

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

THE ROLE OF MEDIA RELATIONS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

BY

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PUBLIC RELATIONS**

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, SAMUEL OBIRI-YEBOAH hereby declare that this research study is my own work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university, and all materials used in this thesis have been duly acknowledged.

.....

SAMUEL OBIRI-YEBOAH

.....

DATE

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this project work was done under my supervision. I thereby approve that the work is adequate in scope and quality for the partial fulfilment of their requirements for the award of a Master of Arts in Public Relations

.....

DR. MRS. MAVIS ESSANDOH

.....

DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the people whose efforts have seen me develop into the person I am now. First and foremost is my sister, Hilda Acheampong. Thank you for the care, support and prayers. May the good Lord bless you with a long and prosperous life. Secondly to Mr and Mrs Obiri-Yeboah, my parents for challenging me to always seek improvement in my life. Last but not the least, to Messrs Attionu, Affrim and Affutu who nurtured me at an early age and believed in me.

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My utmost gratitude goes to the Almighty God, whose love and mercies have strengthened and encourage me through my course. I give Him all the praise. To my parents, Mr and Mrs Obiri-Yeboah, and all my friends for your love and support, may God bless you all abundantly for your words of encouragement and the helping hand you lent me throughout this journey.

I also appreciate my supervisor, Dr. Mrs. Mavis Essandor, who patiently guided me throughout. God Bless You, Madam.

To my colleagues in the MA Public Relations class and all who helped me in one way or the other and all whose names cannot be mentioned here, I give a well-deserved hat tip.

ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to examine the role of Media Relations in Public Relations practice. The study intended to use the qualitative research methodology to investigate how organizations adopt Media Relations in Public Relations practice, explore the effectiveness of Media Relations in Public Relations practice, and examine the changing trends of Media Relations in corporate communication, but due to the impact of the COVID- 19 the study employed the use of secondary research in its data collection in order to avoid human interactions. The study reviewed empirical findings of related studies and came up with the conclusion that media relation is very integral to the work of practitioners. The study also discovered that building and maintaining relationships with media practitioners is very important to the establishment of good Media Relations. The study also discovered that traditional mass media is still relevant to the establishment of trust, credibility and good reputation for organizations.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

This chapter looks at the role of Media Relations in Public Relations practice. It also contains the background of the study, rationale of the study, objective and research questions and the significance of the study.

1.1 Background

Media Relations (M.R) helps to complement Public Relations practices in many ways (Tilley, 2020). It is a tool most PR practitioners use to connect their organization to the public on some level (Tilley, 2020). Wilcox (2005) explained that Media Relations (M.R) is one of the most important parts of every PR practitioner's job. This is why press agents and publicists will do anything just to get the media's attention (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The media according to Griffin (2003) is considered to be very powerful. He claimed that the media can be used to discredit political leaders and endorse other candidate, and in business, bad press can reduce sales and affect company. Proactive MR builds positive reputation by communicating good behaviour (Tilley, 2020). Media Relations is not just an avenue or a function to only think about publicity but a strategic role that helps to build relationships with the media (Krishnan, 2007).

Delorme and Fedler (2003) have argued that the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners started from the inception of Public Relations in itself. Journalists used to describe PR practitioners as disingenuous publicity pimps (Delorme and Fedler, 2003). Whereas practitioners described journalists as insecure whiners who complain about their jobs, salaries and work conditions (Delorme and Fedler, 2003, p. 106; Kaul, 2003). Sallot and Johnson (2006) characterized the relationship between journalists and Public Relations practitioners as

a “love –hate relationship” (p. 154). Despite the hostile relationship between journalists and PR practitioners in the past, recent studies have suggested that the tension has somewhat reduced and there seems to be a more cordial relationship between the two (Tkalac, Verčič and Colić, 2016, Archer and Harrigan, 2016; St. John and Johnson, 2016; Sung-Un and Joon Soo, 2009; Waters, Tindall & Morton, 2010).

The media is very important to every PR practitioner. It typically involves one-to-many communication with anonymous receivers through communication channels with a clear distinction between producers and receivers (Croteau and Hoynes, 2014, p. 287). Corporate actors know and understand the media to be very important to their business. It can be used as a means of getting messages to their publics, customers, and all other stakeholders. The media has the propensity of communicating meaning to a vast dispersed public with the aid of technology.

While large-scale media enterprises as well as news organizations with editorial departments and editorial staff (differentiated by Tunstall, 1971) dominated the media system and therefore created the media agenda, Media Relations became a crucial part of Public Relations, like mass media advertising did for marketing. Moreover, media legitimacy and the evaluating audience have traditionally played a leading role in Public Relations and Media Relations (Bansal and Clelland, 2004; Fredriksson, Pallas, and Wehmeier, 2013; Pollock and Rindova, 2003; Yoon, 2005).

