LEVERAGING ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS OUTCOMES IN GHANA'S MUSIC INDUSTRIES: STRATEGIES AND FORMS

BY

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

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

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

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

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty, whose grace, strength, and guidance sustained me throughout this academic journey. I also dedicate this dissertation to my family, whose unwavering support, encouragement, and sacrifices made the completion of this study possible. Their belief in my aspirations provided constant motivation and resilience during challenging moments.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how artist management teams in Ghana used digital public relations to mobilise online fan communities and how such mobilisation shaped visibility, reputation, and relational continuity within the music industry. Using qualitative data from selected management teams, the study found that fan communities functioned beyond the extension of publicity reach. Fans actively engaged in reputation defence, reinforced preferred narratives, and supported sustained relationships between artists and audiences. At the same time, these practices generated persistent challenges, including frequent message misinterpretation and heightened exposure to reputational risk. Ethical concerns also emerged, particularly in relation to the reliance on unpaid emotional labour from highly committed fans. The findings further showed that the effectiveness of fan participation depended on trust, access, recognition, and shared cultural communication norms. Where these conditions were present, mobilisation supported relational stability and visibility management. Where they were absent, fan activity often became disruptive and difficult to regulate. Platform dynamics further shaped outcomes, as algorithmic changes altered visibility without warning and platform instability constrained managerial control. The study therefore positions digital public relations not merely as promotional activity but as a form of communication governance operating within unequal relations of power and dependence in contemporary fan mobilisation.

Keywords: Digital public relations; Fan communities; Artist management; Music industry; Entertainment

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AE – Active Experimentation

DRID – Directorate of Research, Innovation and Development

PR – Public Relations

RO – Research Objective

SCCT – Situational Crisis Communication Theory

SET – Social Exchange Theory

X – Social media platform formerly known as Twitter

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Public relations (PR) practice within the music and entertainment industry has undergone profound transformation over the past two decades (Balan & Krupa, 2024; Leak & Tindall, 2019). The rise of digital platforms has altered traditional communication structures, enabling real-time audience participation and interactive engagement (Kelley et al., 2021). Consistent with Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical model, this shift reflects participatory communication where publics and practitioners engage in mutually beneficial dialogue. Fans have consequently evolved from passive consumers into active co-creators of meaning who shape publicity and influence media framing (Hallur et al., 2021).

Globally, fan collectives such as the *BeyHive*, *BTS's ARMY (Bangtan Boys)*, *Swifties* and *30BG* exemplify this transformation, functioning as advocacy networks that build, sustain, and defend artist reputations (Fira, 2022; Klára et al., 2020). Khan (2023) identifies these fan-driven formations as credible, organically motivated promoters who mobilise support during album launches, live performances, and public controversies. Scholars describe such communities as brand networks bound by shared identity, consciousness, and moral responsibility (Carlson et al., 2008; Muniz Jr & O'Guinn, 2001), whose emotional attachment fosters enduring ties consistent with Relationship Management Theory, which underscores trust-based, long-term engagement between organisations and their publics (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Cope, 2020). Similar collective identities are emerging across African music markets, where digitally connected publics advocate for artists and amplify visibility (Bonsu, 2021; Cova et al., 2021).

These fan-driven interactions translate theoretical models into practice by positioning fans as credible communicators who promote and defend artists' brands. Their behaviour during controversies or image crises illustrates the logic of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007), where publics

actively participate in image restoration and legitimacy management (Benites-Duran et al., 2024; Edlom & Karlsson, 2021). Across Africa, such advocacy dynamics are visible in fan-led campaigns and digital mobilisation surrounding major artists (Cova et al., 2021; Sem-Ackah et al., 2023).

In Ghana's music scene, similar dynamics are evident. *Shatta Movement*, *SarkNation*, and *Bhim Nation.* Brew (2019) observes that these communities extend beyond admiration by engaging in online promotion, co-creating digital content, organising fan-led events, and defending artists during controversies. Koursoh (2021) highlights Twitter/X, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram as key platforms where these groups mobilise and sustain continuous dialogue around their preferred artists. Notably, much of this activity occurs outside formal public relations systems, signalling a shift in how strategic communication is negotiated within the entertainment sector. These dynamics reveal fan collectives as structured publics that shape visibility, reputation, and loyalty within Ghana's music industry. The present study therefore examines how online brand communities can be harnessed as strategic PR publics in advancing communication objectives within the country's entertainment ecosystem.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Fan-based brand communities have transformed Ghana's music communication landscape, yet their potential as strategic instruments of public relations remains limited. Artists such as Shatta Wale, Sarkodie, and Stonebwoy rely heavily on their fan bases for visibility and advocacy, but these engagements often remain informal and episodic (Bonsu, 2021; Brew, 2019). This vibrant informality reflects a missed opportunity for structured collaboration, revealing the lack of frameworks needed to channel fan energies toward sustained visibility, reputation, and trust within both practice and scholarship.

Within Ghanaian public relations research, this gap is even more pronounced. Although the field has expanded, its sustained fixation on corporate, political, and non-profit communication (Nutsugah & Anani-Bossman, 2023) has left the entertainment sector academically marginalised. This neglect illuminates a blind spot in understanding of how fan collectives operate as strategic publics capable of influencing perception, identity, and loyalty. The oversight is particularly striking given the sector's growing role in shaping national identity, digital interaction, and cultural economies (Zhang et al., 2021;

Zhao et al., 2023). Furthermore, while foundational works on brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Füller et al., 2008; Kaur, 2020; Klára, 2020) and fandom (Baym, 2018; Duffett, 2013) explore participation and belonging, they remain insufficient for interrogating the communicative and relational outcomes that concern public relations scholarship.

