend monitoring. The emphasis on research and feedback suggests a strong alignment with Stakeholder Theory, which prioritises the interests and concerns of diverse audiences in shaping organisational communication. The iterative nature of these approaches, characterised by continuous evaluation and adaptation, further supports the applicability of Systems Theory. The combination of these frameworks provides a comprehensive understanding of how

organisations navigate the complex landscape of sustainability communication, responding to both internal priorities and external demands effectively.

### **4.3 Navigating Challenges and Harnessing Opportunities in Promoting Sustainability**

#### **4.3.1 Addressing Obstacles in Promoting Sustainability Initiatives**

The research aimed to identify primary challenges encountered by public relations departments when promoting sustainability-focused initiatives. This examination was necessary due to the complex and often conflicting stakeholder expectations that can hinder effective sustainability communication. The data revealed a diverse set of challenges faced by participants in their efforts to promote sustainability initiatives, with recurring themes of scepticism, limited understanding, and resource constraints. A common concern highlighted by multiple participants was the widespread scepticism among stakeholders regarding the authenticity of corporate sustainability efforts. Parti-1 noted, “The main challenge is scepticism. Many stakeholders doubt the sincerity of corporate sustainability efforts. It takes time to build trust and prove that these initiatives are genuine.” This sentiment is consistent with the arguments of Moscato (2023), who observed that public distrust often stems from prior instances of greenwashing, making it difficult for organisations to convince stakeholders of their genuine commitment to sustainability.

Further, resource constraints also emerged as a prominent issue, with several participants, including Parti-3 and Parti-7, citing budget limitations as a significant barrier. Parti-3 elaborated on this challenge:

The biggest challenge I face is changing perceptions. Many people view sustainability as a costly endeavour with little immediate payoff. There is also a general lack of understanding about what sustainability truly involves. Convincing senior management to allocate sufficient resources can be a struggle too, especially when budgets are tight.

This aligns with the observations of Adomako and Tran (2022), who highlighted that financial limitations often hinder the implementation of comprehensive sustainability initiatives, particularly in emerging markets like Ghana. The emphasis on resource allocation reflects the broader tension between short-term business priorities and long-term environmental goals, a recurring theme in sustainability literature (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

The difficulty of conveying the long-term benefits of sustainability was another significant challenge noted by participants. Parti-2 and Parti-6 pointed out that many stakeholders, especially those focused on immediate returns, struggled to appreciate the delayed advantages of sustainable practices. Parti-2 stated, “one challenge is conveying the long-term benefits of sustainability. Some stakeholders prefer immediate results. Additionally, aligning the interests of various departments can be difficult, as not everyone sees sustainability as a priority.” This challenge reflects the issues discussed by Meuer et al. (2020), who argued that the perceived trade-offs between immediate financial gains and long-term environmental benefits often lead to internal resistance within organisations.

Another theme that surfaced was the challenge of gaining stakeholder buy-in, particularly when sustainability was perceived as a secondary concern compared to core business objectives. Parti-4 remarked, “we struggle with getting buy-in from stakeholders. They often see sustainability as a distraction from core business goals.” This difficulty in shifting perceptions is mirrored in the findings of Kinderman (2020), who noted that stakeholders frequently view sustainability as an external obligation rather than an integral part of business strategy.

Additionally, evolving regulatory landscapes presented ongoing challenges, as highlighted by Parti-9. This participant emphasised, “keeping up with evolving regulations is a constant struggle. There is also the issue of competing priorities. Sometimes, financial goals overshadow environmental concerns, making it hard to push sustainability initiatives forward.” The regulatory complexity mirrors the findings of Tetteh et al. (2024), who identified inconsistent

policy frameworks as a significant barrier to sustainability efforts, especially in developing economies.

