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FACULTY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS, MARKETING AND ADVERTISING

ASSESSING THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

WITH INSIGHT FROM SELECTED ORGANIZATIONS IN GHANA

SUBMITTED BY

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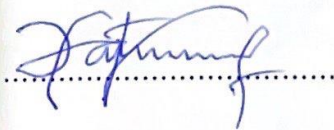
AWARD OF A MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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NOVEMBER, 2021

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

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



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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

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

(Supervisor Signature)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Paul', written over a horizontal line.

DATE: 03/12/2021

DEDICATION

Dedicate to God who picked me up from the streets of Accra and brought me this far. To my mother who has been there for me at all times. To my wife and children, and my siblings who stood by me throughout this journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many appreciations to; Mr. Kwame Apau and Mr. Ato Monney of the Central University, Dr. A. K. Ofori Ahenkorah, former Executive Secretary of the Energy Commission. Mr. Moses Agyemang of Private Enterprise Federation. Reverend Dr. George Asante and the management of Christ Apostolic Church International, Osu.

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A big Ayekoo to all the lecturers in the Ghana Institute of Journalism for their guidance in this chapter of my life.

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to assess the public perception of public relations practice in Ghana. To achieve this objective, three were set forth which included finding out the public perception of public relations practice in Ghana, ascertaining whether the public perception of public relations practice in the selected organizations is positive or negative and exploring how the negative public perceptions of public relations in Ghana could be changed. In order to address these objectives, the study employed a mixed method approach from which questionnaire were employed to collected data from three hundred (300) respondents. The respondents were drawn from customers of ECG, Energy Commission and EPA, the organizations selected for the study. The findings of the study indicated that the overall public perception of public relations practice in Ghana was found to be positive. Also, the cumulative majority of responses indicated that the perception of public relations practice of the selected organizations was neutral. It was also found that the negative public perception of public relations could be changed by indulge in continuous stakeholder engagement activities, sensitization exercises among other suggestions. The study recommends that it is essential for organizations to consider incorporating periodic public perception surveys into their operations. Also, organizations should create an atmosphere where the public can reach out to them with feedback.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Perception is the process of distinguishing between stimuli or occurrences in the environment and the act of interpreting these stimuli (Munday and Chandler, 2018). It is feasible to argue that the concept of perception of a profession is understood by individuals who make up a society. When looking at the public relations profession, it is clear that there are debates concerning whether or not it is a profession. There are individuals who believe that public relations is not yet a profession, as well as those who believe that it is in the process of becoming one (Öksüz, 2015).

Benn, Todd and Pendleton (2010) for instance note that because public relations is one of the fastest-growing professions, public relations firms are expanding their capabilities and practices by employing new public relations practitioners. Despite the field's expansion, the public perception of public relations remains negative. The field's perceived credibility continues to dwindle, as noted by Pendleton (2013), who claims that the public relations industry has lost a lot of its reputation in recent years.

Despite the fact that public relations is described as a management function based on sound organizational performance and the use of two-way communication to build and retain goodwill amongst, some people outside the industry would interpret it unfavorably (White and Park, 2010). Some people argue that public relations practitioners manipulate information to make their organization look better, rather than employ two-way communication to generate and preserve goodwill amongst publics (Merkelsen, 2012). Others feel that public relations is a deceptive

profession in which practitioners behave primarily in the best interests of their organizations, not in the best interests of their audiences (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales, 2019).

Bernays (1992, 1993) has been the most ardent advocate for licensing of public relations practitioners as a strategy to improve credibility and elevate the trade as a profession (Tanyildizi and Ataykaya, 2019). It is conceivable to state that there are certain issues with the public relations profession's societal perspective. Paskin (2013) adds that public relations is a communication discipline that entails adopting strategic communication processes with target audiences in order to build, maintain, and strengthen a corporation's image and reputation.

Since its inception, Grunig (2020) indicates that public relations has seen several adjustments and developments. Throughout history, Tsetsura (2010) suggests as well that numerous definitions of public relations have emerged. However, public relations in general does not have a solid foundation in the minds of the public (White and Park, 2010). This issue still exists today, which is why the focus of this research is on how people in society view the concept of public relations. It is however ironic that public relations professionals, who have substantial tasks and obligations connected to a company's or organization's image and reputation, are unable to accurately protect the image and reputation of their profession (Yldrm and Akbulut, 2017).

With this lapse however, Uduji (2013) insists that the goal of public relations is to establish two-way communication with the goal of finding common ground or areas of mutual interest, as well as to develop understanding based on truth, knowledge, and complete information. And that although the degree of activity to create effective public relations may vary depending on the size and character of the interested parties, the philosophy, strategy, and methods will be quite similar whether the public relations program is aimed to influence international understanding or to enhance relationships between a firm and its customers.

Credibility is the cornerstone attribute that public relations practitioners must possess if they have any hopes of influencing an audience's perceptions or attitudes (Fawkes, 2014). Over a long period of time, scholars (Alaimo, 2020; DiStaso, Vafeiadis and Amaral, 2015; Fawkes, 2012) have established credibility and its counterpart, trustworthiness, as the key source and message attributes necessary in communicating persuasive messages. Without credibility, the annals of research would suggest that any hopes of effectively garnering support for an espoused position are slight if present at all (Westcott-Baker, 2013; O'Keefe, 2015).

Despite the fact that many public relations researchers (Kim and Park, 2011; Servaes, 2012; Asunta, 2016) recognize the value of professionalism in public relations, it is nevertheless seen as a "common occupation" for a variety of reasons (Tanyildizi and Ataykaya, 2019). Individual perceptions of the profession; conveys an individual's views about the profession, their attitude toward it, their behavior, and their worldview (Marsh, 2018). The view of a profession by society is influenced by a number of elements, including the functionality of a profession's dignity in society (Ylmaz and Tanrverdi, 2020).

When journalists have repeatedly expressed negative subjects, the collection of motifs produces an interpretive package or "stock of frames" that carries both implicit and explicit meanings (Van Gorp, 2010). Aside from identifying recurring themes, studies have revealed that public relations is frequently used in news stories that are not about public relations (Yoon and Black, 2011; Scrimger and Richards, 2002). The usage of words like "public relations gimmick" and "public relations nightmare" to characterize unethical or bad events in news articles that have nothing to do with public relations smears the profession. The study's goal is to discover how public relations is perceived in society which may in turn affect how it is recognized.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Recent public opinion surveys and source credibility experiments as well have not painted a flattering picture of public relations (Callison, Merle and Seltzer, 2014). Both have labeled practitioners as spokespersons whom the public highly doubts and have ranked them behind almost every other information source imaginable, including pollsters, student activists, and funeral directors (Yoo and Jo, S., 2014). Because of these findings, researchers have been quick to relegate practitioners to working in the wings, out of the public eye, and speaking through other company mouthpieces. Studies of how public relations is depicted in the media have discovered recurring negative stereotypes.

White and Park (2010) subscribe to the view that similar themes have been uncovered independently by other experts which has led to the conceptualizations of public relations as damage control, publicity, an attempt to hide or obscure the truth, an attempt to advance a company's agenda, and public relations as non-substantive activities have all been discovered in past studies. While there is work done on public perception, specific materials focused on practice of public relations in the Ghanaian setting is either sparse, shallow or non-existence essentially.

The essence of this study is to probe the phenomenon of ascertaining the public perception held about the practice of public relations in the Ghanaian setting. This probe is important as it falls in line with Seitel's (2017) assertion that public opinion is not a static element but like a swinging pendulum. This study intends to suggest ways public relations practitioners can improve their craft based on data collected

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The main purpose of this study is to assess the public perception of public relations practice in Ghana. In pursuing this course, the researcher intends to be guided by the following specific objectives.

1. To find out the public perception of public relations practice in Ghana
2. To ascertain whether the public perception of public relations practice in the selected organizations is positive or negative
3. To explore how the negative public perceptions of public relations in Ghana can be changed

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The following as well are questions posed by the researcher to aid the enquiry being conducted.

1. What is the public perception of public relations practice in Ghana?
2. Is the public perception of public relations practice in the selected organizations positive or negative?
3. How can the negative public perceptions of public relations in Ghana be changed?

1.4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The public has negative impressions of public relations, yet the researcher discovered numerous good perspectives of public relations through a literature review. This study aimed to understand more of society's mixed perceptions of public relations by surveying members of the public as well as interviewing key communicators from the Ghanaian ecosystem in order to ascertain ways to modify negative perceptions of public relations and rid public relations of its unfavorable image. Public relations is a legitimate profession, and society should be aware of what public relations

practitioners do. As a result, it would be critical to conduct this research so that a few bad expectations do not appear to have tainted the field as a whole.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

While perception has always played an important role in business, this study is of relevance because it will help companies appreciate the need for long-term interventions to address unfavorable reviews and poor customer experiences. The study further helps with an understanding of the Ghanaian perceptions of the public relations practice. This study is again of significance because it provides public relations practitioners as well as business with a perspective that will help them prosper in their future prospects.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study set on a pivot between public perception and public relation practice primarily. The researcher will by this stretch the scope of the study to cover inputs from members of the public of selected organizations as well as some key public relations practitioners for a broad perspective. While the study will be based on respondents from Ghanaian organizations, it is fair to state that Ghana will be the context for the study as well.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This research work will comprise five (5) chapters. Chapter one will be the opening part of the research work and will include a background to the study, problem statement, research objectives, among other salient sections. Chapter two will then bother on the reviewing of literature. This chapter will discuss literature relevant to the study as well as drawing on empirical studies to guide this study. Chapter three will cover the research methodology of the study. Chapter four will be to

analyse the data collected while the Chapter five will discuss the findings of the study and summarizing the study primarily.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on providing a complete overview of previous research on the subject at hand. Scholarly publications, books, and other related sources will be reviewed here. By appreciating the work of past researchers, the chapter essentially helps to provide a theoretical foundation for the investigation.