Addressing this deficiency calls for a theoretical shift toward participatory models of communication. For instance, while the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and Relationship Management Theory (Ledingham, 2003) highlight reciprocity and relationship quality they inadequately capture the decentralised and co-creative structures that define fan-based ecosystems. This study extends these frameworks through Digital Dialogic Communication Theory (Kent & Taylor, 2002) to position fan communities as participatory publics within contemporary PR systems. In doing so, it examines how Ghanaian artist managers engage and mobilise these communities to achieve strategic goals while shaping communication, relationships, and audience engagement.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and categorize the digital public relations strategies employed by artist management teams when engaging fan communities
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of fan community engagement in achieving specific PR outcomes (such as media visibility, crisis response, reputation building, etc.).
3. To determine the conditions (relational, contextual, ethical, etc.) under which fan community mobilization enhances PR outcomes versus creating reputational risk or backlash.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What digital public relations strategies do artist management teams employ when engaging fan communities?

2. How effective is fan community engagement in achieving PR outcomes (such as media visibility, crisis response, reputation building, etc.)?

3. Under what relational, contextual, and ethical conditions does fan community mobilisation enhance PR outcomes rather than create reputational risk or backlash?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study addresses a gap in public relations scholarship by shedding light on the role of fan communities within Ghana's music industry. While global research often treats these communities as either spontaneous collectives or marketing assets, few studies explore how artist management teams interact with them for strategic communication purposes. This inquiry introduces a fresh perspective by focusing on the intentional or reactive ways managers engage these groups. As such, it contributes to knowledge by expanding the scope of brand community theory within a service-oriented, culturally specific domain.

It also offers insight for policy actors in the creative arts and communications sectors. Institutions like the Ghana Creative Arts Council and the Ministry of Information can use findings from this study to shape frameworks that acknowledge fan communities as legitimate stakeholders in cultural production. Clear guidelines on digital engagement and artist-fan relations may help institutionalise practices that protect both artistic reputation and audience agency. Furthermore, policy rooted in evidence ensures that digital fan mobilisations are not mistaken for disorganised or incidental activity.

At the practical level, the study benefits public relations practitioners, artist managers, and entertainment strategists who seek to navigate Ghana's evolving media landscape. It shows how fan communities can serve as more than support groups. Their contributions to visibility, loyalty, and narrative control offer tools for long-term brand sustainability. For practitioners, understanding how to collaborate with these communities can strengthen campaigns, reduce reputational risk, and foster audience retention.

Finally, the study opens new pathways for future research. Scholars may consider comparative studies across countries or entertainment genres to understand how fan-driven PR differs in structure and effect. Others may investigate how algorithms and platform design influence community behaviour and visibility. These extensions allow the field to evolve with emerging media cultures, particularly in African contexts where digital fandom continues to grow.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the intersection between fan communities and public relations practices within Ghana's music industry. It specifically examines how artist management teams interact with and utilise fan communities, whether organically formed or strategically cultivated to achieve PR objectives such as promotion, visibility, and reputation management. The study concentrates on prominent Ghanaian artists with established fan bases and active management structures, drawing data from both digital platforms (such as Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube) and interviews with relevant stakeholders.

1.8 Organisation of the Study

The study is organised into five chapters, each designed to build upon the preceding one and guide the reader through a clear exploration of the subject. Chapter One introduces the study. It outlines the background, states the problem, and sets out the research objectives and questions. It also clarifies the scope, explains the relevance of the study, and presents its structure. This chapter lays the conceptual foundation by identifying the gap this research intends to fill. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature. It explores scholarly perspectives on brand communities, public relations practice in entertainment, and the strategic value of digital fan engagement. It also discusses the theoretical frameworks that underpin the analysis. This chapter provides the intellectual context necessary for positioning the study within existing academic discourse.

Chapter Three presents the methodological choices guiding the research. It details the research design, sampling strategies, data sources, and methods of analysis. Chapter Four reports the findings and discusses how they relate to the research questions. Chapter Five draws together the key insights and reflects on their implications. It concludes the study by offering recommendations for practice, outlining policy considerations, and suggesting directions for future research.

1.9 Operational Definitions

This section clarifies the key terms and expressions that frame the scope of the study. Each concept is defined as it is applied within this research to ensure conceptual precision and analytical coherence.

Public Relations (PR) Outcomes: In this study, PR outcomes refer to the measurable results or effects that arise from communication activities between artist management teams and their publics. They include improvements in media visibility, reputation enhancement, audience trust, loyalty, and crisis mitigation.

Fan Communities: Fan communities denote organised or loosely structured groups of individuals who share sustained emotional and symbolic attachment to a particular artist or musical brand. They operate through both online and offline interactions, engaging in promotion, defence, and advocacy on behalf of the artist. Within this research, fan communities are treated as *strategic publics* whose participation contributes to visibility, credibility, and reputation management outcomes.

Digital Engagement Strategies: Refers to the planned, coordinated, and interactive methods by which artist management teams communicate with, involve, and mobilise fans across social media platforms.

Artist Management Teams: Artist management teams comprise the professionals who oversee an artist's branding, communication, and career development. They include managers, publicists, communication strategists, and digital content coordinators who plan and execute public relations activities. In this study, they are the primary actors responsible for designing and implementing digital engagement initiatives that align fan activity with strategic communication goals.

Online Brand Communities: Online brand communities are digitally mediated networks formed around shared admiration for a brand, product, or personality. Their defining characteristics include shared identity, rituals, and a sense of moral responsibility among members.

Relationship Management: Relationship management refers to the deliberate and systematic effort to cultivate and sustain mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its publics.

1.10 Chapter Summary

The chapter introduced the study by establishing the changing role of fan communities in Ghana's music industry. It highlighted the gap in literature concerning how music management teams interact with these communities for public relations outcomes. The chapter also stated the research questions and objectives, clarified the scope, and explained why the study matters to academics, practitioners, and policy actors alike.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing scholarship and theoretical perspectives that inform the study. It begins by presenting the theoretical framework that underpins the research, followed by a conceptual review of key ideas relevant to the objectives. The review situates the study within broader discussions on public relations, fan culture, and digital engagement, drawing from both global and Ghanaian contexts. By critically examining how brand communities and artist–fan interactions have been conceptualised. Further, the chapter provides the foundation for understanding how online fan collectives can serve as strategic instruments for public relations in Ghana's music industry.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in Brand Community Theory (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), Relationship Management Theory (Ledingham, 2003) and Digital Dialogic Communication Theory (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Together, these theories explain both the structural and relational dimensions of fan-based communication in entertainment public relations.