The blend of these perspectives suggests that Stakeholder Theory provides the best framework for understanding these challenges. The focus on scepticism, resource allocation, and buy-in reflects the need to balance diverse stakeholder interests, a core principle of Stakeholder Theory. This theoretical approach highlights the importance of transparent communication and inclusive decision-making in addressing these challenges effectively.

#### **4.3.2 Overcoming Stakeholder Resistance to Sustainability Messaging**

The exploration centred on examining strategies that have proven effective in addressing and mitigating stakeholder resistance to sustainability messaging. Investigating these strategies was important, as securing stakeholder buy-in is critical for the successful dissemination of sustainability messages, especially in resistant environments. The participants described a variety of strategies that have proven effective in overcoming stakeholder resistance, with a strong emphasis on transparency, education, and tailored engagement. Transparency emerged as a central theme, with several participants, including Parti-1 and Parti-9, noting that open communication and detailed reporting were key to building trust. Parti-1 explained, “transparency has been key for us. We share detailed reports showing the positive impact of our sustainability efforts. This builds trust. Engaging stakeholders early in the process also helps to reduce resistance.” This adapts with the findings of Danso et al. (2019), who highlighted the importance of transparency in enhancing stakeholder engagement and reducing scepticism towards sustainability initiatives.

Education was another widely endorsed strategy. Parti-10 and Parti-5 pointed to the effectiveness of workshops and informational sessions in addressing knowledge gaps. Parti-10 stated:

Education is a core part of our strategy. We hold seminars and provide informational materials to explain the benefits of sustainability. We also

involve stakeholders in decision-making processes. This gives them a sense of ownership, making them less resistant to our initiatives.”

This emphasis on education mirrors the arguments made by Meuer et al. (2020), who posited that informed stakeholders are more likely to support sustainability initiatives, as they better understand the potential long-term benefits and the underlying rationale behind these efforts.

Direct engagement and dialogue also featured prominently in the data. Parti-3 highlighted the value of personal interactions, noting, “one of the best strategies is personal engagement. I often meet with stakeholders directly to discuss their concerns. This makes them feel valued and heard.” The effectiveness of direct dialogue reflects the recommendations of Pompper (2020), who argued that meaningful stakeholder engagement requires a two-way communication process that fosters mutual understanding and addresses concerns directly.

Additionally, tailoring messages to specific stakeholder groups was noted as an effective approach by Parti-8 and Parti-7. Parti-8 remarked, “we use targeted messaging. By tailoring our approach to different audience segments, we address specific concerns more effectively.” This strategy reconciles with the principles outlined by Annan-Aggrey et al. (2022), who noted that customised communication helps address the unique priorities of different stakeholders, thereby reducing resistance and enhancing the relevance of the sustainability message.

Highlighting the financial benefits of sustainability was another commonly cited tactic. Parti-6 and Parti-2 pointed out that stakeholders were more receptive when presented with data showing cost savings or competitive advantages derived from sustainable practices. Parti-6 stated, “highlighting the long-term financial benefits is effective. When stakeholders see potential cost savings, they are more open to the idea.” This perspective is consistent with the findings of Munten et al. (2021), who argued that demonstrating the economic advantages of sustainability can help align stakeholder interests and foster greater support for environmental initiatives.

The collective insights from the participants indicate that Systems Theory best fits the range of strategies employed. The emphasis on adaptive communication, tailored messaging, and ongoing education reflects the dynamic, interconnected nature of the relationships between organisations and their stakeholders. Systems Theory's focus on feedback loops and responsiveness to stakeholder concerns provides a robust framework for understanding how these strategies function within the broader organisational ecosystem (Small et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the data revealed a comprehensive array of strategies centred around transparency, direct engagement, education, and tailored messaging. These approaches highlight the importance of building trust, addressing knowledge gaps, and aligning sustainability goals with stakeholder interests. The integration of these strategies within the framework of Systems Theory underscores the dynamic and interconnected nature of effective stakeholder communication in the context of promoting corporate sustainability.