2.1 OVERVIEW OF SELECTED ORGANIZATIONS

2.1.1 Electricity Company of Ghana Limited

The Electricity Company of Ghana Limited (ECG) is in charge of distributing electricity in Ghana's southern parts. ECG's tasks, as per ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (2021), includes transmitting, delivering, and distributing power, as well as executing national electrification programs on behalf of the government. For distribution, the corporation also buys electricity in bulk (from the Volta River Authority) or from any other supplier. Construction, reconstruction, installation, assembling, repairing, maintaining, operating, or removing sub-transmission stations, electrical appliances, installations and fittings all fall under this category.

The ECG was founded in 1963 and became a limited company in February 1997, when shares were first sold. However, the government still owns the corporation. The Electricity Corporation of Ghana (ECG) was founded by the passing of the Electricity Corporation Decree, 1967 (NLCD 125) and the repeal of the Electricity Act (Institute of Developing Economies Japan External Trade Organization [IDE-JETRO], 2021). For the following two decades, ECG would be fully

responsible for power supply and distribution networks throughout the country. In 1987, the corporation's sphere of operation was limited to the southern parts of Ghana which also had a greater concentration of customers.

ECG has the vision to be financially sustainable and focused energy service by 2024 and a mission to provide quality reliable and safe electricity services to support the growth and development of Ghana (Electricity Company of Ghana [ECG] Corporate Profile, 2021). As part of the company's core values lies professionalism which encompasses technical competence, discipline and teamwork among other things. Also, ECG prides itself on openness through effective communication, transparency, integrity and trustworthiness. Wellbeing, excellence and reliability are other core values ECG prides itself on embodying (ECG Corporate Profile, 2021).

2.1.2 Energy Commission of Ghana

The Energy Commission of Ghana is charged with regulating and managing the development and utilization of Ghana's energy resources, as well as providing a legal, regulatory, and supervisory framework for all energy providers in the country, specifically by issuing licenses for the transmission, wholesale, supply, distribution, and sale of electricity and natural gas, as well as other related matters (Energy Commission Corporate Profile, 2021). The Energy Commission of Ghana is charged with regulating and managing the development and utilization of Ghana's energy resources, as well as providing a legal, regulatory, and supervisory framework for all energy providers in the country, specifically by issuing licenses for the transmission, wholesale, supply, distribution, and sale of electricity and natural gas, as well as other related matters (Energy Commission Corporate Profile, 2021).

In addition, the Commission prepares, reviews, and updates indicative national plans regularly to ensure that all reasonable energy demands are met, as well as prescribing performance standards

and technical and operational rules of practice for the supply, distribution, and sale of electricity and natural gas to consumers by public utilities through legislative instruments.

Another prerogative of the Commission is to ensure that the provisions of such legal instruments are enforced uniformly throughout the country, as well as to promote competition in the supply, marketing, and sale of renewable energy products and other sources of energy (Energy Commission Corporate Profile, 2021). The Commission's mandate includes promoting energy efficiency and productive uses of electricity, natural gas, and petroleum products, as well as licensing public utilities for transmission, wholesale supply, distribution, and sale of electricity and natural gas, and securing a comprehensive database for national decision-making on energy resource development and utilization (Energy Commission Corporate Profile, 2021).

2.1.3 Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is Ghana's principal public authority for environmental protection and improvement. According to the Agency's corporate profile (2021), it is obligated to ensure that everyone in today's society looks after air, land, and water so that future generations inherit a cleaner, healthier environment. EPA has a long history in Ghana, with offices all around the country working on and implementing government policy, inspecting and regulating industries, and responding to emergencies such as pollution incidents (Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] Corporate Profile, 2021).

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was formally founded on December 30, 1994 (Act 490), with the mission of regulating the environment and ensuring that government policies on the environment are implemented (EPA Corporate Profile, 2021). The former Environmental Protection Council (EPC) was created by the Environmental Protection Council Decree of 1974

(NRCD 239), which was later changed by the EPC (Amendment) Decree of 1976. (SMCD 58). The Environmental Protection Agency Act of 1994 (Act 490) changed the Environmental Protection Council into an agency with regulatory and enforcement responsibilities, among other things (EPA Corporate Profile, 2021).

EPA has a vision dedicated to continuously improving and conserving the country's environment in which all sections of the community value the environment, strive to attain sustainable development, effective and efficient resource management based on good environmental governance, taking into account social land equity issues (EPA Corporate Profile, 2021). The mission of the EPA of Ghana as well is to co-manage, protect and enhance the country's environment, in particular, as well as seek common solutions to global environmental problems. The accomplishment of the mission is to be achieved inter alia through research, scientific, technological and innovative approaches, good governance and partnerships (EPA Corporate Profile, 2021).

2.2 EXCELLENCE THEORY

The Excellence theory is the first general theory of public relations (Macnamara, 2012). The theory was developed based on the findings of a 15-year study of best practices in communication management (Grunig, 2013) known as the Excellence Study. The Excellence Theory is a theory of excellence and effectiveness in public relations and communication management. The theory specifies how public relations makes organizations more effective, how it should be organized and managed in order for it to contribute to organizational effectiveness, and how to determine the monetary value of public relations (Grunig and Grunig, 2011).

The theory first explains the value of public relations to an organization and the society in which it operates. This value is based on the quality of relationships an organization has with its stakeholder publics (Found, Lahy, Williams, Hu and Mason, 2018). The theory asserts that in order for public relations to make a contribution in an organization it must be part of strategic management (Grunig, 2008).

According to the theory, for an organization to be effective, it must solve the problem and satisfy the goals of both the manager and stakeholders. Organizations must identify their various publics who are affected by the decisions taken by the organization or those who want the organization to solve a problem important to them. To identify these publics, the organization must scan the environment. This is public relations' contribution to strategic management (Godam, Omega and Ochonogor, 2019).

The theory also suggests that organizations must communicate symmetrically with their publics. This facilitates the cultivation of quality, long-term relationships with them. Through symmetrical communication the organization is likely to set and achieve goals desired by both the organization and its publics (Grunig and Grunig, 2008), since a good relationship is essential and crucial to the survival of the organization. Hung-Baesecke Chen and Ni (2021) explained that this is because a good relationship reduces cost incurred in unfavourable circumstances like litigation, regulation, legislation and negative publicity. It also reduces the risk of making decisions which may have adverse effects on different stakeholders and increase the chances of the organization producing goods or services needed by various stakeholders and ultimately its base.

In addition to explaining the value of communication to an organization, the theory provides four broad categories of the characteristics of an excellent public relations function that is how the public relations function should be organized to attain maximum value (Grunig and Grunig, 2008).

These characteristics are in the broad areas of public relations as a management function, roles, models and the organization of the communication function.

2.2.1 Relevance to the Study

This theory is of importance to this study because it anticipates and present some of the lapses in public relations practice so that practitioners and their organizations can work on mitigating the disadvantages. Kim, Hung-Baesecke, Yang and Grunig (2013) for instance argue that organizations are bombarded by demands from stakeholders both inside the organization and in their environments-employees, governments, communities, consumers, stockholders, and organized activists. This segues into Grunig, Grunig and Dozier's (2006) suggestion that excellent public relations is an integral part of an excellent organization meaning, organizational excellence provides a hospitable climate for excellent public relations. This is justified because public relations managers who are part of the dominant coalition communicate the views of publics to other senior managers, and they must communicate with publics to be able to do so (Laskin, 2012). They also communicate to other senior managers the likely consequences of policy decisions after communicating with publics affected by the potential policy.

It is important to note that understanding the target audience is the most important part of any successful public relations strategy. Also, public relation is about sharing the right information to right places and people, to build the brand reputation. Public relations agencies for instance work with organizations and help them to build their image in a certain industry. Through effective marketing strategies it promotes its client's agenda. As described earlier, public relations provides the greatest value to an organization when it is used strategically meaning that in an effective organization, all the major functions are linked together by a common set of strategies that tie in

to an overall vision of the future and an underlying set of values. This can in the long run help shape the public perception of an organization or entity.

2.2.2 Researcher's position

From the point of view of this study, this theory is an essential pillar to help appreciate the probe. Among other reasons, the theory was as a result of a study to establish best practices of organizations from a public relations perspective (Curtin, 2021). This theory proposed a 12-metric system which advises organizations aspiring to be perceived as “excellent” have to inculcate in order to attain the said objective. This has been a guiding principle which has essentially replaced the earlier evolutionary stages of public relations as affirmed by Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006). Human resources, organic structure, intrapreneurship, symmetrical communication mechanism, leadership, and community are all intertwined in the first six attributes/characteristics of excellent organizations, with symmetrical communication being a key factor in achieving organizational excellence (Grunig and Grunig, 2008).