Zoch and Molleda (2006) explained that Media Relations try to shape the media agenda using framing, information subsidies and agenda building. They went ahead to explain that Media

Relations mainly deals with organizational process of creating Media Relations programs and campaigns (Zoch and Molleda, 2006).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Argenti (2003) explained that Public Relations in itself, was established by business to help increase public and media interest in business and place businesses in a positive light. Seitel (2001) argued that most business people still see Public Relations as synonymous with dealing with the press and getting publicity.

Many Scholars have investigated the role of Media Relations in PR practice. Varghese and Abdul Rahman (2014) sought to investigate the perception and importance attached to Media Relations by corporate houses and business journalists in Chennai. Zerfass, Verčič and Wiesenberg (2016) also investigated the changing trend in Media Relations from the traditional mediated communication mode to own produced and delivered content from strategic communicators in Europe. Supa (2014) also studied the current state of Media Relations research through a review of history. Krishnan (2007) also investigated whether Media Relations play a strategic role in corporate Public Relations practice in Malaysia.

Whiles many studies have been done on the role of Media Relations around the world, especially in Europe and Asia, it has been observed that little of such studies have been done in Africa especially Ghana. This study therefore is going to investigate the role of Media Relations in Public Relations practice. The study is going to look at how organizations adopt the concept of Media Relations and how effective practitioners think it has been in their communication strategy.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

The study is going to help us to understand the significance of Media Relations in PR practice. The main objective of this study is to examine the role of Media Relations in PR practice. In the process of achieving this objective, the study will investigate how Media Relations complement PR practice using the Agenda setting theory to explain the importance of the media in corporate communication practice and Public Relations activities.

The study is also going help us understand the relationship between journalists and practitioners. Scholars like Wilson and Supa (2013), Larsson (2009) and Forson (2013) have all contextualized the relationship between journalists and Public Relations practitioners. The study will help us to understand this relationship further and also what it means to corporate communications.

The study will give a comprehensive account of how systems theory as a relationship theory of Public Relations, can be used to examine the relationship between Public Relations practice and media and also how the media as a system can help organizations within the society (Gregory, 1999). The theory also helps us understand that no organization can survive in a social setting alone without interacting with other social systems. Hence, an organization as a system needs to establish a symbiotic relationship with the media and other installations within the society for sustainability and growth.

Finally, the study will add up to existing literature on the role of Media Relations in Public Relations practice. It will serve as a reference point for practitioners and academics who wish to study Media Relations and how it complements Public Relations practice, and also how systems theory and agenda setting can be used to analyze Media Relations.

1.4 Objectives

The objective is going to be divided into two; the main and the specific objectives.

The main objective of the study is to examine the role of Media Relations in Public Relations practice.

1.5 Specific Objectives

1. To investigate how organizations, adopt Media Relations in their Public Relations practice
2. To explore the effectiveness of Media Relations in Public Relations practice.
3. To examine the changing trend of Media Relations in corporate communications practice.

1.6 Research Questions

1. How do organizations adopt the use of Media Relations in their Public Relations practice?
2. How effective is Media Relations in Public Relations practice?
3. What are the changing trends of Media Relations in corporate communication practice?

1.7 Organization of the study

The study is in five (5) parts. Chapter one will discuss the background of the study, statement of the problem, and research objectives and research questions. Chapter two will review literature. The literature review will discuss some basic concepts of the study as well as the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter three will discuss the methodology of the study. Chapter four will also discuss findings of related studies and also propose some findings for

this study. Chapter five will conclude with summary of the study and propose some recommendations for the study.

1.8 Significance of Study

The study is, first of all, going to add up to existing literature on the role of Media Relations in PR practice. Students who wish to study the literature for any academic reference can review this study. Professionally, if any practitioner also wants any reference on the role of Media Relations in PR in Ghana, he or she can also always rely on this study for assistance. This can help practitioners make informed decisions on how to deal with issues relating to Media Relations when developing a communication strategy.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter covered the background of the study, rationale, significance, and objectives of the study. The study is going to look at how organizations employ the use of Media Relations in their Public Relations practice; it is going to also examine the effectiveness of Media Relations in Public Relations practice and finally look at the trends in Media Relations in corporate communications practice.

The next chapter is the literature review where I review other literature relevant to the topic and also how come up with conceptual and theoretical framework for the study.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature in relation to the study. The review discusses the theoretical, conceptual, and the empirical studies relating to the topic. The conceptual assessment is going to help us to define and understand the main concepts of the study and the theoretical framework is also going to help us to explain the theoretical underpinnings and their relevance to the study. The review concludes with how other studies will influence my research.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Media Relations

Supa and Zoch (2009) defined Media Relations as a systematic, planned and mutually beneficial relationship between Public Relations practitioners and journalists. Media Relations is very important to the role of Public Relations (Wilson and Supa, 2013). The media provides a medium through which practitioners can deliver their message to their publics (Grabowski, 1992; Larsson, 2009). Public Relations campaigns and communication efforts are often centered on Media Relations and the interactions between practitioners and journalists (Wilson and Supa, 2013). Raupp (2017) argued that Media Relations is an essential activity in PR practice because the media performs a very crucial function in the public information process. The media informs the public on happenings around them and educates the public on government policies. Supa (2014) describes Media Relations as the complex process involving an organization's Media Relations strategy, Media Relations professionals, journalists, editors, and media enterprises.