#### **4.4 Impact of PR-Driven Sustainability Narratives on Stakeholder Engagement and Corporate Reputation**

##### **4.4.1 Influence of Sustainability Narratives on Stakeholder Engagement**

The study examined the influence of PR-driven sustainability narratives on stakeholder engagement, paying particular attention to feedback from key stakeholders. This investigation was essential because the impact of these narratives on engagement levels plays a vital role in shaping corporate reputation and building trust. The data revealed a substantial positive impact of sustainability narratives on stakeholder engagement, with participants frequently highlighting increased dialogue, trust, and a sense of partnership as key outcomes. Several participants, including Parti-1 and Parti-5, noted that transparency and clarity in messaging were highly appreciated by stakeholders. Parti-1 shared

Our sustainability narratives have significantly boosted engagement. Stakeholders appreciate the transparency in our communication. We have received positive feedback, especially about the clarity and honesty in our messaging. They feel more connected to our mission and long-term goals.

This mirrors the findings of Kinderman (2020), who argued that transparent communication is vital in building stakeholder trust, particularly in the context of sustainability efforts.

Some other participants emphasised that their narratives created a platform for meaningful dialogue, enhancing the quality of engagement. Parti-6 highlighted, “the influence has been profound. Stakeholders now actively engage with our content, sharing it widely within their networks. We have received feedback that our stories help them see the company as a leader in sustainability.” This approach corresponds with the observations of Pompper (2020), who noted that effective storytelling in sustainability communication fosters a sense of inclusion and encourages stakeholders to participate more actively. Furthermore, Parti-3’s feedback reflected a similar trend, emphasising that stakeholders not only resonated with the narratives but also provided suggestions for new areas of focus. This responsiveness suggests that the narratives have succeeded in establishing a collaborative dynamic, indicative of strengthened relationships and enhanced stakeholder investment.

The data also pointed to a notable shift in perception, with stakeholders viewing the company in a more positive light as a result of its sustainability messaging. Parti-2 remarked, “the narratives have sparked more interest from stakeholders. Many have expressed that they now see the company in a more positive light. They value the detailed stories we share about our green initiatives.” This sentiment is consistent with the insights of Bilderback (2024), who argued that detailed and relatable communication around sustainability helps in reshaping corporate reputation and enhancing public perception. The approach of aligning sustainability narratives with stakeholders' values was highlighted by Parti-4, who stated, “they appreciate the way we align our messages with their values. Their feedback indicates a stronger trust in our brand as a result.” This alignment strategy reflects the principles of Stakeholder Theory, which prioritises the alignment of corporate actions with the expectations and values of stakeholders.

Several participants, including Parti-9 and Parti-10, pointed out that their narratives fostered a deeper sense of partnership, with stakeholders expressing a desire to be more involved in the sustainability journey. Parti-9 commented:

The change in engagement levels has been remarkable. Stakeholders now reach out with questions and suggestions more frequently. Many have praised us for being honest about both successes and challenges. They say it makes them feel like partners in our sustainability journey, rather than passive observers. This feedback has been instrumental in shaping our future strategies.

This reflects the observations of Meuer et al. (2020), who noted that honest and transparent communication fosters a sense of partnership, encouraging stakeholders to take an active role in the sustainability efforts of the company.

#### **4.4.2 Tailoring Sustainability Messages for Diverse Stakeholder Groups**

The inquiry focused on understanding how sustainability messages are tailored to meet the needs of diverse stakeholder groups and the resultant impact on engagement levels. Examining tailored messaging was crucial to highlight the significance of customised approaches, which can enhance communication effectiveness and foster stronger engagement. The findings demonstrated a strategic emphasis on customising sustainability messages to fit the distinct needs and interests of various stakeholder groups. Participants consistently noted that tailoring content enhanced engagement by making the messages more relevant and resonant. Parti-2 highlighted

We segment our audience carefully. Investors get detailed reports with financial implications, while employees receive updates focused on community impact. By addressing specific concerns, we have seen a notable rise in interest and participation across all groups.