All this goes a long way to justify why the theory is essential to the contemporary practice of public relations. In the case of this study where public perception is being viewed as an area of interest largely based on how it affects public relations, the researcher sides with the dictates of the theory. While the last six attributes; strategic planning, social responsibility, acceptance of women and minorities in companies, a focus on quality, and efficient operating systems all point to how to attain organizational excellence (Grunig and Grunig, 2008). Due to the essential nature of symmetrical communication in organizations that are organic, respect human capital, are creative, have inspiring leaders, and strong participative cultures, Graen and Schiemann (2013) espouse the view that excellent public relations is the glue that binds excellent organizations together.

2.3 EMPIRICAL REVIEWS

Despite the fact that public relations is beneficial to society, scholarly studies have discovered that journalists frequently use the term in negative ways (Tanyildizi and Ataykaya, 2019). With the aim of revealing the perception of the term in public relations in society and its recognition, Tanyildizi and Ataykaya (2019) through the survey method sampled 400 respondents related to the public relations profession. By examining the perceived differences between public relations and marketing departments' functions, Ha and Ferguson (2015) also reported that public relations practitioners saw the image function as the most important function of the public relations department, whereas marketing practitioners saw the pragmatic function as the most important function of the public relations department. By adopting a mixed method approach, this study surveyed employees from more than 30 companies in South Korea.

Rahi (2016) in attempting to find an empirical relationship between customer values, public relations perception, brand image and to investigate these variables impact on customer loyalty within insurance companies of Pakistan employed the quantitative methodology. From here, the study sampled 367 respondents from two major cities of Pakistan Lahore and Islamabad. Based on findings, Rahi (2016) claims that the perceived strength of public relations and marketing departments is linked to views of public relations functions. Practitioners feel that online presence reflects an organization's competitiveness, promotes an organization's image, and promotes the practitioner's personal sense of professionalism, according to Natalia and Shihab (2018) when they studied public relations strategies to build financial technology awareness. This data was acquired from inputs made by four purposively-chosen participants through qualitative in-depth interviews. This development corresponded with Udiji's findings studying public relations for improving public perception of the marketing executives in the banking industry in Nigeria. Based on the 180

marketing executives sampled, it was found that practitioners must balance challenges like skepticism about their site's worth, ineffective evaluation methods, and site control (Uduji, 2013). In fact, Kriyantono and Anggraini (2020) argue that long-term relationships with the media are critical because the media contributes to the public's negative perception of public relations by writing negative words and framing phrases like "public relations gimmick" and "public relations nightmare". This findings sufficed after Kriyantono and Anggraini (2020) sought to describe the public and practitioner's perceptions of the public relations or Humas profession. This was carried out employing qualitative research methodology were 200 respondents were interviewed.

Nicolaou, Matsiola, and Kalliris (2019) on the other hand in exploring technology-enhanced learning and teaching methodologies through audiovisual media noted that public relations is still seen as just another name for publicity by many, particularly journalists, because it has been portrayed in the media in a consistently negative light for several decades, implying that public relations practitioners in some cases believe media professionals are biased against their clients. Despite the findings of Callison, Merle, and Seltzer (2014) studying public perception of public relations practitioners over time showing positive attitudes of public relations have decreased, Kriyantono and Anggraini (2020) believe there is still potential for favorable opinions of the profession.

Furthermore, White and Park (2010) show that not all media framing of public perception is accurate, and that public relations practitioners are in charge of crisis management and do not hide the facts. This is holds water as the study's focus was on public perceptions of public relations which was conducted through computer-assisted telephone interviews with a sample size of 455 to give insight. Notwithstanding, Nicolaou et al. (2019) contend that public relations practitioners

contend that journalists are biased against them and their clients, and that journalists believe public relations practitioners are more likely to mislead the public than is actually reported.

2.4 PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Public perception is what people perceive about an event, issue, organization, state, or anything else are based on their knowledge, information, cultural background, and previous experiences. De França Doria (2010) explored the function of perception in forming public opinion, as well as how other people's perceptions can support and impact public opinion formation. It was found that risk perception, attitudes, contextual cues provided, familiarity, trust, past issues and information provided by the mass media and interpersonal sources are significant factors which shapes perception. Sadaf (2011) also observed that the media is believed to be able to play a crucial role in effecting change in society by activating people on certain subjects, altering their views and shaping their judgments. And that transformation will occur at the micro to macro level, thus from the individual to the highest level of society, in order to influence policymakers and, of course, those working at various levels who can contribute significantly to the benefit of society.

Sadaf (2011) further argues that individuals build impressions based on what the media presents to them, meaning that perception plays a critical part in making some topics essential and others irrelevant. This is due to a variety of factors; perceptions are sometimes influenced by a variety of other factors. Perception is the sorting out, interpretation, analysis, and integration of stimuli involving our sense organs and brain (Gaufman, 2017). Past experience, cultural expectations, motivations, moods, needs, and attitudes are some of the psychological elements that influence perception (Freedman, 2016).

Severin (2001) goes on to say that various people react differently to the same message, and that this is all down to the decoding process, or how people receive specific information. However,

exposure to chosen media content can have a substantial effect in shaping one's perspective of a particular subject. Selective exposure in Sadik, Bradley, Al-Hasoon and Jenkins's (2007) assessment is a way for reducing dissonance in this setting by finding information that is consistent with existing beliefs and activities.

As previously said, public perception is a widespread notion or opinion based on how things appear. Profit margins can be created or broken based on how the general public views a company (Edman, 2013). If a company is regarded as reputable and offers a high-quality product or service, it can easily attract long-term customers. If a negative image of the company is associated with it, customers may be turned off (Kozubikova, Kotaskova, Dvorský and Ključnikov, 2019). Using branding and marketing strategies, an organization can modify how the public views it over time.

This clearly fits into Needle and Burns's (2010) idea that it will be smart to first wash away the unfavorable image of an organization in order to alleviate some of the consequences of a bad public perception. Something as easy as admitting past mistakes and creating a new logo might be a wonderful place to start when it comes to rebranding (Pedrazzi, Duma and Gadgil, 2021). Another place to start marketing efforts is with a positive campaign that highlights what a firm has done for the community or throughout its history. All marketing efforts will need to include a well-written tag line identifying the brand with positive imagery.

2.5 PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) defines public relations as the management through communication of perceptions and strategic relationships between and organisation and its internal and external stakeholders (Wallrich, 2020). Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) as well introduce the perspective that public relations is the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and

the various publics on whom its success or failure depends. This line of explanation is further validated by Dozier, Grunig and Grunig's (2013) assertion that public relations is wider than persuasion strategies and wider than initiatives such as media relations or advertising that are specialized in public relations.

While the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) (2020) assert that public relations helps our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions, it serves to bring private and public policies into harmony. Public relations promotes goodwill and communication between the company and consumer. Good public relations builds relationships with your customers. Public relations is a component of your marketing strategy; a company will be more profitable through communication and relationships with customers (Taylor, 2018).

Public relations is broader than communication technique and broader than specialized public relations programs such as media relations or publicity (Ki and Ye, 2017). Public relations and communication management describe the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of a communication with both external and internal publics-groups that affect the ability of an organization to meet its goals. According to Daft (2015), investing in public relations allows companies to achieve their objectives quickly and efficiently. Even if their programs are excellent, organizations need effective public relations campaigns to encourage and attract the public to their services. An effective public relations program may help to shape and grow an entity or nation's image.

2.5 HOW PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AFFECTS PUBLIC RELATIONS

Perceptions of public relations have an impact on the profession's perceived legitimacy and whether or not it is seen as beneficial to society. They argue that public relations is damage control,

an attempt to cover or camouflage something, or a non-substantive activity, and see it as an important activity that serves society by delivering information. Public relations, on the other hand, is related with publicity, media relations, and an organization's endeavor to advance its own agenda. Reddi (2019) also points out that public relations has been regularly represented in the media in a bad light for decades, resulting in pictures that may become part of public perceptions. Perceptions of public relations have an impact on the profession's perceived legitimacy and whether or not it is seen as beneficial to society.

Grunig and Grunig (2008) argues that organizations strive for autonomy from their publics. Organizations also try to mobilize publics that support their goals and thus increase their autonomy. Having the autonomy to pursue their goals is important for organizations because effective organizations choose appropriate goals for their environmental and cultural context and then achieve those goals (Kim et al., 2013). Even with these efforts, no organization ever achieves complete autonomy, although it may be an idealized goal.

Organizations work toward this idealized goal by managing their interdependence with publics (Diga and Kelleher, 2009). Therefore, building relationships-managing interdependence-is the essence of public relations. Thurlow, Kushniryk, Yue, Blanchette, Murchland and Simon (2017) indicate that good relationships make organizations more effective because they allow organizations more freedom to achieve their missions. Ironically, however, organizations maximize their autonomy by giving up some of it to build relationships with publics.