Raupp (2017) argued that Public Relations came to the fore in the late 19th century when segments of the population like industrialists, the public sector, entertainers and sportspeople

started hiring publicists and press gents. Grunig and Grunig (1992) posit that the desire to generate publicity arose from the perception that companies themselves, should control their image. Press agents/ publicists used all means to get access to the media (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Press agents indulged in stunts, bribery, and fake news just to get the public's attention (DeLorme and Fedler, 2003). After "press agency", the next model to evolve was the "public information" function (Grunig and Hunt, 1984 and Grunig and Grunig, 1992). The press information model also sought to gain the public's attention, however, this time around the PR practitioners presented factual and correct information to the press. The practitioner served as a counselor to management. The common features of press agency and public information are that they both need writing and technical skill combined with a grasp of using images, words, websites and Media Relations (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, Toth, and Van Leuven, 2012).

Practitioners use research to gather information on public opinions, which is analyzed and an appropriate response given (Grunig and Grunig, 1992). Two other PR models were developed as a result of research. The first is the two-way symmetrical model which states that "Public Relations sought to determine what publics know and understand about the organization, issues of importance and so on" (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, Toth, and Van Leuven, 2012, p. 22). These findings are then incorporated into the communication effort of the organization. The second model, which is the two-way asymmetrical model, considers PR as scientific persuasion. The two-way asymmetrical adopts the use of social science research methods to increase the persuasiveness of the message. For example; a Public Relation practitioner who is conducting a campaign for a product about the use of contraceptives will research on the general public opinion on contraceptives and design a persuasive message that seeks to address

all the concerns raised. The two-way symmetrical model seeks to build relationships through research unlike the function of the practitioner under asymmetrical (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The role of the press agency and public information is still relevant today and it is manifested in the role of Media Relations. Lattimore et al (2012) argued that Media Relations help organizations to respect, develop and maintain good relationships with the media and their publics.

2.1.2 The Journalist And The Public Relations Practitioner

According to Kaul (2013), Media Relations focus on the active involvement of practitioners in building relationships with media members. DeLorme and Fedler (2003) have argued that the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists has existed from the inception of Public Relations in itself. They argued that this competitive relationship started at the end of World War 1 when journalists thought the work of publicists might reduce the advertising revenue for media companies. Journalists used to describe PR practitioners as “disingenuous publicity pimps” according to Delorme and Fedler (2003, p. 106) whereas practitioners described journalists as insecure whiners who complain about their jobs, salaries and work conditions (Kaul, 2003). Sallot and Johnson (2006) also labelled the relationship between journalists and Public Relations practitioners as a love –hate relationship. Despite the hostile relationship between journalists and PR practitioners in the past, recent studies have suggested that the tension has somewhat reduced and there seems to be a more cordial relationship between the two (Tkalac, Verčič and Colić, 2016, Archer and Harrigan, 2016; St. John and Johnson, 2016; Waters et al., 2010).

The media is very important to PR practitioners, and other corporate actors know and understand the media to be very important to their businesses. Media communication typically involves one-to-many communication with anonymous receivers through communication

channels, with a clear distinction between producers and receiver (Croteau and Hoynes, 2014, p. 287). They can be used as a means of getting messages to publics, customers, and all other stakeholders. The media has the propensity of sharing meaning to a vast dispersed public with the aid of technology.

With the media agenda dictated by big media corporations and well-resourced news networks who seemingly control the media landscape, the importance of Media Relations grew and it became what advertising is for marketing (Zerfass, Vercic and Wiesenberg, 2016). Public opinion of the media and perceptions of their sincerity and their reputation have also been key to Public Relations in general and Media Relations specifically (Bansal and Clelland, 2004; Fredriksson, Pallas, and Wehmeier, 2013; Pollock and Rindova, 2003; Yoon, 2005).

Zoch and Molleda (2006) explained that Media Relations try to shape the media agenda using framing, information subsidies and agenda building. They went ahead to explain that the way firms develop Media Relations activities and campaigns form the bedrock of Media Relations (Zoch and Molleda, 2006).

2.1.3 How Organizations Employ The Use Of Media Relations In Public Relations Practice

Supa (2014) argues that Media Relations should be an integral activity within every Public Relations department. Though every organization has different Media Relations goals, relationship building is the single most important goal for every organization (Supa, 2014). Media Relations should therefore be looked at not just as a tactical role but more as a strategic activity. Silva (2009) argues that PR practitioners must learn how to effectively communicate, no matter who they are.