This approach associates with the recommendations of Ayiku and Tandoh (2020), who argued that segmented communication strategies are essential in addressing the diverse priorities of stakeholders, thereby maximising engagement. Parti-4 and Parti-10 both stressed the importance of providing data-driven content to investors, while community stakeholders preferred narratives focused on social impact. Parti-4 shared:

We create distinct messaging for each group. Investors want data, so we give them metrics and projections. Local communities care about social projects, so we emphasise those. This approach has deepened trust and fostered stronger connections. Engagement levels have significantly improved.

This emphasis on data-driven messaging for investors mirrors the findings of Tetteh et al. (2024), who observed that clear and measurable reporting on sustainability initiatives is particularly effective in engaging financial stakeholders, as it tunes with their preference for evidence-based decision-making.

Quite a few participants, including Parti-5 and Parti-8, underscored the importance of adapting communication channels and tones to suit different audiences. Parti-5 noted, “we use different channels and tones for each group. Customers prefer simple, direct updates. Investors appreciate detailed analytics. Tailoring our communication has led to more meaningful interactions.” This reflects the principles of Systems Theory, as it involves adapting the organisation’s communication strategies based on the feedback and needs of different subsystems within the broader corporate environment (Musheke & Phiri, 2021).

The strategy of actively listening to stakeholder feedback before crafting tailored messages was emphasised by Parti-7 and Parti-3. Parti-7 explained that

we listen to stakeholders first, then craft messages that speak directly to their interests. For employees, it is about our workplace sustainability efforts. For consumers, it is about eco-friendly products. This personalised approach has increased engagement significantly.

This method of engaging stakeholders through dialogue and active listening reflects the findings of Annan-Aggrey et al. (2022), who noted that involving stakeholders in the messaging process enhances relevance and fosters stronger relationships. Additionally, Parti-6 highlighted the strategic adaptation of messaging for regulatory audiences, stating, “we adjust our messaging based on the audience's priorities. For policymakers, we highlight compliance and regulatory aspects. This has helped us gain more support from regulatory bodies.” This approach dovetails into the recommendations of Kinderman (2020), who emphasised the

importance of addressing regulatory expectations in sustainability communication to secure policy support and reduce potential resistance.

In synthesising these perspectives, it becomes evident that tailoring sustainability messages to fit the unique needs of different stakeholder groups is best understood through the lens of Systems Theory. The adaptability and responsiveness demonstrated by the participants echo the theory's focus on dynamic interactions within an organisational context, where feedback and environmental changes inform communication strategies. Additionally, the emphasis on aligning messages with stakeholder interests supports Stakeholder Theory, underscoring the importance of prioritising the diverse needs and values of various stakeholder groups in the development of effective sustainability narratives. Together, these theoretical frameworks provide a robust foundation for understanding the impact of tailored communication strategies on stakeholder engagement and trust-building.

#### **4.4.3 Evaluating the Effectiveness of PR Efforts in Sustainability Communication**

The investigation assessed the methods used by public relations teams to evaluate the success of their sustainability messaging efforts, identifying key indicators of effectiveness. This assessment was justified because understanding the metrics of success allows organisations to refine their strategies, improving the impact of future sustainability communications. The data highlighted a multifaceted approach to evaluating the success of PR strategies in promoting sustainability, with a strong emphasis on both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Participants frequently noted that the metrics chosen for evaluation were designed to capture various dimensions of stakeholder engagement, brand perception, and overall impact on corporate reputation.

The data underscored the importance of using digital engagement metrics as primary indicators of success. Parti-1 for instance shared, “we use metrics like social media engagement and website traffic. Increased positive feedback is another key indicator. We also track stakeholder

inquiries related to our initiatives.” This reliance on digital analytics mirrors the observations of Kinderman (2020), who argued that tracking online interactions provides valuable, real-time insights into the effectiveness of sustainability messaging, particularly in digital-first communication strategies. By monitoring social media and website metrics, these participants aimed to gauge the public’s response and interest in their sustainability initiatives.