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focused on providing a complete overview of previous research on the subject at hand. Scholarly publications, books, and other related sources were reviewed here and by

appreciating the work of past researchers, the chapter essentially helped to provide a theoretical foundation for the investigation.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a guide to the research method used by the study which begins with an overview of the selected organizations the study intends to use as a case for this study. This overview will include that of Electricity Company of Ghana Limited (ECG), Energy Commission of Ghana and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of Ghana. This will then be followed by the research design, research population along other significant topics which will help realize the objectives of this study which is to explore the public perception of public relations practice in Ghana.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design assists researchers in addressing their research questions efficiently and acted as a guide for selecting the data needed for the study (Marczyk, DeMatteo and Festinger, 2010). In keeping with the objective of the study which was to explore the public perception of public relations practice in Ghana, the descriptive approach was adopted. Lewis (2015) defines descriptive research design as the way of acquiring data to address issues about the current situation of the study's subjects. In keeping with this, the mixed-method research approach was used in this study. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2013) elucidate that the term "mixed methods" refers to an emerging research methodology that promotes the systematic integration, or "mixing," of quantitative and qualitative data within a single investigation or long-term research program.

The underlying idea of this methodology also known as triangulation is that integrating quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analysis allows for more full and synergistic use of

data than separate quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis (Du Plessis and Majam, 2010). According to Bentahar and Cameron (2015), the logic of triangulation indicates that qualitative and quantitative methods can be merged to create a holistic view of the topic under investigation, resulting in mixed methods research. Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) define ‘pragmatism’ as the guiding paradigm of mixed methods research, which rejects pure ideas of ‘truth’ and ‘reality,’ arguing that the method(s) used should be based on the research’s aim. The implication of adopting the mixed-method approach is that while it adopts qualitative and quantitative methods, it employs the advantages of both methods so that it is more effective.

3.2 STUDY POPULATION

Klassen et al. (2012) point out that a research population is a well-defined group of individuals or items with common characteristics that are the main subject of a scientific investigation, but researchers are unable to examine every individual in the population due to cost and time constraints. As a result, researchers use sampling processes to pick samples from the population (Maxwell, 2012) which is why individuals in Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) in the Greater Accra Region was used as the study’s population. This area was the focus population because it harbours the central business district of Accra. At the same time as well, all the organizations in the case have their head offices in this area. This, therefore, presents an opportunity for the researcher to collect data from individual stakeholders who interact with these organizations. Again because the study sought to garner the public perception, the diverse makeup of AMA made it a suitable area to use as the population for the study.

3.3 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

A research sample is a subset of the population from which it was collected, and it must be of sufficient size to merit statistical analysis to derive population-related conclusions (Clark, 2008).

Because of the enormous population sizes, researchers are frequently unable to test every individual in the population due to cost and time constraints; as a result, according to Palinkas et al. (2015), researchers employ sampling procedures to gather population samples. The sort of sampling technique used by a researcher will influence their capacity to make generalizations about the study population based on the sample findings, as well as the types of statistical tests you may run on the data (Subedi, 2016). According to Morse (2016), selecting a sample is an important aspect of conducting sound research.

The sample composition has a significant impact on the quality of study outcomes, and the researcher's study approach has a significant impact on sample and site selection (Oppong, 2013). Because it is impossible to see a population in its entirety, a sample is taken to accurately represent the population. Jalali (2013) proposes that there are two types of sample designs thus, non-probability sampling designs and probability sampling designs while performing a study. To arrive at a sample for this study, however, the researcher used the non-probability sampling method. This is because non-probability sampling is a qualitative sampling method that selects samples based on the researcher's subjective judgment rather than random selection (Ghaljaie, Naderifar and Goli, 2017). Also, Taherdoost (2016) makes the point that it is a more flexible strategy because the researchers' knowledge is mostly relied on under this sampling method. Again, this approach is used by researchers in studies where random probability sampling is not possible due to time or financial restrictions (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). In light of this, the convenience sampling method was used to determine the sample size for the study.

3.3.1 Sample Size

Convenience sampling also known as availability sampling is a method of selecting participants based on their immediate availability (Farrokhi and Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). According to

Robinson (2014), this accessibility is generally defined in terms of geographical proximity, but it can also include other criteria such as known contacts. This sampling approach was used to select 300 respondents from the AMA area which made up the population. This is because, as Etikan et al. (2016) point out, in quantitative studies, the study aims and characteristics of the sample population, such as size and variety, can impact who and how many people are picked. As a result, the researcher was convinced that the sample selected would be suitably representative and will aid in the study's completion. This is because for every organization included in the case, data was collected from 100 respondents considered to be stakeholders of that organization. The implication then is that 100 respondents for ECG, 100 respondents for Energy Commission and 100 respondents for the EPA as well. The respondents sampled were either customers or stakeholders of the various organizations. A breakdown of the respondents' allocation is tabulated below.

Table 1.0 Breakdown of Selected Organizations

NO.	ORGANIZATION	NUMBER
1	ELECTRICITY COMPANY OF GHANA LIMITED	100
2	ENERGY COMMISSION	100
3	ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY	100

Source: Field Data, 2021

3.4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Each study requires data collecting since no significant research can be conducted without it (Kim, Sefcik and Bradway, 2017). As a result, determining the best data collection method is critical. Questionnaires were used to collect primary data from study participants. This is because, according to Rowley (2014), surveys may include closed-ended or multiple-choice questions, which are used to obtain numerical data in quantitative research. The respondents were given time

to answer the questions after being administered the questionnaire. Even though the respondents were given some privacy, the researcher was close by in case clarification was sought as well as any other concerns came up.

After gathering the questionnaire responses from the respondents, the researcher went on to analyze the data. This was performed by using Microsoft Excel 2016 to construct descriptive statistics and graphs. Following that, the researcher went over the research questions again and provided the necessary suggestions based on the data they had analyzed. This procedure included calculating raw data percentages as well as creating a suitable visual representation of the data. When it came to analyzing the data, the researcher used infographics and interpreted the results. To depict the data, representations such as pie charts and bar charts were used. The goal was to make it easier for readers by combining written analysis with infographics to speed up the comprehension process.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Researchers must guarantee that participants are protected from any harm that may result from research techniques, which is why, as Iman and Ghafarinasab (2011) indicate, the researcher will communicate the study's aims to the participants and obtain informed consent for their participation. The researcher will reassure the respondents orally that their names are kept private and that the information gathered by the researcher is kept private. The researcher will also provide them pseudonyms and protect anonymity by securely preserving all study information with physical copies locked in a cabinet and soft copies kept in files guarded by a password available only to the researcher throughout the drafting of the data analysis.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter gave an outline of the study's research methodology, starting with an overview of the organizations that would be used as a case. The ECG, Energy Commission and the EPA all contributed to this summary. The research design, research population, and other significant topics that would help realize the objectives of this study were then discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

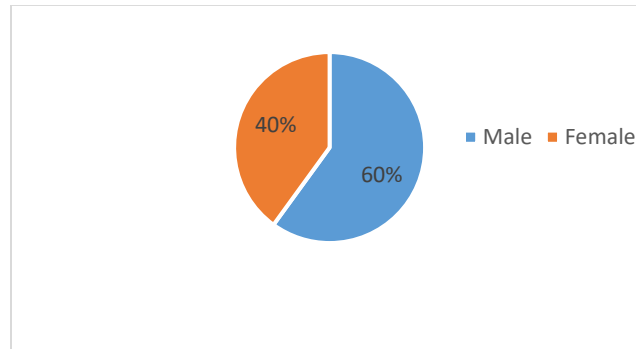
4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines and presents an analysis of data gathered from respondents in order to achieve the objective of exploring the public perception held about the practice of public relations in the Ghanaian setting by focusing on selected organizations (Electricity Company of Ghana Limited [ECG], Energy Commission of Ghana and the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA]) in the public sector. Data was thus source from individual stakeholders who interact with these organizations. The purpose of this sample selection was to gather accurate data that mirrored the perception of the public.

4.1 GENDER REPRESENTATION

According to the findings, 60% of the respondents in the survey were males and 40% were females. While the data indicates that respondents of both genders were willing to take part in the poll, males made up the majority of those who did. Despite the fact that the Ghana Statistical Service (2021) claims that women outnumber men in Ghana, the evidence does not support this claim in the context of the study. While this is intriguing, it is worth noting that it might just as easily be a coincidence or the effect of other factors.

Figure 1: Gender Representation of Respondents

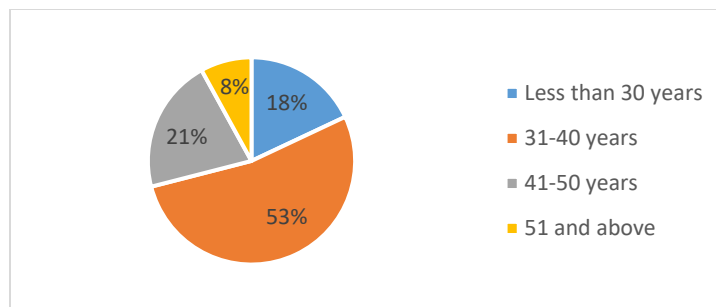


Source: Field Data, 2021

4.2 AGE REPRESENTATION

When asked about their age ranges, 18% said they were under 30 years old, 53% said they were between the ages of 31 and 40, and 21% said they were between the ages of 41 and 50 years old. There were also eight percent of respondents who were 51 years of age or older. Consequently, this implies a majority of the respondents should have enough experience to provide relevant and hands-on responses to the questions posed to them in this study. As a result of the age distribution's quality, it is more likely that responses to queries will come from experience rather than speculation.