2.2.1 Brand Community Theory

Brand Community Theory emerged from the work of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), who described it as a specialised, non-geographically bound community formed around shared admiration of a brand. It stems from social identity and community theories. The theory assumes that consumers create emotional and behavioural bonds with brands that go beyond transactions (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009). It suggests that shared consciousness, rituals, and moral responsibility shape such communities (Cova & Cova, 2002). These features sustain participation and reinforce identity among members.

Its key ideas include collective identity, brand loyalty, and co-creation. Members share meanings and experiences that strengthen the brand (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). The theory explains

how consumers contribute to brand legitimacy, advocacy, and cultural meaning (Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). In digital spaces, engagement extends beyond consumption to emotional and participatory bonds (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). Its scope covers marketing, branding, and consumer culture, showing how value and meaning are co-created.

The theory's strength lies in shifting attention from transactions to relationships (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Yet critics say it overlooks power issues and exclusion (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). Some argue it idealises participation and ignores corporate influence (Luedicke, Thompson, & Giesler, 2010). Others believe it assumes all consumers seek community, limiting its reach (Cova & White, 2013). Despite these limits, it remains key in explaining brand-related social relations.

2.2.2 Relationship Management Theory

Relationship Management Theory was developed in public relations through the work of Ledingham and Bruning (1998, 2000). It arose as a reaction to transactional models, placing relationships at the heart of communication. It draws on systems and social exchange theories, arguing that lasting, mutual relationships support organisational success (Hon & Grunig, 1999). The theory assumes that reciprocity, trust, and commitment define quality relationships.

Key concepts include openness, involvement, and shared control between organisations and stakeholders (Grunig & Huang, 2000). It guides how organisations build and assess relationships that foster goodwill and trust (Ledingham, 2003). The theory highlights that strong relationships enhance legitimacy and resilience. Its scope cuts across corporate, public, and nonprofit contexts (Bruning, Dials, & Shirka, 2008).

Scholars praise it for making public relations a strategic management tool (Ki & Hon, 2007). It provides indicators to measure relationship quality and offers an ethical basis for practice (Hung, 2005). Critics, however, point to its weakness in addressing context and culture (Kent & Taylor, 2016). Others say it idealises mutuality and ignores power differences (Ihlen, 2008). Some argue that its managerial focus

favours organisations over the public (Pieczka, 2011). Even so, it remains central in understanding communication-driven relationships.

2.2.3 Digital Dialogic Communication Theory

Digital Dialogic Communication Theory, introduced by Kent and Taylor (2002), explains how organisations build effective online relationships by prioritising two-way, ethical, and responsive communication. It holds that principles such as mutuality, openness, propinquity, empathy, and risk guide the design of digital spaces that invite participation rather than simple message distribution. When organisations provide useful information, enable feedback, and structure platforms to support repeated interaction, they strengthen trust and encourage publics to return (Kent et al., 2013). In entertainment communication, these principles clarify how artists and management teams create digital environments that stimulate participation and allow fans to shape meaning around creative work. Taylor and Kent (2014) showed that interactive affordances, timely responses, and clear engagement prompts elevate relational satisfaction and reinforce audience belonging, while Waters and Jamal (2011) established that such dialogic features support cohesive communities and empower publics to act as communicative partners.

Critiques, however, point out that practice often falls short of theory. McAllister-Spooner (2009) noted that many organisations adopt dialogic rhetoric without implementing genuine interaction. Park and Reber (2008) added that structural affordances alone do not ensure balanced communication, as power differentials frequently limit public influence. Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) found that promotional priorities routinely overshadow dialogic goals, reducing opportunities for genuine exchange, and Collister (2016) argued that dialogic principles become difficult to sustain in large, decentralised online communities. Even so, the theory remains central to PR scholarship because it offers a clear standard for evaluating digital engagement and highlights the strategic value of communication practices that acknowledge, involve, and respect publics.

2.2.4 Relevance of the Combined Theories to the Study

In all, the theories provide a coherent lens for interpreting the organisational, social, and communicative forces that shape interactions between artists, their management teams, and fan communities. Brand Community Theory offers the foundational understanding by showing how fan groups form, cultivate shared identities, and sustain collective meaning-making through rituals, emotional attachment, and participatory practices. This establishes the internal logic and cohesion that underpin communities whose behaviours influence visibility, legitimacy, and cultural impact.

Building on this structural base, Relationship Management Theory clarifies how organisations nurture and sustain mutually beneficial ties with their publics. Its focus on trust, openness, involvement, and commitment helps explain how management teams approach fan communities as active stakeholders whose loyalty depends on credible and responsive engagement. This relational perspective therefore connects the existence of fan communities to the ongoing processes that shape cooperation, expectation management, and audience retention.

Extending these relational dynamics into contemporary communication environments, Digital Dialogic Communication Theory accounts for the online spaces where much of this interaction now occurs. By emphasising interactivity, useful information, and the design of digital spaces that support participation, the theory explains how communication practices encourage fans to contribute, co-create meaning, and maintain consistent involvement. Its principles show how digital channels amplify the relational and community structures highlighted by the previous theories.

Collectively, the three theories form an integrated framework that captures how community structure, relationship-building strategies, and digital communication practices operate together to shape public relations outcomes in entertainment settings. This combined perspective offers a grounded basis for analysing fan mobilisation, engagement patterns, and strategic relevance within Ghana’s music industry.

2.3 Conceptual Review

This section discusses the core concepts underpinning the study and connects them to the research objectives. The concepts reviewed include online brand communities, public relations in the entertainment industry, fan engagement, and key ideas directly linked to each research objective.

2.3.1 Online Brand Communities

Online brand communities have become important digital environments where individuals interact around a shared attachment to a brand and participate in meaning-making processes that extend beyond consumption (Paruthi et al., 2023). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) describe these communities as non-geographically bound networks sustained by structured social relations. Their defining features include shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility that encourages members to support both one another and the brand (Laroche et al., 2013).

Furthermore, through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X, participants generate content, exchange interpretations, and reinforce a collective identity that elevates the symbolic significance of the brand (Dessart et al., 2015). This co-creation of meaning demonstrates how brand narratives are shaped collaboratively between organisations and their audiences.