In contrast, Parti-2 and Parti-8 highlighted a more comprehensive evaluation framework that combined quantitative measures with qualitative feedback. Parti-2 noted, “our evaluation relies on both qualitative and quantitative measures. We monitor media coverage, survey stakeholder perceptions, and analyse engagement rates. High participation in sustainability events also signals success.” This approach matches with the findings of Meuer et al. (2020), who emphasised the need for a balanced assessment strategy that incorporates both hard data and stakeholder perceptions to provide a holistic understanding of PR effectiveness in sustainability efforts.

Brand sentiment analysis and shifts in public perception emerged as significant indicators for several participants. Parti-3 elaborated on this approach:

We assess effectiveness through stakeholder feedback and brand sentiment analysis. We also track changes in customer loyalty and investor interest. Positive shifts in these areas suggest our efforts are working well. Stakeholder trust has become a core measure of our PR success.

This perspective is consistent with the arguments of Munten et al. (2021), who highlighted that positive changes in brand sentiment and stakeholder loyalty are reliable indicators of the impact of sustainability communication on corporate reputation. By focusing on brand perception, participants aimed to assess the broader, intangible outcomes of their PR efforts, which are critical in building long-term stakeholder trust.

Another common evaluation method cited in the findings was the use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to media reach and stakeholder engagement. Parti-4 mentioned, “We measure impact using KPIs like media reach and stakeholder engagement levels. We also look

at how our messages influence brand perception over time. Surveys provide valuable insights into public opinion.” This approach mirrors the recommendations of Danso et al. (2019), who noted that well-defined KPIs offer a clear framework for assessing the effectiveness of sustainability messaging, especially when the indicators are directly tied to strategic communication objectives.

Several participants, including Parti-6 and Parti-10, emphasised the role of direct stakeholder feedback in evaluating success. Parti-6 highlighted:

We rely on direct feedback from stakeholders and engagement statistics. We track participation in our programmes as well. A rise in collaborative projects indicates our messaging is resonating. This feedback helps us understand what aspects of our communication are most effective.

This reliance on stakeholder feedback conforms with the principles of Stakeholder Theory, which prioritises direct engagement and feedback loops as essential components of effective communication strategies. By using stakeholder responses as a core metric, these participants demonstrated a commitment to understanding the impact of their messaging from the perspective of the audience.

A distinct theme that emerged across the responses was the emphasis on adaptability in evaluation methods. Parti-9 and Parti-7 pointed out that regular assessments and adjustments were crucial for refining their strategies. Parti-9 explained, “We use several indicators, including brand sentiment and social media analytics. Stakeholder surveys give us direct insights. Positive changes in these metrics reflect the success of our efforts, and we adjust our strategy based on these results.” This adaptive approach is consistent with Systems Theory, which views organisations as dynamic systems that must continuously adapt their communication strategies based on feedback and changing environmental factors.

The data also highlighted the importance of internal metrics, such as employee engagement in sustainability activities, as noted by Parti-10. This participant remarked:

We evaluate through both internal and external metrics. Employee engagement in sustainability activities is a strong internal indicator. External measures include media coverage and stakeholder feedback. We adjust our strategy based on these results to ensure alignment with our overall goals.

This focus on internal indicators reflects the findings of Annan-Aggrey et al. (2022), who argued that employee participation is a critical measure of success, as it signals organisational commitment and helps reinforce the credibility of external sustainability messages.