Figure 2: Age Representation of Respondents

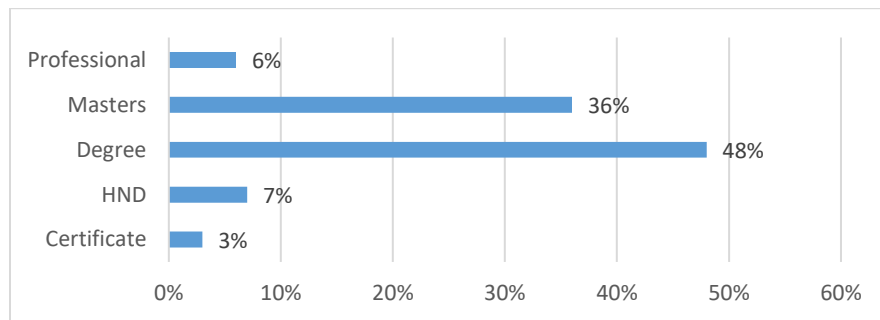


Source: Field Data, 2021

4.3 ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

In terms of academic qualifications, three percent said they had certificates, while seven percent said they had Higher National Diplomas (HND). In addition, although 48% said they had an undergraduate degree, another 36% said they had a master's degree. In terms of professional qualifications, six percent of respondents said that was their greatest educational qualification as well. According to the data, the majority of the respondents had received formal or tertiary education. This implies that, in addition to the organizations' informal perceptions, their formal education informs their hopes, expectations, and inputs. This is important for the study since the data from these respondents will be influenced to some extent by combining their academic and informal knowledge.

Figure 3: Academic Background of Respondents



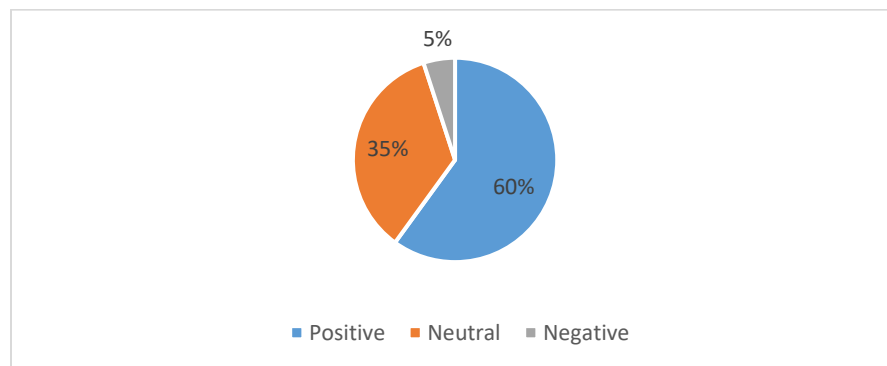
Source: Field Data, 2021

4.4 PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

By way gauging the general perception of public relations practice in Ghana, the enquiry sought the view of the respondents. The data showed that 60% of the respondents indicated that the practice was viewed in a positive light while 35% noted the perception was neutral. That notwithstanding, 35% of respondents also indicated that the public perception of the practice was rather negative. The implication from this data indicates that while there are public sentiments

tainting the way public relations is practiced in Ghana, there was a significant school of thought debunking this view. The findings thus flies in the face of the widely opinion held in literature (eg. Kirat, 2005; Vardeman-Winter and Place, 2017) which continues to describe public relations unfavourably.

Figure 4: Perception of Public Relations Practice

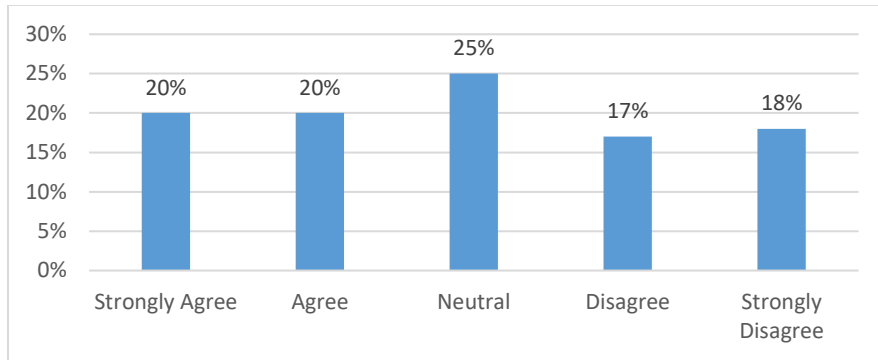


Source: Field Data, 2021

4.5 PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PUBLIC SPEAKING

Still on testing the respondents' view of public relations, when asked whether the practice was all about effective public speaking, 20% strongly agreed with another 20% also agreeing. While 25% of respondents stayed neutral on this assertion, 17% disagreed with a further 18% also disagreeing strongly. From the data, even though no view was overwhelming, it can be noted that the popular opinion backed the assertion. This indicates that almost half of the respondents saw public relations practice as one which required eloquence because it involved a significant amount of effective public speaking. Then again, the findings diverges with literature (eg. Kaparaeva, 2020; Anani-Bossman, 2021; Maiorescu-Murphy, 2021) as public relations is said to be more than just public speaking because it has aspects which makes it a complex blend of strategy as well as communication expertise.

Figure 5: Public Relations and Public Speaking

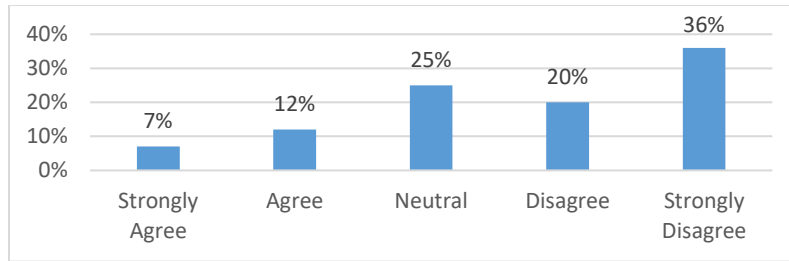


Source: Field Data, 2021

4.6 PUBLIC RELATIONS, LIES AND DECEPTION

Another opinion sought by the study touched on ascertaining the respondents' view on the notion that the public relations practice is riddled with lies and deception. On this premise, it was observed that while seven percent strongly agreed, 12% also agreed with the notion with 25% staying neutral. It was also noted that 20% of the respondents were in disagreement while a further 36% supported this view by going on to strongly disagree. From this data, it was realized that a majority of the respondents aligned with the view that public relations is not only a practice tainted with gimmicks. This data as well ties in to the underlying factors which formed the basis for the respondents asserting that the public perception of public relation in Ghana was positive as alluded to earlier.

Figure 6: Public Relations, Lies and Deception

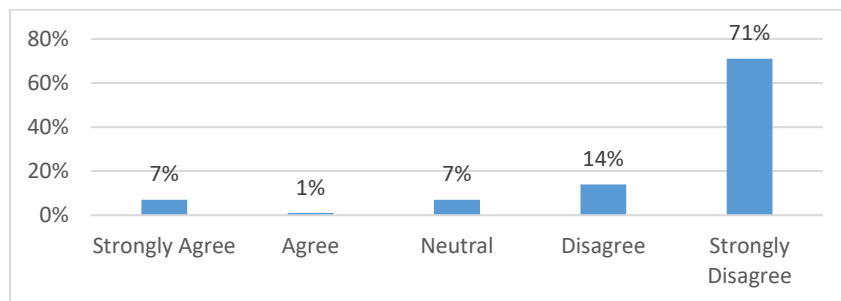


Source: Field Data, 2021

4.7 PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CRISIS

On whether the skillsets of public relations practitioners was needed only during times of crisis, seven percent of the respondents strongly agreed with other one percent joining the fray in agreement. While another seven percent stayed neutral of the assertion, 14% disagreed as another 71% of respondents also joined the view expressed by strongly disagreeing. The realization from this data as well indicates that the respondents’ understanding of public relations no matter how minute informed a majority of respondents to make the point that while crisis management is essential in public relations, it is not the only reason which warrants public relations practitioners to work.

Figure 7: Public Relations and Crisis

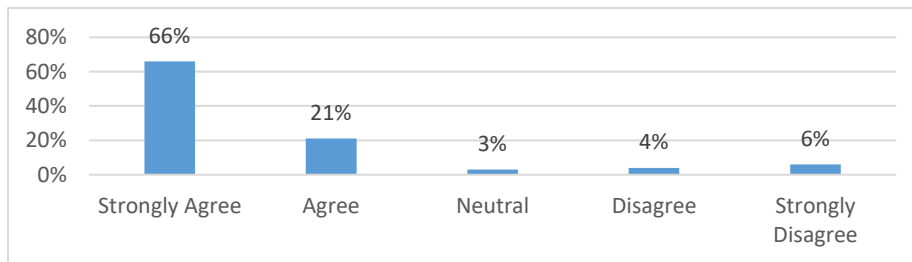


Source: Field Data, 2021

4.8 PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

In relation to public relations being essential to formulating effective communications strategy, 66% of respondents strongly agreed with another 21% agreeing as well. Even though three percent stayed neutral with their assessment, four percent disagreed and six percent strongly disagreed. The inference drawn from the data suggests that a majority of the respondents subscribed to the view that in order to put together an effective communications strategy, public relations cannot be side-lined. This is because public relations per the responses is essential thereby putting it at the heart of formulating communications strategies.