Consequently, these communities function as active publics whose behaviour directly influences visibility, credibility, and advocacy. The perception of authenticity and reciprocity strengthens relational trust (Habibi et al., 2016), turning online brand communities into collaborative ecosystems that sustain reputation and enhance communication outcomes such as loyalty, audience retention, and positive word-of-mouth.

2.3.2 Public Relations in the Entertainment Industry

Public Relations within the entertainment industry operates as a strategic function designed to manage visibility, shape narratives, and sustain favourable relationships in a media environment characterised by rapid information flow. Cutlip et al. (2013) describe PR as a deliberate effort to establish mutual

understanding between organisations and their publics. In entertainment contexts, this includes shaping artist identity, coordinating publicity, curating storytelling, and managing events that influence public perception (L'Etang, 2015).

Additionally, celebrities, record labels, and management teams rely on PR professionals to maintain beneficial relationships with journalists, fans, influencers, and digital audiences (Turner, 2014). The increasing role of social media has shifted PR practice from one-way communication to interactive engagement grounded in responsiveness, feedback, and relational strategies (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

As a result, contemporary entertainment PR requires sustained content creation, narrative monitoring, and strategic timing to ensure that artists remain visible and relevant. Moreover, practitioners must navigate fan expectations, manage controversies, and handle crises in ways that protect reputation and uphold trust. In effect, entertainment PR underscores the importance of authenticity, consistent engagement, and ethical communication in building durable relationships that support long-term artistic careers.

2.3.3 Fan Engagement

Fan engagement refers to the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural involvement that individuals demonstrate toward media figures, brands, or cultural products (Steiner et al., 2023). It reflects a participatory relationship in which fans interpret, promote, and extend brand narratives rather than function as passive consumers (Jenkins, 2006).

Beyond this, digital platforms enable fans to express commitment through comments, creative edits, remixes, challenges, and content sharing, contributing to the circulation of cultural value (Fuschillo, 2020). The depth of such participation is reinforced by enthusiasm, attention, and social connectivity, which strengthen advocacy and community cohesion (Brodie et al., 2011).

Similarly, this behaviour has important implications for public relations. Within entertainment contexts, fans assist in content amplification, narrative framing, and defence during controversies (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015). The immediacy and intimacy created by social media deepen parasocial bonds

(Marwick & Boyd, 2011), which influence attitudes, expectations, and mobilisation patterns. Therefore, fan engagement operates as a strategic resource that enhances visibility, sustains attention, and supports reputation management within the entertainment industry.

2.3.4 Nature and Characteristics of Fan Communities

Fan communities originated from early popular culture formations in which shared enthusiasm fostered collective identities around cultural products. Jenkins (1992) described such groups as participatory cultures where fans move from passive consumption to active production, shaping the meanings attached to cultural artefacts. Historically rooted in film, music, and sports fandoms characterised by interpersonal bonds and ritualised forms of admiration (Hills, 2003), these communities have expanded through digital media into interconnected online spaces that support wide participation and creative exchange across geographic boundaries (Baym, 2018). Their defining features include co-creative practices such as commentary, remixing, and user-generated content that elevate visibility and influence public discourse (Booth, 2015). In these environments, identity formation and shared purpose become central as fans express belonging through sustained advocacy behaviours (Sandvoss, 2014). This participatory energy is reinforced by affective investment and social bonds that enhance symbolic and relational capital (Fuschillo, 2020). In public relations terms, these characteristics position fan communities as strategic publics whose interpretive power, message amplification, and emotionally driven participation can be mobilised to shape visibility, frame narratives, and support communication objectives within contemporary entertainment ecosystems.

More significantly, these characteristics hold strategic value for public relations because they shape how audiences mobilise, interpret, and circulate messages about an artist. The emotional intensity and collective purpose embedded in fan communities create conditions in which communication spreads rapidly and acquires peer legitimacy, a feature essential for shaping visibility and framing narratives in contemporary entertainment. The technological affordances of social media enable immediacy, interactivity, and communal decision-making, thereby increasing fans' capacity to influence communication outcomes.

Fan communities therefore operate as dynamic ecosystems sustained by trust, emotional commitment, and shared symbolic values (Duffett, 2013). Their cohesion is often maintained through informal leadership structures that emerge from charisma, consistency, or content contribution. In the context of public relations, these informal hierarchies often function as internal influence networks, where certain individuals assume agenda-setting roles within the community and guide collective responses to publicity, promotion, or controversy. Although originally rooted outside formal organisational structures, fan communities now shape political, corporate, and humanitarian communication through collective mobilisation (Click et al., 2017). Taken together, these features reveal why fan communities have become indispensable publics whose emotional energy and digital interactivity create enduring relational value for artists and their management teams.

2.3.5 Management–Fan Collaboration for PR Purposes

The integration of fans into strategic communication processes reflects a shift from one-way publicity to collaborative relationship building. Scolari (2009) argued that in participatory media environments, audiences function as co-producers of meaning, influencing how organisations are perceived. For this reason, management–fan collaboration involves recognising fans as stakeholders whose creativity and networks can enhance public relations outcomes. Kassing and Sanderson (2015) observed that such partnerships allow organisations to access authentic voices that humanise communication and strengthen relationships with broader publics.

Additionally, collaboration often unfolds through digital campaigns, interactive events, and ambassador programmes that invite fans to contribute voluntarily to organisational storytelling (Jenkins et al., 2013). The success of these efforts rests on reciprocity: management provides recognition, access, and clear communication, while fans amplify messages, sustain visibility, and defend reputations when necessary. When properly coordinated, these exchanges reinforce the two-way symmetrical model of public relations outlined by Grunig and Hunt (1984).

Beyond visibility, collaboration enables management teams to harness the community's interpretive power. Fans continuously evaluate, reinterpret, and redistribute messages within peer networks, and these interpretive actions often determine how narratives gain traction or resistance. When fans internalise communication goals, they become voluntary extensions of the organisation's communication apparatus, performing functions that mirror advocacy, monitoring, and narrative management. This decentralised configuration strengthens credibility by integrating community voices into organisational storytelling, which fosters authenticity and belonging (Brodie et al., 2013).