#### **4.4.3 Indicators of Success in Assessing PR Efforts**

The findings pointed to a variety of indicators used to assess the effectiveness of PR efforts in promoting sustainability, ranging from digital engagement metrics to changes in brand sentiment and stakeholder loyalty. Digital analytics, such as social media engagement and website traffic, were consistently mentioned as primary indicators by participants like Parti-1 and Parti-5. This reliance on online metrics aligns with Moscato's (2023) argument that digital engagement provides immediate, measurable feedback on the impact of PR campaigns, particularly in the context of sustainability initiatives.

Qualitative measures, such as stakeholder surveys and focus group discussions, were highlighted by participants including Parti-7 and Parti-8. Parti-7 remarked, "Our evaluation process involves regular surveys and focus group discussions. We look at brand reputation and stakeholder involvement as indicators. Positive shifts here show that our PR efforts are effective." This qualitative approach is consistent with the recommendations of Pompper (2020), who emphasised the importance of incorporating stakeholder voices into the assessment process to gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of communication strategies.

Changes in partnership opportunities and collaborative projects also served as key indicators of success. Parti-5 noted, "An increase in sustainability-related partnerships is a strong sign of success," reflecting the insights of Tetteh et al. (2024), who argued that successful sustainability messaging often leads to enhanced collaboration and partnership opportunities, further validating the organisation's commitment to its environmental goals.

In synthesising these perspectives, Systems Theory emerges as the most suitable framework for understanding the evaluation processes described by participants. The focus on adaptive feedback loops, dynamic assessment methods, and a blend of quantitative and qualitative metrics reflects the interconnected nature of organisational systems and the need for continuous refinement of communication strategies. Stakeholder Theory also plays a role, particularly in the emphasis on direct feedback and relationship-building as core components of evaluation. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a robust foundation for understanding the complex dynamics involved in assessing the success of PR efforts in promoting sustainability.

#### **4.6 Chapter Summary**

The chapter analysed and discussed the collected data in relation to the study's objectives, providing a detailed examination of how sustainability is incorporated into corporate messaging. The chapter explored the varied strategies employed by PR professionals, the challenges they encountered, and the effectiveness of these approaches in shaping stakeholder perceptions. The analysis drew connections between participant responses and the theoretical frameworks outlined in earlier chapters, highlighting consistencies and contrasting insights. Key findings included the importance of transparency, the role of tailored messaging, and the necessity of overcoming stakeholder scepticism. This chapter's discussion integrated both empirical data and relevant academic literature, offering a comprehensive understanding of the role of public relations in advancing corporate sustainability efforts.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The chapter synthesises the study's key findings, drawing together insights from the data analysis and presenting conclusions that address the objectives of the research. It offers a concise summary of the main themes identified, reflecting on the implications of the study for both public relations practice and organisational strategy. The chapter also provides targeted recommendations aimed at enhancing the integration of sustainability in corporate communication, guided by the challenges and opportunities highlighted in the findings. By concluding with suggestions for future research, the chapter seeks to contribute to the evolving discourse on sustainability in the Ghanaian context, emphasising the relevance of strategic PR efforts in shaping corporate narratives and fostering stakeholder trust.

#### 5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The aim of the study was to investigate the role of public relations in shaping and promoting sustainability narratives within organisations. It sought to uncover how these narratives are integrated into communication strategies, the challenges and opportunities encountered by PR professionals, and the impact of these efforts on stakeholder engagement and corporate reputation. Specifically, the study set out to: (1) explore the ways in which organisations incorporate sustainability into their communication strategies; (2) examine the barriers and advantages faced by PR departments when advocating for sustainable practices; and (3) evaluate the influence of PR-driven sustainability narratives on engaging stakeholders and enhancing the organisation's public image.

The findings revealed that sustainability has become a cornerstone of corporate communication, with PR teams playing a pivotal role in embedding ESG factors into

messaging. The data highlighted that organisations strategically integrate sustainability themes from the outset of their campaigns, aligning them with broader corporate goals. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of research, collaboration with internal sustainability teams, and the use of storytelling techniques. These approaches ensured that sustainability messaging was not only coherent but also resonated with diverse audiences. The use of data-driven narratives, visual storytelling, and transparent reporting emerged as key methods for conveying the company's sustainability commitments effectively.