Figure 8: Public Relations and Communications Strategy



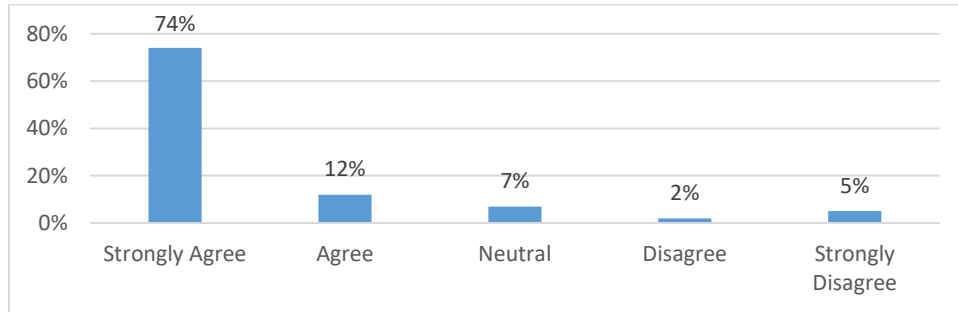
Source: Field Data, 2021

4.9 PUBLIC RELATIONS AND STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

In relation to public relations being key in maintaining a satisfactory, long-term, trusting relationships with publics and stakeholders, majority of the responses affirmed the assertion. The indication was that according to two percent of respondents, that was not the case as they disagreed with another five percent following suit to strongly disagree as well. While seven percent stayed neutral of the assertion, and overwhelming 74% of respondents strongly agreed with a further 12% affirming this line of argument by agreeing. The popular view echoed by a significant majority of respondents not only gives credence to arguments made in support of this

assertion but also shows that the respondents have wider appreciation of what public relations entails.

Figure 9: Public Relations and Stakeholder Management

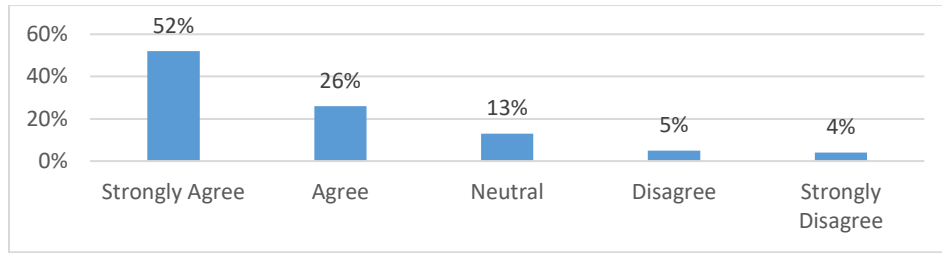


Source: Field Data, 2021

4.10 PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Once again, a majority of respondents affirmed the notion that public relations helps businesses achieve their organizational objectives. This was represented by 52% respondents strongly agreeing, 26% agreeing while 13% felt neutral about the statement. Five percent and four percent of respondents opted to disagree and strongly disagree respectively. That notwithstanding, the majority of responses validated that assertion that public relations was significant for businesses poised on achieving its organizational objectives. This is because as Toth (2009) puts it, at the heart of attaining organizational objectives is the role of public relations. This is justified by Smith (2020) elucidation that if organizational communication strategies are derived from its organizational objectives, that results in an assured steady organizational growth.

Figure 10: Public Relations and Organizational Objectives

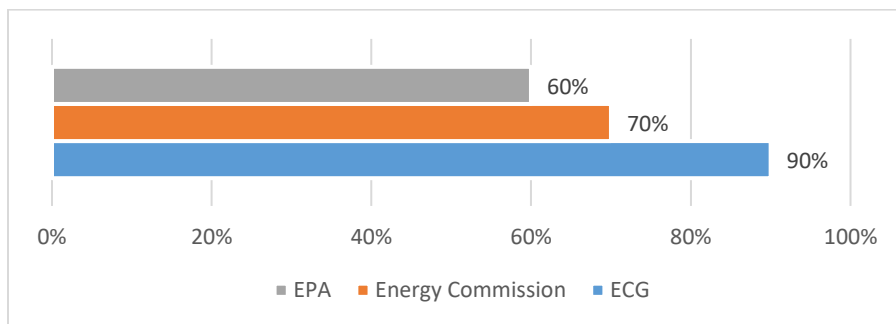


Source: Field Data, 2021

4.11 KNOWLEDGE OF SELECTED ORGANIZATIONS

This point of enquired proceed to gather the respondents’ knowledge of the selected organizations the study sought to focus on. The data as represented below showed that as 90% of the respondents knew ECG, 70% indicated they knew Energy Commission with another 60% indicated they knew EPA. While more than half of respondents indicated they knew each of the organizations, a cumulative average of 73% of respondents knew all organization under study. What this implies it that overall, a significant number of the respondents had knowledge of the organizations sampled for the study. This information is salient because this shows that to a greater degree, responses given would not be out of conjectures.

Figure 11: Knowledge of Selected Organizations



Source: Field Data, 2021

4.12 EFFECT OF POSITIVE PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

With the knowledge of organizations settled, the next focal point to cover touched on gathering the respondent's views on the effects of a positive perception of public relations practice. It was realized that 26% of respondents were of the view that a positive perception of public relations practice contributed to building credibility as well as garnering goodwill for an organization. Also, 33% of respondents indicated that a positive perception of the practice fostered trust between the organization and its publics. Another view propagated by 60% of respondents indicated that maintaining a positive perception for the practice of public relations contributes to the formulation and maintenance of a positive image. Though the views varied, ultimately the converging point is that public relations is more beneficial once it is complemented by a positive perception from the public.

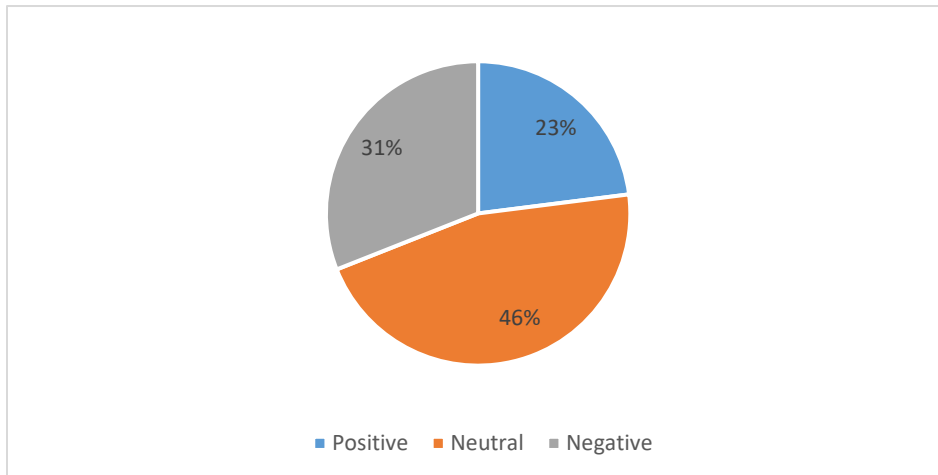
4.13 EFFECT OF NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

With regards to effect of a negative perception of public relations practice, 23% of respondents indicated that it enjoinders a lack of trust for an organization or entity. A further 15% of respondents were of the view that this led to an atmosphere of apathy among the publics of an organization or entity which could lead to stereotyping as emphasized by 21% of respondents as well. A majority of 41% of respondents also pointed out that a negative perception of public relations practice could result in the destruction of organizational image/reputation. The inference from these views connectively echoes the need to ensure that in the face of practicing public relations, maintaining a positive public perception or striving to reach a positive public perception cannot be underestimated. This is because each of the effects of negative public perception as outlined is not healthy for organizational growth.

4.14 PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN ECG

In the context of ECG’s public relations practice, 23% of respondents indicated that the perception was positive with 31% also indicating it was negative while 46% of respondents indicated the perception was neutral. With neither the positive and negative sides winning the majority, the inference drawn from the findings indicate that a majority of respondents were not sure enthused of ECG’s public relations practice nor appalled. While this is not the ideal place to be in the long term, this shows that if ECG shores up its public relations efforts, it could easily be seen in the positive light.