However, collaboration requires ethical attentiveness. Scholars such as Hutchins and Rowe (2012) warned that unbalanced relationships risk exploitation, especially when fan labour is used without adequate recognition. Effective collaboration therefore demands transparency, respect, and acknowledgment of fan autonomy (Baym & Burnett, 2009). When fans perceive ethical fairness and relational sincerity, they evolve into credible advocates who not only amplify messages but also safeguard reputational value during moments of contestation. Consequently, management–fan collaboration represents a decentralised communication paradigm in which shared storytelling and co-created identities advance both organisational objectives and community enthusiasm, thereby strengthening public relations outcomes.

2.3.6 Digital PR Strategy Execution Through Online Fan Communities

Digital PR strategy execution involves the systematic design and coordination of online engagement activities that shape visibility and influence discourse (Luttrell et al., 2022; Silverman & Smith, 2024). Message planning clarifies objectives, frames narratives, and aligns content with platform expectations, a position Enke and Borchers (2021) foregrounds in work on strategic communication. Mapping the digital environment further interrogates how fan clusters, micro-leaders, and affordances enable or constrain diffusion. Mohammadkazemi and Falahat (2024) reveal that fan communities are internally varied, prompting segmentation strategies that sharpen managerial understanding of diverse motivations and amplification capacities.

As a result, execution then demands platform-sensitive adaptation (Macnamara, 2018). On TikTok, trend-led storytelling fosters participatory involvement (García-Ortega & García-Avilés, 2023); on X, real-time commentary advances conversational reach (Srikanth et al., 2012); on Instagram, visual coherence stabilises identity; and on YouTube, long-form content extends emotional resonance (Christou et al., 2025). Sachdeva and Mitra (2025) sheds light on how these tailored approaches enhance spreadability, yet each introduces vulnerabilities, including trend fatigue, selective interpretation, and inconsistent messaging across platforms. The mobilisation cycle further demonstrates how fans interpret and circulate content, embedding co-creation through duets, remixes, and challenges. However, Nielsen et al. (2024) complicates the assumption of organisational control by showing that participatory publics may redirect narratives in unintended ways.

Crisis activation and ongoing monitoring form the final layer of execution (Johnston & Zawawi, 2020; Smith, 2017). During reputational threats, managers rely on fan advocacy to reinforce preferred narratives and counter misinformation, a strategy Liao et al. (2025) emphasises depends on trust and sustained responsiveness. Social listening tools subsequently illuminate shifts in sentiment and cultural cues, enabling real-time refinement (George & Baskar, 2024). These iterative feedback loops underscore how fan communities function as strategic publics whose interpretive agency, emotional investment, and communicative labour can strengthen, distort, or destabilise visibility and reputation within the entertainment ecosystem.

2.3.7 Strategies, Benefits, and Challenges of Leveraging Fan Communities

Leveraging fan communities requires intentional strategies that align organisational goals with the motivation and creativity of fans. Mangold and Faulds (2009) highlighted that social media platforms operate as hybrid communication spaces where fans amplify brand narratives through peer influence. Strategies often include co-creation initiatives, user-generated content campaigns, interactive challenges, and exclusive access programmes that reward participation (Zaglia, 2013). By incorporating feedback loops and open communication channels, organisations can gather insights that inform message refinement and engagement planning (Cova & Pace, 2006). In PR terms, these strategies

ensure consistent visibility, narrative coherence, and audience participation across communication cycles.

Furthermore, the benefits of leveraging fan communities extend across several public relations functions. Emotional investment often drives authentic advocacy, which strengthens credibility and fosters organic visibility (Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). Fans also provide resilience during crises, as loyal members defend reputations and supply alternative narratives when negative publicity arises (Hung, 2005). Additionally, fans function as micro-publics capable of shaping conversations, thereby extending the reach of PR efforts without substantial financial expenditure (Fuschillo, 2020). Through continuous engagement, organisations gain opportunities for social listening that reveal preferences, grievances, and emerging trends, which enhances responsiveness and relational quality (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Together, these benefits illustrate why fan mobilisation is increasingly regarded as a relational asset and a communication resource.

Despite these advantages, several challenges accompany the mobilisation of fan communities. Fan dynamics are unpredictable, and enthusiasm can shift to backlash when expectations are unmet or communication appears insincere (Baym, 2018). Over-commercialisation risks weakening authenticity, leading to perceptions of manipulation (Marwick, 2013). Balancing organisational control with fan autonomy presents additional complexity, as excessive intervention may limit creativity and alienate community members (Postigo, 2016). Furthermore, platform diversity introduces issues of moderation, privacy, and conflict management, particularly when interactions escalate into polarised or hostile exchanges (Booth, 2015).

Consequently, organisations that leverage fan communities must adopt strategies grounded in ethical stewardship, transparency, and mutual respect. Management teams must communicate clear expectations, maintain authenticity, and allow space for fan autonomy to flourish. When these conditions are met, fan communities transform participatory energy into sustainable reputational capital, reinforcing PR outcomes such as loyalty, goodwill, crisis resilience, and long-term visibility. In effect, leveraging fan communities redefines public relations as a collaborative ecosystem where trust, creativity, and belonging shape enduring brand–fan alliances.

2.4 Empirical Review

Empirical studies provide practical insight into how fan communities influence public relations outcomes in the music and entertainment sectors. They reveal the methods researchers use, the issues explored, and the implications for audience engagement, reputation, and branding. The following studies examine various contexts both global and African showing how fan collectives shape communication, emotion, and value creation around artists and music platforms.

Koursoh (2021) explored audience engagement and representation during the 20th Vodafone Ghana Music Awards incident involving Shatta Wale and Stonebwoy. Guided by reader-response theory and Ekman's Theory of Basic Emotions, the study applied qualitative content analysis to Facebook posts about the event. The findings revealed that fan bases are central to musicians' public image and community interaction. Posts reflected intense audience emotions (anger, fear, and surprise) and represented the artists through themes of cowardice, heroism, and sore loser. Koursoh (2021) concluded that digital fan communities extend beyond spectatorship, shaping both emotional discourse and reputation management in Ghana's music industry.