Publics usually form opinions about an organization based on “what they say or do not say” (Silva, 2009 p. 5). Creating the right image for an organization is very crucial to the success and failure of an organization (Silva, 2009). Silva (2009) argues that to be able to begin to build an effective relationship with the media, it is best for practitioners to always call on the press and always make sure they have positive and interesting stories to share with them. Silva (2009) also advised that it is best to establish a list of media contacts. This list should include the names and contacts of all the media houses, editors and journalists that practitioners would want to work with. Silva (2009) posits that PR practitioners should try and establish a mutual relationship with people working in media houses. This relationship should not be professional alone. The practitioner can start by inviting journalists to lunch to befriend them, talk to them or have some special relationship with them beyond work (Silva, 2009).

In building a contact list of media houses, Silva (2009) advises us to try not to sideline our local media houses for the mainstream media houses. The local media outlets help the organization connect with its immediate environment. The best way to gain the interest of the media in your story is to make it “newsworthy” (Silva, 2009). Most practitioners, in most cases, invite the media to report on CSR activities, signing of agreements, training activities, educational campaigns, and many more (Silva, 2009). Practitioners use tools like press releases, press conferences, press kits, newsletters, press soirees, and recently websites and social media (Silva, 2009).

2.1.4 Changing trends in Media Relations

The dramatic change in the communication industry, driven by technology, has affected the way media practitioners interact with their audience (Wilson and Supa, 2013). Watson (2012), Wright and Hinson (2014), Zerfass, Verčič, and Wiesenbergl (2016) and Asamoah (2019) have

all discussed the changing trends in Public Relations practice with the advent of the internet and social media.

Zerfess et al (2016) reviewed the status of Media Relations in Europe. They focused on the shift from mediated communications to owned communication content. According to them, this change has also affected the relationship between traditional communication disciplines in organizations including; advertising, business communication, corporate communication, management communication, marketing communication, Public Relations, technical communication, and political communication (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007).

Zerfess et.al (2016; p: 9) described “strategic communication” as obscuring the differences between advertising and Media Relations. Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015) explained that the media contributes to how reality and meaning is understood and framed. The introduction of social networking sites happen to be the highlight of the dramatic change in communication patterns. Social media allows practitioners to reach and interact with stakeholders, and also opens the possibility of mutually beneficial relationships (Berger and Dong-jin, 2003, as cited in Wilson and Supa, 2013).

Most social media sites offer news, information and story ideas which practitioners may use as Media Relations resources (Diga & Kelleher, 2009). Asamoah (2019) analyzed how organizations employ the use of social media and concluded that social media presents a new avenue for organizations to reach their publics. Asamoah (2019) explained that, most organizations have social media platforms which are mostly handled by the communications department or the PR practitioner.

Social networking sites like Twitter are very useful for corporate communications because they encourage interactivity and enhance mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics (Wang, 2013; Wilson and Supa, 2013). It can also be used as a strategic communication tool to conduct public campaigns (Wang, 2003).

Altmeppen (2015) as cited in Zerfee et al (2016) argues that even though mass media is relevant to Public Relations practice, new media is gradually gaining grounds and communication strategists need to take cognizance of this.

2.1.5 Effectiveness of Media Relations in Public Relations practice

Tilley (2020) argues that the media is extremely influential and can hurt organizations by reporting negatively on an organization's operations. This can affect sales negatively, reduce financial standing and destabilize trading relationships (Tilley, 2020). Proactive Media Relations builds positive reputation by communicating good behaviour (Tilley, 2020, p; 3).

Larsson (2009) posits that the media is very important to an organization's external communication efforts. The power of the news media to set a nation's agenda in an immense and well mediated fashion cannot be overlooked when we are discussing the power of the media and the effectiveness of the agenda setting theory (Larsson, 2009). McComb and Shaw (1993) argues that the public learns how much importance to attach to issues by the salience of the topic in the news. Their representation of issues leaves some imagery in our heads and aids us in how we interpret events (Lippman, 1922).

Tilley (2020) describes the media as a very influential social agent. According to her, the media can discredit the highly earned reputation of a political leader or top government official or start or stop a war. In business Tilley (2020) also argued that the media is also very important to the success and failure of commercial or non-profit organizations. Organizational Media

Relations deal both proactively and reactively with the risks and opportunities of the power of the media (Tilley, 2020).

Tilley (2020) again states that “Media Relations takes a strategic view that any publicity is not necessarily good publicity” (p. 3). She argues that positive media exposure that does not reach its intended audience is a wasted opportunity. Tilley (2020) argues that Media Relations can impact audiences’ views significantly and their decision-making process.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Agenda Setting

The agenda setting theory is a mass communication theory that discusses how mass media influence in making certain issues public agenda (Zain, 2014). The theory can be traced to 1922 when Walter Lippmann discovered the importance of mass media as an influential element in the setting of images in the minds of the public (Zain, 2014). The term was later formed and popularized by McCombs and Shaw (1972). They observed after studying the influence of media message on voters in the 1968 presidential elections in the US that, mass media has the capacity to influence voters’ opinion by directing them as to what to think about national issues (Zain, 2014). The media do this by placing emphasis on certain issues forcing the audiences or public to react to such issues (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009).