Figure 12: Perception of Public Relations Practice at ECG



Source: Field Data, 2021

4.15 REASON FOR ECG’S PERCEPTION

The justification for the perceptions held about EGC’s public relations practice came in two fold, those which touched on justifying the negation and that which affirmed the positive notion. It was observed that 12% of respondents were of view that ECG is riddled with poor communication strategies while 10% also noted that ECG had a poor customer service outfit. Also, five percent of

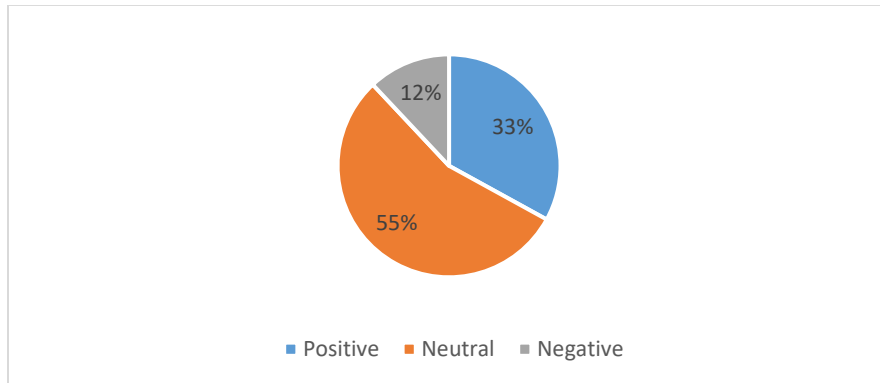
respondents indicated that ECG was tainted with being deceitful and peddled falsehoods. Another 20% of respondents were of view that ECG's public relations practice was rather reactive.

On the positives, it was noted that on the contrary by 30% of respondents that ECG's public relations outfit was proactive. Again, eight percent and 15% of the respondents cited effective crisis management and effective dissemination of communication respectively as justification for EGC's public relations practice being positive. Once again, these findings shows that perception is not static and can be triggered by different publics differently. This is because while some found ECG's public relations practice to be reactive, others found it to be proactive as well.

4.16 PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN ENERGY COMMISSION

From the perspective of the Energy Commission's public relations practice as well, 33% of respondents said they had a positive impression, 12% said they had a bad impression, and 55% said they had a neutral impression. Because neither the positive nor negative sides received a majority of votes, the statistics suggest that the majority of respondents were neither excited nor dismayed by the Energy Commission's public relations efforts. While this is not the best situation in the long run, it does indicate that if the Energy Commission improves its public relations activities, it may easily be perceived as a good force.

Figure 14: Perception of Public Relations Practice at Energy Commission



Source: Field Data, 2021

4.17 REASON FOR ENERGY COMMISSION’S PERCEPTION

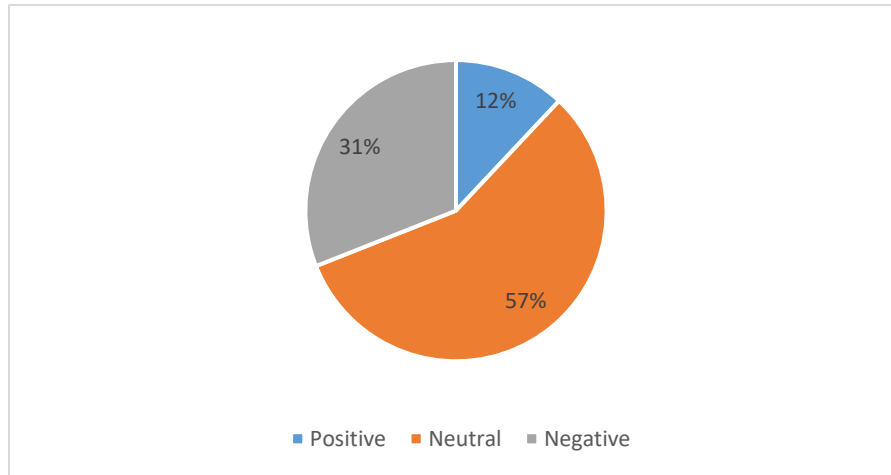
Here as well, it was noted that the various perceptions held about Energy Commission’s public relations practice had diverse groundings. Out of the entire responses, 18% of respondents indicated that they view the organization’s public relations practice in a positive light because it had adequate online presence. Also, 20% of respondents indicated that they had a bad impression of that organization because of its lack of visibility. Interestingly, this view was qualified by another school of thought held by 45% of the respondents who indicated that this was the case because due to the primary stakeholders of the organization, that could account for the lack of visibility. While these views continued to fester, another 10% of the responses argued for neutrality because they felt the organization’s public relations could improve its efforts overtime.

4.18 PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN EPA

On the part of EPA’s public relations practice also, it was found that 12% of respondents said they had a positive impression, 57% said they had a neutral impression and 31% said they had a bad impression. Also, as a result of the majority of respondents pointing that EPA’s public relations practice was neutral, this shows that the organization should rehash its communication

strategies in order to sway more of its publics to view it in a positive light. This is because for the sake of corporate sustainability, EPA has to invest in improving its public relations activities in order to shift the public perception held about it.

Figure 15: Perception of Public Relations Practice at EPA



Source: Field Data, 2021

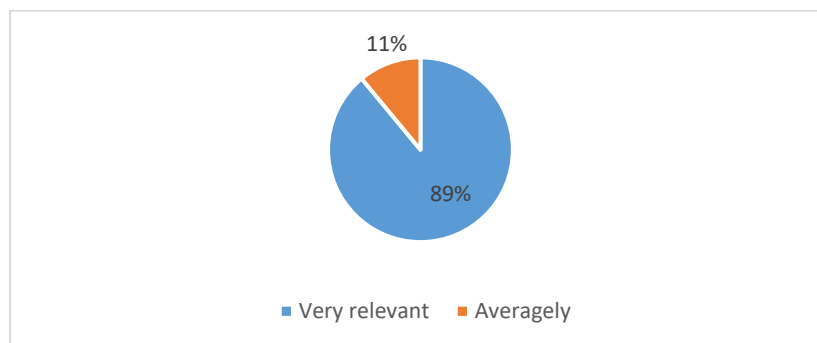
4.19 REASON FOR EPA’S PERCEPTION

For the perception held about EPA’s public relations practice as well, it was discovered that 36% of the responses argued that there was little or no communication to the organizations publics which is why the public relations practice was viewed in a negative light. Also, 46% indicated that there was a lack of visibility of the organization which was attributed to the public relations outfit. Aside these concerns, a further 18% indicated that EPA’s public relations practice could be augmented if it invested in the appropriate strategies and activities.

4.20 RELEVANCE OF TRUSTWORTHINESS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

While the discussion centered around public perception and public relations practice, it was essential to appreciate the role trustworthiness played in the process. While 11% of responses saw trustworthiness in public relations in an average manner, 89% had a contrary view suggesting that it was rather very relevant. Per the findings, it was found that trustworthiness was very relevant to public relations practice in the view of the respondents. This gives the indication that in order to foster a good relationship with the public, there has to be an element of trust so that information put out would not be viewed with contempt but received and given the seriousness it deserves.

Figure 16: Relevance of Trustworthiness in Public Relations Practice



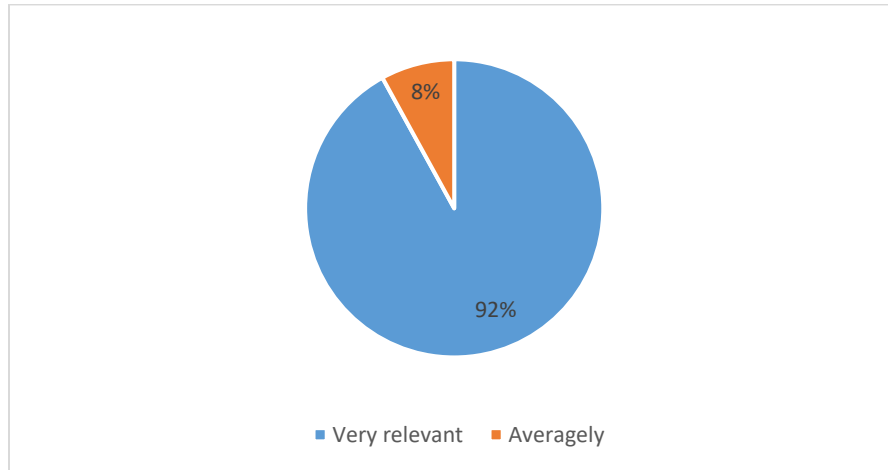
Source: Field Data, 2021

4.21 RELEVANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

Even though public relations is usually an organizational function, ascertaining the relevance of accountability was salient to this study. With regards to this, while eight percent of the responses pegged accountability as average in relevance, an overwhelming 92% of respondents indicated that accountability was very relevant to public relations practice. The essence of this assertion

hinges on the fact that a lack of accountability creates room for doubt which overtime engenders lack of trust which essentially breaks down the efforts of public relations.

Figure 17: Relevance of Accountability in Public Relations Practice



Source: Field Data, 2021

4.22 HOW TO CHANGE NEGATIVE PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

With various views gathered on the benefits and disadvantages of public perception in public relations, it was salient to find out how the negative public perception of public relations could be changed from the point of view of the respondents. Owing to this, 54% of respondents noted that organizations or entities who are mindful of changing the negative public perception of their public relations practice indulge in continuous stakeholder engagement activities. Also, 14% of respondents suggested organizational reorientation while 20% also pointed to sensitization exercises. The formulation of stronger industry associations to foster positive public perception about public relations was also advocated by 20% of the respondents.