Similarly, Benites-Duran et al. (2024) investigated how fan communities influence brand equity using BTS (Bangtan Boys) as a case study. Employing a quantitative, correlational design with 384 participants, the study found a strong positive relationship between brand community and brand equity. The results showed that over 96 percent of fans reported high emotional connection and brand loyalty. Benites-Duran et al. (2024) concluded that stronger brand communities elevate brand value and vice versa, highlighting emotional engagement as a key driver of loyalty and visibility.

In Sweden, Edlom and Karlsson (2021) examined fan hierarchies through digital ethnography of the Facebook community *Konichiwa Bitches* for artist Robyn. They found that "superfans" and "executive fans" act as intermediaries between artists and audiences, facilitating communication and advocacy. In essence, their work illustrates how structured fan roles enhance engagement and strengthen artist brands.

Expanding on this, Edlom (2022) explored how communication practitioners in the music industry navigate digitalisation and participatory culture. Using interviews and textual analysis of industry reports, the study revealed that practitioners feel pressured to sustain constant engagement yet struggle with ethical concerns around audience exploitation. This insight demonstrates the evolving responsibilities of digital PR practitioners in maintaining active online communities.

Cova et al. (2021) shifted attention to Africa by analysing the emergence of a brand community around a Cameroonian music platform. Using a qualitative case study, they found that brand communities in low-income settings can be cultivated through three deliberate steps, mobilising shared identity, fostering participation, and sustaining co-creation. Cova et al.'s (2021) findings show that fan communities can thrive even in resource-limited contexts when guided by inclusive engagement strategies. Collectively, these studies highlight how fan communities shape promotion, loyalty, and communication in the music industry.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study. Several theories were identified as complementary lenses explaining how fan communities function and how management teams engage them strategically. The conceptual review explored key ideas such as online brand communities, fan engagement, and entertainment public relations, linking them directly to the study's objectives. Collectively, the reviewed literature establishes the analytical framework for examining how fan communities contribute to public relations outcomes within Ghana's music industry. The next chapter details the methodological approach adopted to explore these themes empirically.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological procedures used to investigate how online fan communities are leveraged for public relations outcomes within Ghana's music industry. The study adopts a qualitative approach designed to explore the strategies, relationships, and perceptions of artist management teams. It explains the research design, population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, methods of analysis, and ethical considerations. The overall aim is to ensure that the research process produces credible, contextually grounded, and analytically rich insights consistent with the study's objectives and theoretical framework.

3.2 Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research rests on the interpretivist philosophy, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the meanings individuals assign to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It seeks depth rather than breadth, emphasizing understanding over measurement (Bryman, 2016). The approach values the subjective interpretation of participants' realities, recognising that knowledge emerges from context and interaction (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ontologically, it accepts multiple realities shaped by human experience, while epistemologically, it holds that knowledge is co-created between researcher and participant (Silverman, 2021). The qualitative paradigm also supports reflexivity, allowing the researcher to remain aware of personal biases that may influence interpretation (Schwandt, 2015). Its flexibility makes it ideal for exploring complex human and social phenomena, particularly where meanings, relationships, and processes are central (Patton, 2015).

This study therefore employed a qualitative approach to understand the experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of key participants within their natural settings. The approach is suited to understanding

the lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of artist management teams as they engage with fan collectives. It allowed an in-depth exploration of social meanings, communication patterns, and relational processes that shape fan–management collaboration. By relying on detailed narratives rather than numerical data, the study captured the depth and texture of participants' realities, revealing how strategies, trust, and shared values influence public relations practice in natural settings.

3.2.1 Research Design

A case study design guided this inquiry. As a form of qualitative design, the case study allows an in-depth, contextualized exploration of a bounded system such as an institution, community, or event (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). It focuses on understanding "how" and "why" questions, enabling detailed examination of social and organizational processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Philosophically, the case study aligns with the constructivist worldview, assuming that understanding arises from engagement with real-world contexts rather than detached observation (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The design's strength lies in its capacity to integrate multiple data sources, promoting rich and holistic description (Thomas, 2016; Yin, 2014). It is flexible enough to accommodate various forms of evidence (eg. interviews, documents, and observations) thereby reinforcing validity through triangulation (Simons, 2009). Methodologists emphasize that case study design does not aim for generalization but for analytical insight, which contributes to theoretical development (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Stake, 2005).

Given the study's focus on understanding lived experiences and institutional practices within their natural context, the case study is appropriate. This design is appropriate for exploring complex social interactions and organisational practices as they occur among artist management teams and their fan communities. It enables a holistic understanding of how specific management structures coordinate engagement, negotiate meanings, and manage relationships with fans. Through this design, the study traced the interconnections between fan activity, strategic communication, and reputation management, producing contextually grounded insights into how public relations operates within Ghana's dynamic music industry.

3.3 Study Population

The study population refers to the entire group of individuals or entities from whom relevant data can be obtained to address the research objectives (Creswell, 2014). Clearly defining the population helps to focus on individuals who can provide credible and contextually grounded insights (Bryman, 2016). In this study, the population comprises professionals within Ghana's music and entertainment industry who are directly involved in public relations and digital communication. This group is central to the research because they shape artist–fan relationships, design and implement PR strategies, and coordinate digital engagement initiatives that sustain fan communities.

3.3.1 Sampling

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of individuals from a larger population to participate in a study (Patton, 2015). In qualitative research, this process is not guided by statistical probability but by the relevance and richness of participants' experiences. The goal is to identify individuals who possess deep, contextually grounded knowledge of the phenomenon being explored (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this study, sampling was guided by the intention to capture a range of professional insights into how fan communities operate as strategic publics within Ghana's entertainment industry.

The study employed purposive sampling, which involves deliberately selecting participants who hold specific positions or expertise directly related to digital public relations and fan engagement. This approach is appropriate because it ensures that participants can meaningfully reflect on the research objectives, particularly those concerning the management of fan communities and the implementation of digital PR strategies (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). To supplement this, snowball sampling was used to identify additional participants recommended by initial interviewees. This combined strategy broadened access to professionals who might otherwise be difficult to reach, enhancing the diversity of perspectives across different artist management structures (Etikan et al., 2016).