This theory is able to explain to us the power of the media. Cohen (1963) argued that the theory sought explain how the mass media can change political behaviour during elections. Zain (2014) argues that the theory also seeks to explain how the media adopt the concept of framing and priming of issues for their audience and how the audience also perceives issues after media exposure. The mass media according to Iyengar and Kinder (1987) can influence public

opinion intentionally or unintentionally. The media is believed to contribute to the influence of audience's perception, values, focus, and priorities (Zain, 2014). The audiences tend to form their own opinion or focus on the issues portrayed by the media and 'consider it as worthy of inclusion in their mental agendas' (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009 as cited by Zain, 2014; p.5).

McCombs and Shaw (1993) and Littlejohn and Foss (2009) argues that in most cases public agenda has an impact on media agendas. The media basically mirrors issues in the public sphere (Zain, 2014). McCombs and Shaw (1993), Roberts and McCombs (1994) Walgrave and Aelst (2006) and Zain (2014) also argue that politicians and Public Relations practitioners are also part of the people who are responsible for setting the agenda for public discourse. Rogers and Dearing (1988) discussed the relationship between three agendas. They discussed public agenda, media agenda and policy agenda. The public agenda is set by the general public and issues usually bothering them. For example; public agenda can be set when citizens come together to protest the state of their roads to the government which is captured in the media. Media agenda is set when the media decides to push an issue to the public which is mostly of environmental concern, an example can be the campaign by the media to stop illegal mining in Ghana (#StopGalamseyNow). Policy agenda is mostly triggered by the government or policy makers including Public Relations practitioners.

2.2.2 How The Agenda Setting Theory Relates To The Study

The agenda setting theory provides us with some justification as to why some Public Relations practitioners will want to establish and maintain relations with the media (Tilley, 2020). PR practitioners can gain free publicity and news coverage if they are able to provide stories of news value. Tilley (2020) explains that the public is likely to follow and talk about information provided in the media.

Zain (2014) also argued that agenda setting can be analyzed in three folds; we have the public agenda, media agenda and policy agenda. A critical look at the theory provides us with insight into significant questions like who sets the agenda, what agendas are being set and to what extent the mass media is able to influence publics. This is going to give the practitioner an idea of how to manage information and how to influence public opinion towards issues. During crisis situations, Media Relations become very useful especially in the process of determining how to change narratives or influence public perception using the various media tools and relationships with media houses and journalists.

2.2.3 Systems Theory

Systems theory is a relationship theory that allows practitioners to understand the importance of building relationships with other important systems in the community (Cutlip, Center & Broom. 2000). Gregory (1999) argues that mechanical, organic and social systems can be defined by their interactions with their environment. Cutlip et al (2000) describe a system as a set of units interacting with each other to achieve a goal. The concept of systems theory basically seeks to explain the various parts of organizations and societies and how these parts come together to form a symbiosis. Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) argue that the theory emphasizes the interdependence of organizations with their environment, both internal and external to the organization.

Gregory (1999) explains that systems theory was derived from the sciences that state that living organisms interact with each other for survival. Gregory (1999) argues that no organization can survive in isolation. Organizations are part of a social system which entails the media, suppliers, customers/clients, government, international community, employees, distributors, and the environment itself (Cutlip et al, 2000).

According to Gregory (1999), there are three main system perspectives of organizations. We have “mechanistic, organismic and adaptive” (p. 4). Mechanistic can also be referred to as closed systems while organismic and adaptive are the open systems (Gregory, 1999). An organization that operates the closed system is an organization that does not allow for much interaction with the external environment. Cutlip et al (2000) argue that closed systems do not seek new information. Decision makers operate with what happened in the past or with their personal preferences. Gregory (1999) also explained that in open systems, units within an organization affect and are affected by other units, and the organization as a whole is responsive to environmental change. The system receives input from the environment which impacts on its ideals or desired goals.

The theory does not only examine the relationship with external stakeholders but also looks at the internal stakeholders of the organization. Organizations assign specific jobs and functions to their employees resulting in many departments such as accounting, legal, and Public Relations, and marketing. These departments work together to ensure the progress and development of the organization. Gregory (1999) and Katz and Khan (1966) posit that the elements of open systems are input, throughput, output, interrelationship, transactional relationships with the environment and boundaries (p. 4).

An open system receives input from the environment (usually in a form of raw materials, human resource or capital), this is then processed (throughput) through interactions with other internal systems within the organization to produce an output (Gregory, 1999). According to Gregory (1999), the interactions and the concepts of input, output and throughput need some stability or the maintenance of an overall balance and this is called homeostasis. Within an organizational setting, the department responsible for establishing and maintaining

relationships with external factors is the Public Relations/ communication department. The open-systems mode enables practitioners to fulfil a “functional or management role where they plan and manage communication programmes systematically, counsel and are part of the dominant coalition which makes policy decisions” (Gregory, 1999, p.6).