4.23 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This discourse was centered on a research question posed by the researcher with the goal of addressing the study's objective, which was to assess the public perception of public relations practice in Ghana. As a result, the debate also touch on the sub-objectives set by the researcher to lead the conversation. These sub-objectives were to find out the public perception of public relations practice in Ghana, ascertain whether the public perception of public relations practice in the selected organizations is positive or negative and to explore how the negative public perceptions of public relations in Ghana can be changed.

In the instance of this study, the overall public perception of public relations practice in Ghana was found to be positive. This could be attributed to the respondents' understanding and affirmation that the practice was not all about effective public speaking but was more of maintaining a satisfactory, long-term, trusting relationships with publics and stakeholders. This validates Ki and Ye's (2017) argument that public relations is broader than communication technique and broader than specialized public relations programs such as media relations or publicity. This therefore indicates that public relations and communication management as a whole encompasses the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of a communication with both external and internal publics-groups that affect the ability of an organization to meet its goals.

Also, a cursory assessment of the public perception of public relations practice the selected organizations indicated the overall sentiment expressed pegged the practice as neutral. This is to say that while there were opinions suggesting certain organization's public relations practice to be negative or positive, the cumulative majority of responses indicated that the perception of public relations practice was neutral. The implication from this findings goes to suggest that while this is not the ideal place to be in the long term, for the sake of corporate sustainability, each of the

organizations have to invest in improving its public relations activities in order to shift the public perception held about it toward the positive fray.

The justification for this proposition is seen in Sadaf's (2011) assertion that individuals build impressions based on what the media presents to them, meaning that perception plays a critical part in making some topics essential and others irrelevant. This is due to a variety of factors; perceptions are sometimes influenced by a variety of other factors. It then becomes important to react as an organization because Reddi (2019) points out that perceptions of public relations have an impact on the profession's perceived legitimacy and whether or not it is seen as beneficial to society. As public relations has been regularly represented in the media in a bad light for decades, this has resulted in pictures that may become part of public perceptions.

Again, with so many different perspectives on the benefits and drawbacks of public perception in public relations, it was critical to determine how the unfavorable public perception of public relations could be modified from the respondents' perspective. As a result, organizations or institutions that are concerned about correcting the bad public opinion of their public relations practice engage in ongoing stakeholder engagement efforts. This is because according to Diga and Kelleher (2009), organizations work toward this idealized goal by managing their interdependence with publics.

This means that building relationships-managing interdependence-is the essence of public relations. It was also proposed that organizational reorientation and sensitization exercises were also to be an area of focus for organizations as well as stronger industry associations. The attention of organizations were drawn to these suggestions they were relevant to improving the negative public perception of public relations. Ultimately, having a positive public perception imbues harmony between organizations and its stakeholders because it builds an atmosphere of

trust over time. This dovetails into Thurlow et al.'s (2017) position that good relationships make organizations more effective because they allow organizations more freedom to achieve their objectives.

4.24 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter examined and presented an analysis of data gathered from respondents in order to achieve the objective of exploring the public perception held about the practice of public relations in the Ghanaian setting by focusing on selected organizations (ECG, Energy Commission and EPA) in the public sector.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The findings of this study are summarized in this chapter. Following that, there is a discussion of the study's originality as a final piece, as well as recommendations made by the study.

5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The main objective of the study was to assess the public perception of public relations practice in Ghana. To achieve this objective, three were set forth which included finding out the public perception of public relations practice in Ghana, ascertaining whether the public perception of public relations practice in the selected organizations is positive or negative and exploring how the negative public perceptions of public relations in Ghana could be changed. In order to address these objectives, the study employed a mixed method approach from which questionnaire were employed to collected data from three hundred (300) respondents. The respondents were drawn from customers of ECG, Energy Commission and EPA, the organizations selected for the study. The findings of the study indicated that the overall public perception of public relations practice in Ghana was found to be positive. Also, the cumulative majority of responses indicated that the perception of public relations practice of the selected organizations was neutral. It was also found that the negative public perception of public relations could be changed by indulge in continuous stakeholder engagement activities, sensitization exercises among other suggestions.

5.2 ORIGINALITY OF THE STUDY

While the study contributed to ascertaining the overall public perception of public relations practice in Ghana, the study also shed light on the public's understanding of public relations and

how negative perceptions can be changed. The study also contributes to the growing literature on public relations of African descent, notably Ghana, by strengthening the current understanding of how the public perceives the public relations practice. Furthermore, the findings are critical for shaping public relations policies of state-owned organizations in Ghana and Africa, as well as improving the global intellectual discussion on public perception and public relations, due to the study's uniqueness and significance.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The concept of public relations has shown many changes and developments since its first emergence. While in every period, public relations has come up to date with different definitions, Tanyildizi and Ataykaya (2019) notes the positioning of public relations in people's mind is not fully established on a clear basis. Even today, this problem persists. This has become salient for the practice because as per White and Park's (2010) assessment, perceptions about public relations affects the perceived credibility of the profession and influence whether people see public relations as valuable to society. Ascertaining the public perception about an organization or entity from time to time is advised because it helps in understanding the views of the public and summing those views to reach a conclusion. This will then inform the formulation or updating of the organizational communications strategy and policies where necessary. It is for this reason that organizations have to invest in maintaining a positive public perception about its public relations practice because it goes a long way to ensure overall organizational success.

5.4 RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that it is essential for organizations to consider incorporating periodic public perception surveys into their operations. This is because once this adopted, will translate into integrating it into the organization's long-term goals and objectives. Also, organizations

should create an atmosphere where the public can reach out to them with feedback. Then again, public relations practitioners should put premium on their boundary spanning and environmental scanning role so that organizations are not ambushed with incidents which lead to the nursing of negative public perception. Additionally, future studies should focus on replicating this study with a bigger sample and organizations and in different industries. This could present alternative outcomes which can then inform the public perception of public relations discuss.

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APPENDIX
RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

I am a Ghana Institute of Journalism graduate student working on a project titled “Assessing the Public Perception of Public Relations Practice with insight from Selected Organizations in Ghana”. The research is being carried out as part of the requirements for a Master’s degree in Public Relations. The purpose of this questionnaire is to elicit information in order to achieve the study objectives. Please give your honest view on the questions posed, as the information gathered will be kept in strict confidence. You can also opt out at any time if you are uncomfortable. Again, this research is solely for academic purposes.

Thank you for your co-operation.

SECTION A: Demography of Respondent

- 1) What is your Gender?
i. Male [] ii. Female []
- 2) What is your age range?
i. Less than 30 years [] ii. 31- 40 years [] iii. 41-50 years [] iv. 51 years and above []
- 3) What is your highest educational qualification?
i. Certificate [] ii. HND [] iii. Degree [] iv. Masters [] v. Professional []
- 4) What is your marital status?
i. Single [] ii. Married [] iii. Divorced [] iv. Other, please specify.....
- 5) Which sector do you work?
i. Communication [] ii. Health [] iii. Financial [] iv. Manufacturing [] v. Education []
Others, please specify

SECTION B: Perception of Public Relations Practice

6) What is your perception of public relations practice in Ghana?

- i. Positive [] ii. Neutral [] iii. Negative []

This section intends to find out the public perception of public relations practice. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree to each of the following statement. Use the following scale as a guide:

- 1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree**

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
7) Public relations is all about effective public speaking					
8) Public relations practice is riddled with lies and deception					
9) Public relations needed only during times of crisis					
10) Public relations is essential to formulating effective communications strategy					
11) Public relations is key in maintaining a satisfactory, long-term, trusting relationships with publics and stakeholders					
12) Public relations helps businesses achieve their organizational objectives					

SECTION C: Public Perception of Public Relations Practice in the Selected Organizations

13) Please indicate the organizations you know listed below (*by ticking the boxes below*)?

- i. Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG)
- ii. Energy Commission
- iii. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

14) What is the effect of a positive perception of public relations practice?

.....
.....

15) What is the effect of a negative perception of public relations practice?

.....
.....

16) What is your perception of public relations practice in ECG?

- i. Positive []
- ii. Neutral []
- iii. Negative []

17) What is your reason for the answer above?

.....
.....

18) What is your perception of public relations practice in Energy Commission?

- i. Positive []
- ii. Neutral []
- iii. Negative []

19) What is your reason for the answer above?

.....
.....

20) What is your perception of public relations practice in EPA?

- i. Positive []
- ii. Neutral []
- iii. Negative []

21) What is your reason for the answer above?

.....
.....

SECTION D: Changing the Negative Public Perceptions of Public Relations

22) Negative public perception about public relations practice will change if the practitioners refrain from lies, deception?

- i. Strongly Agree []
- ii. Agree []
- iii. Neutral []
- iv. Disagree []
- v. Strongly Disagree []

23) To what extent is truthfulness relevant in changing the public perception of public relations in Ghana?

- i. Very relevant []
- ii. Average []
- iii. Least relevant []

24) To what extent is trustworthiness relevant in changing the public perception of public relations in Ghana?

- i. Very relevant []
- ii. Averagely []
- iii. Least relevant []

25) To what extent is accountability relevant in changing the public perception of public relations in Ghana?

- i. Very relevant []
- ii. Averagely []
- iii. Least relevant []

26) What is your suggestion on how can the negative public perceptions of public relations in Ghana be changed?

.....
.....

Thank You for Your Time