However, the study also identified several challenges faced by PR departments in this process. A major issue was scepticism among stakeholders, who often doubted the sincerity of corporate sustainability claims. This was compounded by resource constraints and internal resistance, particularly from departments that prioritised immediate financial returns over long-term environmental goals. Aligning the interests of various stakeholders proved difficult, as did maintaining momentum in sustainability initiatives, especially when external competitors did not prioritise such efforts. Despite these obstacles, PR teams employed strategies like transparency, stakeholder education, and tailored messaging to overcome resistance and enhance engagement.

The influence of sustainability narratives on stakeholder engagement was found to be substantial. The study revealed that clear and consistent messaging significantly boosted interest and involvement from stakeholders. Many participants reported increased dialogue, positive feedback, and heightened trust as a direct result of their PR efforts. Stakeholders felt more connected to the company's mission, often expressing appreciation for the honesty and clarity of the narratives. The tailored approach to different stakeholder groups, focusing on their specific needs and concerns, was particularly effective in building strong relationships. Investors, customers, and community partners responded well to customised messages, which addressed their distinct priorities, whether financial returns, eco-friendly products, or social impact.

In summary, the study underscored the critical role of PR in integrating sustainability into corporate communication, navigating challenges, and crafting narratives that resonate with stakeholders. It highlighted how strategic, well-crafted messaging not only enhances engagement but also strengthens corporate reputation, positioning the organisation as a credible leader in sustainability efforts. The findings suggest that, despite the hurdles, a comprehensive and adaptive communication strategy centred on transparency and alignment with stakeholder values can significantly amplify the impact of sustainability initiatives.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Corporate sustainability refers to the commitment of businesses to operate in ways that are economically viable while also contributing positively to the environment and society. It goes beyond mere compliance with regulatory standards, aiming instead to integrate sustainable practices into the core of business strategy and operations. The significance of corporate sustainability lies in its capacity to enhance long-term financial performance, reduce environmental impact, and build strong, resilient relationships with stakeholders. Public relations plays a critical role in shaping and communicating these sustainability narratives, ensuring that the company's efforts are visible, credible, and aligned with stakeholder expectations. By crafting compelling messages and highlighting tangible outcomes, PR professionals help bridge the gap between corporate initiatives and public perception, thus fostering trust and enhancing the organisation's reputation. Through effective storytelling and transparent reporting, PR not only amplifies the company's commitment to sustainability but also positions it as a responsible leader in its industry.

The growing emphasis on sustainability across global industries has reshaped business practices, making it essential for organisations to incorporate sustainable development into their core operations. Public relations has emerged as a crucial player in communicating these sustainability efforts, translating complex ESG factors into relatable narratives that resonate with diverse audiences. In the context of the Ghanaian market, the drive towards sustainability

has gained momentum, fuelled by increased awareness of climate change, social equity, and economic resilience. The PR industry, therefore, plays a pivotal role in shaping public discourse, building trust, and guiding corporate strategies that align with societal expectations. This industry's ability to craft authentic and transparent messages is critical, as it helps companies bridge the gap between their sustainability commitments and stakeholder perceptions, ensuring that their efforts are acknowledged and valued.