2.2.4 How Systems Theory Relates to the Study

The systems theory seeks to argue that an organization cannot live in isolation. It has to depend on other external and internal systems to function effectively. The media is part of such systems and without it, the PR practitioner cannot function effectively (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). This theory is going to help me contextualize and also understand the role of the media in PR activities.

Hazleton (1992) argued that Public Relations can be described as a series of events containing “input from the environment to the system (organization), transforming of inputs into communication goals, objectives, and campaigns and output in the form of messages, to target both internal and external audiences (p. 2). Public Relations practitioners are the middlemen, explaining the organization to its stakeholders and interpreting the environment (political, cultural, and social) to the organization. Cutlip et al (2000) argues that Public Relations practitioners are responsible for advising the dominant coalition about problems and opportunities in the environment and helping decision makers respond to these changes.

The theory helps us understand why the media system is important to the survival of an organization and how it is also important that practitioners should always try to establish and maintain relationship with the media and journalists.

2.2.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature on the role of Media Relations in Public Relations practice. It discussed Media Relations, the relationship between journalists and practitioners and some changing trends in Media Relations practice. The Chapter also discussed the agenda setting theory and the systems theory. Zain (2014), Tilley (2020), Littlejohn and Foss (2009), Robert and McCombs (1993) used the agenda setting theory to explain the role of Media Relations in Public Relations. Gregory (1999), Cutlip et al (2000), and Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) also helped in the discussion and application of systems theory and its role in public relation practice and how it helps us understand the relationship between practitioners and the media. The next chapter discusses the methodology of the study, sample used, and some other methodology in relation to the study.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology of the study and how data would be analyzed and presented. The chapter also discusses the relevance of the methodology and some limitations of this methodology.

3.1 Methodology

Jackson, Drummond and Camera (2007) argued that “Methodologies suggest how inquiries should proceed by indicating what problems are worth investigating, how to frame a problem so it can be explored, how to develop appropriate data generation, and how to make the logical link between the problem, data generated, analysis and the conclusion” (p. 5). Methodology always gives us the opportunity to think of ways we can gather our data and also ways we can analyze the data in order to make sense out of them. The methodology informs the method or technique used for data collection (Kaplan, 1964). Kaplan (1964) again defines methods as the tools/ techniques used to generate data. This may include surveys, interviews, focus group discussions and so on.

3.2 Research Design

This study would have employed the use of qualitative research methodology in the collection of its data. The study sought to interview five (5) communication practitioners using an unstructured style of questioning to elicit their views on the role of Media Relations in Public Relations practice. The purpose of this study was to get insight and rich details into how communicators employ the use of Media Relations and how it has complemented their work. This study however, due to the impact of COVID-19, decided to adopt the secondary data collection technique by gathering findings of the results of other related studies.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

As stated earlier, the research examined the role of Media Relations in Public Relations practice. To be able to meet this objective, it was important that we investigate how organizations employ the use of Media Relations in their communication strategies, how effective the Media Relations strategies have been, and also analyze the changing trends of Media Relations in corporate communication practice and the relationship between practitioners and journalists. However due to the impact of the COVID-19 and the way the virus spreads, the researcher decided to use secondary methods to gather and analyze data. The secondary data helped the researcher avoid human interaction as health professionals are advising that we try as much as possible to limit our interactions with people to avoid the spread of the virus.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

The study analyzed data thematically. The study made sure that all research questions were addressed and the main objective of the study was met. The study analyzed results from other related studies as stated in the data collection section. The analysis broke the issues into themes and discussed them accordingly in order to bring clarity and understanding of major findings and then formed conclusions. This method helped me to act according to the directives proposed by the Government of Ghana and Health practitioners to practice social distancing and if possible avoid human interactions in order to stop the virus from spreading.

3.5 Advantages Of Using Secondary Data Collection Method For The Study

The secondary data collection methods helped the researcher save time. The initial method for data collection was the qualitative approach whereby the researcher would have interviewed practitioners. This would have meant that the research would have to send letters to these

practitioners requesting for an interview. If the interview request had been granted, the researcher would have also scheduled a meeting with each interviewee. This would have meant that the researcher would have spent time and money before the interviews were completed. With secondary data, you only have to search for research related to your studies and review the findings without necessarily moving away from your computer.

The secondary data collection and analysis also assisted the researcher to abide by the directives of the Government to limit human interactions.

3.6 Conclusions

The chapter discussed the methodology used in the study. The study used secondary research methodology in the data collection and analysis. The study reviewed the findings of other related studies and analyzed the results in relation to the objectives of the study.

The next chapter is going to analyze data and discuss the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses some of the possible outcomes of the study since the study would not collect data due to the impact of COVID-19. The chapter also discusses findings of other studies in relation to the specific objectives of the study.