Participants were identified through professional networks, entertainment associations, and industry directories that list active artist management. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and

X (formerly Twitter) were also be used to locate individuals managing digital engagement for high-profile artists. Once identified, participants were contacted formally through email or direct messaging, with a brief introduction to the study and an invitation to take part. This approach ensures transparency and voluntary participation while facilitating access to individuals with relevant expertise and experience.

Inclusion in the study was limited to participants with at least two years of professional experience in public relations, artist management, or digital communication within Ghana's music and entertainment sector. Eligible participants must play an active role in shaping fan engagement or managing digital communication activities for artists. Individuals whose roles are purely technical or administrative, and who do not engage with PR or communication functions, were excluded. These criteria ensure that the participants' contributions are informed by substantive professional practice and firsthand experience with fan relations in a digital context.

Guided by these inclusion criteria, the study adopted convenience and snowball sampling techniques to recruit participants who met the stated professional requirements. Initial participants were approached based on accessibility and relevance to the research focus, consistent with Patton's (2015) position that qualitative sampling prioritises information-rich cases over population coverage. Thereafter, additional participants were identified through referrals from earlier interviewees, reflecting Noy's (2008) view that snowballing is especially effective where professional networks are not publicly listed and access is governed by trust and relational entry. The use of both approaches addressed access constraints typical of fieldwork within creative industries, where formal sampling frames are rarely available (Bryman, 2016). The final sample consisted of six (6) participants, a number justified not by representational logic but by analytic sufficiency. As Sandelowski (1995) argues, adequacy in qualitative samples is determined by the richness and relevance of data rather than numerical size, while Guest et al. (2006) demonstrate that focused qualitative studies often reach core thematic patterns within a small number of interviews. Consequently, the six participants provided sufficient professional depth and interpretive range to support a credible analysis of how artist management teams engage fan communities as strategic publics.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data collection refers to the systematic process of gathering information from selected sources to answer research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes. In qualitative research, methods typically include interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Flick, 2018). Each method offers a distinct advantage depending on the aim of the study. The interviews allow access to personal meanings, focus groups capture collective views, and observations reveal contextual behaviours. For this study, interviews were chosen because they provide rich, first-hand narratives on practices, perceptions, and experiences that cannot be easily quantified (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This method aligns with an interpretivist approach that seeks to understand how practitioners make sense of their strategies and decisions rather than to measure them statistically.

Interviews are particularly suitable because the study explores dynamic processes within artist management and fan community engagement—issues that require depth, reflection, and contextual grounding. The semi-structured format balances consistency and flexibility, ensuring that all key themes linked to the objectives are explored while allowing participants to elaborate on issues unique to their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method also facilitates rapport and trust, encouraging participants to disclose insights about strategic choices, challenges, and ethical considerations that might not surface through surveys or observation. The decision to rely on interviews is therefore guided by the need for detailed, context-sensitive accounts that illuminate how public relations teams mobilize, interpret, and negotiate fan engagement within Ghana's entertainment industry.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

A data collection instrument refers to the tool or mechanism a researcher uses to gather information relevant to the study's objectives and research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, a semi-structured interview guide is employed because it provides both consistency and flexibility, allowing participants to discuss their experiences in depth while ensuring alignment with the study's focus. The guide consists of core questions and probes that correspond directly with the research objectives, helping to capture detailed insights into how artist management teams engage with fan communities.

Semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for qualitative research because they enable respondents to construct meaning in their own words, while still allowing the researcher to guide the discussion toward specific themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Patton, 2015). This design ensures that the collected data reflect both individual perspectives and cross-participant comparability, which supports interpretive analysis.

Compared to structured or unstructured instruments, the semi-structured guide is the most appropriate for this study's purpose. Structured interviews can constrain participants' narratives, reducing the richness of data, whereas unstructured ones may lead to inconsistencies and digressions that complicate analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The semi-structured format, by contrast, combines the strengths of both: it ensures that all participants respond to similar topics while allowing probing into unique experiences, particularly in the dynamic and context-sensitive field of entertainment public relations. The instrument is further refined through piloting with practitioners to enhance clarity, remove redundancy, and test the flow of questions (Flick, 2018). This process helps ensure that the instrument is contextually appropriate, theoretically grounded in Relationship Management Theory and Brand Community Theory, and capable of generating comprehensive and credible data for analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis as the principal method for interpreting qualitative data gathered from interviews with artist management teams. This approach is suitable for identifying patterns of meaning across textual material while allowing flexibility to reflect contextual realities (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). As an exploratory and interpretive study, the focus was on how management personnel describe and evaluate their engagement with fan communities. Data analysis began with verbatim transcription of interviews, checked for accuracy, followed by multiple readings to ensure familiarity and note emerging ideas linked to the theoretical framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reflexive journaling was limited to document analytic impressions and early assumptions that might shape interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Coding combined inductive and deductive reasoning. Inductively, codes emerged from participants' language to capture new meanings, while deductively, the Brand Community Theory and Relationship

Management Theory guided attention to relational and communicative dimensions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Codes were manually developed using colour highlights and memos, with a codebook outlining definitions and examples (Miles et al., 2020). Related codes were clustered into broader themes such as "collaborative promotion strategies" or "relationship quality in fan management." Themes were refined for coherence and situated within the guiding theories, supported by illustrative quotations. To enhance credibility, peer debriefing and member validation was conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The final stage integrated themes into a coherent narrative addressing the study's objectives and showing how they contribute to understanding brand communities and relationship management in Ghana's entertainment public relations context.

3.7 Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation across management teams, and the inclusion of field notes capturing contextual details. Member validation was pursued by sharing preliminary themes with participants for feedback (Creswell & Poth, 2018), while peer debriefing was used to test the accuracy and logical coherence of thematic interpretations (Patton, 2015). Transferability was supported through rich contextual descriptions of the industry, participants, and communication processes, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar settings within African entertainment contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Dependability was ensured through the maintenance of a transparent audit trail documenting each stage of the research process, including data collection, coding, and theme development (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). This record included reflective memos that traced analytic decisions and shifts in interpretation over time. Confirmability was maintained through reflexive journaling to distinguish researcher assumptions from participants' meanings, as well as through external peer review to enhance analytic objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Collectively, these procedures secured the credibility, dependability, and confirmability required for a rigorous and trustworthy qualitative inquiry.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity guided all phases of the research process. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Development (DRID). Each participant received a detailed information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty (Orb et al., 2001). Written informed consent was obtained for participation, audio recording, and the use of anonymised quotations in reporting.