The implications of this study for the practice of public relations in Ghana are significant, especially as the local business environment becomes more attuned to sustainable practices. The findings suggest that PR professionals must adopt a more strategic, stakeholder-centred approach, using tailored communication to meet the unique needs of different audiences. This study is crucial for Ghana's growing interest in sustainability, as it highlights the importance of effective PR strategies in not only promoting corporate initiatives but also in building lasting relationships with communities, investors, and regulatory bodies. The research underscores the need for PR practices that are adaptive and responsive to local contexts, reflecting the specific environmental and social priorities of the Ghanaian market. By providing insights into the effective integration of sustainability narratives, the study offers a valuable contribution to the evolving practice of public relations in Ghana, aiding businesses in their quest for reputational excellence and sustainable growth.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that effective integration of sustainability into corporate communication strategies is crucial for enhancing stakeholder engagement and building a strong corporate reputation. The recommendations outlined below are designed to address the key challenges identified in the research and to align with the study's objectives, providing actionable steps for PR practitioners, corporate leadership, and other relevant stakeholders.

First, organisations should prioritise the incorporation of sustainability into their communication strategies from the initial stages of planning. PR practitioners must collaborate closely with internal sustainability teams to ensure that the narratives align with actual initiatives. This alignment will enhance credibility and prevent perceptions of greenwashing. The use of data-driven storytelling should be expanded, highlighting measurable achievements in ESG factors. Corporate leadership should facilitate this integration by providing adequate resources and fostering a culture that recognises the long-term value of sustainability messaging.

Second, to overcome the identified challenges, PR departments should enhance their efforts in educating stakeholders about the long-term benefits of sustainability. This can be achieved through workshops, detailed reports, and interactive sessions tailored to the specific interests of different stakeholder groups. Transparency in communication should be maintained at all levels, with frequent updates on both the successes and challenges of sustainability initiatives. Regulatory bodies and industry associations should support these efforts by establishing clear guidelines for sustainability reporting, helping companies navigate evolving compliance requirements.

Third, the study highlighted the importance of tailored messaging for different stakeholder segments. PR professionals should develop customised communication strategies that address the distinct concerns of investors, customers, employees, and local communities. For investors, the focus should be on financial implications and long-term gains of sustainable practices. Customers should be engaged through narratives that emphasise the company's commitment to eco-friendly products. Meanwhile, community stakeholders may respond better to messaging centred around social benefits and local initiatives. This targeted approach will help strengthen relationships and build trust across diverse groups.

Finally, organisations need to implement a robust framework for evaluating the effectiveness of their sustainability communication. PR teams should employ a mix of quantitative metrics, such as social media engagement and website traffic, alongside qualitative feedback from stakeholder surveys and focus group discussions. This balanced approach will provide a comprehensive view of the impact of their messaging and help refine future strategies.

### **5.5 Areas for Future Research**

Future research should explore the long-term impact of sustainability narratives on corporate reputation and financial performance within the Ghanaian context. Additionally, there is a need to investigate the role of digital media in amplifying sustainability messaging, particularly on platforms favoured by younger, more environmentally conscious audiences. Further studies could also examine the effectiveness of different storytelling techniques in engaging various stakeholder groups, providing deeper insights into the best practices for crafting compelling sustainability narratives in diverse cultural and economic environments. This research could extend beyond traditional PR methods, incorporating new media and emerging technologies to better understand their potential in promoting sustainable business practices.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Guide

Section 1: To explore how organizations integrate sustainability into their communication strategies

1. Sustainability is important to organizations, what role does PR play in there?
2. How do you ensure that sustainability is a key component in the communication strategies your team develops?
3. In what ways do you incorporate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors into the messaging around your corporate initiatives?
4. How do you determine which sustainability topics are most relevant for your audience?

Section 2: To examine the challenges and opportunities faced by PR departments in promoting sustainability initiatives

1. What are the primary challenges you encounter when promoting sustainability initiatives?
2. What strategies have proven effective in overcoming stakeholder resistance to sustainability messages?

Section 3: To assess the influence of PR-driven sustainability narratives on stakeholder engagement and corporate reputation

1. How have your sustainability narratives influenced stakeholder engagement, and what feedback have you received from key stakeholders?

2. How do you tailor your sustainability messages to different stakeholder groups, and what impact has this had on engagement?

3. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your PR efforts in promoting sustainability, and what indicators do you use to assess success?