4.1 Discussions Of Findings Of Other Studies

Zerfass, Verčič, and Wiesenberg (2016) studied the status of Media Relations in Europe as it reflects the upcoming shift from mass mediated communication to own produced and delivered content by strategic communicators. The study used quantitative survey to collect responses from about 2,253 communication practitioners across Europe. In the analysis, 37.0 % perceived that the mass media will gain importance for shaping the public opinion. 50.3% also perceived that owned media had the propensity of shaping people's mind. Practitioners also by these responses emphasized the importance of Media Relations to the shaping of public opinion. Zerfass, Verčič, and Wiesenberg (2016) argued that for this reason, organizations must observe and respect the power of the media.

In a qualitative study by Varghese and Rahman (2014) on the practice and effect of corporate Media Relations in Chennai (India), Media Relations appears to be very important to corporate organizations. After interviewing both practitioners and journalists, the study revealed that Media Relations help organizations to communicate to the masses. They also revealed that Media Relations is expected to help corporate organizations establish good social image, credibility and reputation among the various publics of an organization. The study also revealed that many companies have considered how to leverage news appearance to their benefits. The study reveals that practitioners have devised strategies to enable them to appear in the media

space for good reasons to enable them achieve media coverage and maintain good relationship with the media. Another strategy by practitioners is to establish and maintain trust with journalists by revealing news off the record and also taking them into “confidence” (Varghese and Rahman, 2014). The study however did not focus too much on the changing trends in communication and how it may affect the work of Media Relations.

Supa (2014) however examined the impact of social media on Media Relations practice through the use of depth interviews with practitioners. The study interviewed thirty-three (33) PR practitioners and thirty-six (36) journalists. The study revealed that almost all the practitioners agreed that social media is changing Media Relations practice. Only three (3) out of the thirty-three (33) practitioners did not agree to the assertion that social media is changing Media Relations. Practitioners explained that social media is able to connect them with journalists and other stakeholders. Journalists on the other hand explained that social media has caused less change in the Media Relations relationship. Practitioners agreed that social media has become an important tool for relationship-building. The study concluded that even though the value of Media Relations is being questioned because of technological advancement, it is still significant to the establishment of trust, credibility and reputation of companies in the eyes of key audiences.

Wright and Hinson (2009) also studied the impact of blogs and other social media on Public Relations practice in 2008. In the studies, it was discovered that majority (61%) of the respondents believed that blogs and social media is changing the trends in Public Relations practices. 93% of the respondents however agreed that they spend part of their average workday with some aspects of social media and blogs. Wrights and Hinson (2009) also discovered that respondents agreed that traditional news media is still relevant to Public Relations practice

because they scored high in terms of accuracy, credibility, telling the truth and being ethical than social media and blogs. This result corroborates the results obtained from Supa's (2014) study.

Hall and Pettigrew (2017) also studied Media Relations in a changing media landscape. The study interviewed six (6) practitioners on the current state of dialogue and interactions between Public Relations practitioners and members of the media. The study revealed that the average task of most of the practitioners within a week includes actively interacting with the media and information gathering and drafting. The study also revealed that 50% of the work of a practitioner within a week is interacting with the media either by phone, in person meeting, email, text/instant message, *Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn*. Practitioners also argued that email and phone conversations are mostly the primary source of communicating with journalists. It was also revealed that social media is also complementing Media Relations since it is improving the interactions between practitioners and journalists. Some practitioners also admitted that they mostly interact with bloggers in their communication efforts. They explained that most of the time, the bloggers come in because of the target audience they are trying to reach and also depending on the type of campaign. The study however did not gather data on the views of journalists on how social media is affecting Media Relations.

4.2 Discussion Of Some Possible Findings In The Study In Relation To The Research Question

4.2.1 How does organization employ the use of Media Relations in their Public Relations practice?

One of the objectives of this research was to investigate how organizations employ the use of Media Relations in Public Relations practice. Similar research has been conducted by Hall and

Pettigrew (2017) and Varghese and Rahman (2014) in India. Results from earlier studies indicated that Media Relations is mostly smooth when there is some type of cordial relationship between practitioners and journalists. Hall and Pettigrew (2017) explained that 50% of a practitioner's weekly work involves interacting with the media and by extension, journalists. Establishing trust with the journalist helps strengthen a practitioner's relationship with the media.

Varghese and Rahama (2014) explained that practitioners have devised strategies to enable them to appear in the media space for good reasons and to enable them achieve media coverage and maintain good media relationships. From the studies above, we can conclude that practitioners understand that Media Relations is not possible without establishing relationships with journalists. The journalists are the people responsible for producing content and gathering news. To be able to effectively undertake the Media Relations role, practitioners need to build and maintain sustainable relationships with journalists and various media houses.

4.2.2 How Effective is Media Relations in Public Relations Practice?

Varghese and Rahama (2014) and Zerfass, Verčič, and Wiesenberg (2016) studied the effectiveness of Media Relations in PR practice. Zerfass, Verčič, and Wiesenberg's (2016) study was able to explain to us the perception of some practitioners on the importance of Media Relations. It was discovered that most practitioners believed that the media is very effective in shaping public opinion. This means that to be able to effectively get your communication results, it is best that you employ the services of the media. Varghese and Rahama (2014) revealed that Media Relations is expected to help corporate organizations to establish good social image, credibility and reputation among the various publics of an organization.

Varghese and Rahama's (2014) study corroborates the assertion that the media is a very influential social agent. With respect to the question asked on the effectiveness of Media

Relations in Public Relations, the study believes that Media Relations is very effective in Public Relations practice. The Zain (2014) asserts that mass media has the propensity of influencing public opinion. A study from Zerfass, Verčič, and Wiesenberg (2016) and Varghese and Rahama (2014) proved Zain's (2014) assertion right. From the findings above, it would be safe to say that this study would also have generated similar results.

4.2.3 What Are The Changing Trends Of Media Relations In Corporate Communication Practice?

Wright and Hinson (2009) and Supa (2014) both studied the effect of the changing trends in communication on Media Relations and PR practice. Wright and Hinson's (2009) study revealed that 93% of respondents agreed that they spend part of their average working day on social media and blogs. 61% however agreed that social media is changing the trends in PR practice. Supa (2014) discovered that 30 out the 33 practitioners interviewed agreed that social media is changing Media Relations relationships. Their study revealed that social media is in a way strengthening the relationship between them and journalists.

Practitioners interviewed in Supa's (2014) study argued that social media apart from helping them to connect with journalists also helped them to connect and interact with their various stakeholders. Journalists and practitioners believed that social media and blogs however effective cannot completely affect traditional Media Relations because the traditional mass media still has command over trust, credibility, and reputation among the various publics (Wright & Hinson, 2009; Supa, 2014; and Varghese and Hinson, 2014).

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter discussed findings of related studies. Results from related research work gave the researcher the opportunity to answer the research questions proposed in this study. Due to the

impact of the COVID-19 and advice from experts to practice social distancing, the study could not gather data as proposed in chapter three. The study then reviewed results from similar research from other authors. Results obtained enabled us to answer the research questions asked in this study. The study reviewed research works from authors like Hall and Pettigrew (2017), Varghese & Hinson (2014), Supa (2014), Wright and Hinson (2009) and Zerfass, Verčič, and Wiesenberg (2016). With the discussion above and the findings available, the study can conclude that Media Relations is very important to Public Relations practice. For practitioners to communicate effectively, it is prudent to always be in constant interaction with the media as well as the people who work within the media.

The next chapter is the concluding chapter. The chapter is going to summarize some of the findings, discuss the relevance of the study and propose some recommendation.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Introduction

This is the concluding chapter of the study. In this chapter, we will discuss the relevance of the study and also some limitations of the study. This chapter is also going to provide us with some recommendations for future studies.

5.1. Summary of Findings

The objectives of the study were in three parts. The first objective of this study was to investigate how organizations adopt Media Relations in Public Relations practice. Hall and Pettigrew (2017) and Varghese and Hinson (2014) all explained to us how interactions between practitioners and journalists help promote effective Media Relations. Wright and Hinson (2009) and Supa (2014) helped us to discuss the second objective which was the changing trends in corporate communication and its effect on Media Relations and finally, Varghese and Hinson (2014) and Zerfass, Verčič, and Wiesenberg (2016) also helped us to understand the importance of the media and the effectiveness of Media Relations to Public Relations practice. The study concluded that relationships with the media is very significant to Public Relations practice. Relationship with the media makes the communication effort of practitioners relatively easy and effective.

5.2. Limitations of the Study

One major challenge of this study was COVID- 19. COVID-19 had a huge impact on the way data was collected and analyzed. The study was going to interview professionals on the how Media Relations is influencing their job but due to the COVID-19, the study had to adopt to working with secondary data from related studies.

Another limitation was that secondary data does not give us the true representation of issues on the ground. Secondary data only reviews literature of related studies. These studies might be similar in structure but might not be similar in context. Most of the studies used in this study were studies conducted in Europe and America. This means that results obtained in these studies were results derived from the West. The West however have their own culture which is somewhat different from ours (Ghana). Therefore, results obtained from their studies might not reflect the situation in Ghana but might only give us an idea of the results we might expect when similar studies are conducted in Ghana.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Studies

This study focused on the role of Media Relations in Public Relations practice. In doing so, the study touched on how organizations use Media Relations in Public Relations practice and its effectiveness. The study also touched on the changing trends of Media Relations in corporate communication practice. The Internet according to Forson (2013) is changing corporate communication practice in Ghana. Future studies should delve deeper into the changing trends in the media space due to the proliferation of the Internet and how it is affecting the relationship between journalist and practitioners.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the importance of the study, some limitations of the study and also proposed some recommendations. This chapter discussed the importance of Media Relations in Public Relations practice. It also discussed how systems theory can be used to analyze the role of the media in corporate communications. The study also helped to provide clarity on the role and importance of media to an organization using the agenda setting theory. The study

also recommended that future researchers should focus on investigating how the Internet is affecting the Media Relations role.

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