Confidentiality was upheld through the anonymisation of all personal and organisational identifiers. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and references to specific artists, projects, or campaigns were rephrased to prevent traceability. Digital files, including audio recordings, transcripts, and consent forms, were stored on encrypted drives with restricted access. Data retention complied with institutional and national guidelines, with destruction scheduled after the approved retention period (Israel & Hay, 2006).

During interviews, participants were reminded that there were no right or wrong answers, thereby reducing social desirability pressure. Care was taken to avoid psychological discomfort or reputational risk by ensuring that sensitive information was handled responsibly. In reporting, quotations were selected to preserve authenticity while protecting participant identity.

Ethical sensitivity extended beyond procedural compliance to relational ethics. The researcher engaged participants respectfully, acknowledging their professional expertise and contributions to Ghana's creative industry. Reciprocity was observed by offering participants access to a summary of the findings after study completion, promoting transparency and mutual benefit (Tracy, 2010). All research activities adhered to established codes of conduct in qualitative inquiry, ensuring respect, fairness, and accountability throughout.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodological foundation for the study. It described the qualitative research design, population, sampling procedure, and data collection methods employed to explore how artist

management teams engage with fan communities in Ghana's music industry. The chapter also outlined the data analysis plan, measures for ensuring trustworthiness, and ethical safeguards guiding the research process. The next chapter presents and analyses the findings derived from the fieldwork, showing how they relate to the research objectives and theoretical perspectives discussed earlier.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from interviews with artist management personnel in Ghana's music industry. It explains how fan communities are used in public relations practice and how this affects visibility, reputation, and relationships. The chapter interprets the data in line with the study's objectives and guiding concepts. It also shows what the findings suggest about current practice in a digital and highly interactive environment. The analysis is organised by themes. Interpretation is integrated into each section and linked to relevant scholarship. This approach connects the data to existing work on brand communities, relationship management, and digital communication.

4.1.1 Overview of Themes and Participant Identification

The findings are organised around three overarching themes aligned with the study's research objectives. The first theme examines the digital public relations strategies employed by artist management teams, with particular attention to platform selection, message framing, and informal coordination mechanisms. The second theme focuses on public relations outcomes associated with fan mobilisation, including visibility, reputation management, and relationship continuity. The third theme addresses the conditions that shape effectiveness and risk, such as trust, ethical considerations, power relations, platform pressures, and cultural context.

To ensure confidentiality and analytic consistency, participants are identified using pseudonyms throughout the chapter. Each participant is referenced as Participant1, Participant2, Participant3, Participant4, Participant5, or Participant6. This labelling system enables systematic comparison across accounts while protecting personal and professional identities.

4.1.2 Participant Profile and Contextual Characteristics

All participants were actively involved in managing recording or performing artistes within Ghana's music industry at the time of the study. Their professional experience in artist management ranged from early-career involvement to long-term practice, providing variation in strategic exposure and decision-making responsibility. Participants worked across multiple music genres and managed artistes at different stages of public visibility, including emerging, mid-level, and well-established acts.

Responsibility for digital public relations activities also varied. Some participants personally oversaw online engagement and fan interaction, while others coordinated internal teams or external collaborators responsible for content creation and community management. This variation offered a broad contextual foundation for interpreting differences in digital public relations practice while maintaining participant anonymity.

4.2 RO1: Digital Public Relations Strategies Used by Management Teams

This theme examined the practical methods through which management teams in Ghana's music industry structured and executed digital public relations through fan communities. The analysis demonstrated that engagement was neither spontaneous nor incidental. Instead, findings showed patterned decision-making concerning where messages were released, how narratives were framed, and which fan actors were informally mobilised as communicative intermediaries.

4.2.1 Platform Logic and Communication Purpose

The findings show that platform selection followed deliberate strategic judgement rather than habit or convenience. In this regard, Participant3 conceded that platform choice followed strategic exposure logic:

> Some platforms exist for announcement and display, while others exist for work and planning. What matters most is not popularity but suitability. We discovered very early that instruction collapses when it competes with entertainment and that strategy disintegrates when excitement replaces structure. So each platform is given a function and is used according to that function without apology. That discipline protects clarity and prevents confusion across the community.

Audience sensitivity strongly influenced platform preference. Young audiences dictated heavy use of short-form video and visual storytelling, whereas older and professional followers received information through extended posts and community discussion spaces. These findings illustrated engagement typologies discussed by Dessart et al. (2015) and Laroche et al. (2013), who demonstrated that consumption patterns structured participation behaviour. Platforms therefore reflected consumption psychology rather than organisational habit.

Extending this position, Participant1 stated that strategy emerged from observation of fan routines:

> We do not force audiences into places they do not naturally inhabit. We study their habits carefully, and we shift our energy toward the places where interaction already exists. When people move, we move. When attention changes, we follow it. Strategy grows from observation, not assumption. That approach stops us from speaking into emptiness.

Not all management teams exhibited equal platform diversification. Some concentrated effort narrowly due to capacity constraint. Others expanded aggressively where staffing and expertise permitted. The findings therefore indicated that resource availability shaped digital strategy as much as theory. This variability echoed dependence literature which explained organisational adaptation based on constraint and insecurity (Emerson, 1962; Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005; Drees & Heugens, 2013). Organisations acted within limits even when strategic preference suggested expansion.

In support of this constraint-driven pattern, Participant5 explained the burden of overextension:

> We have the ideas but not always the hands. Every platform requires time, attention, and creativity. Expanding too far weakens performance everywhere. So we limit engagement to where quality can be defended. Ambition without capacity produces damage. Discipline preserves influence.

Disagreement persisted over whether digital platforms replaced traditional media. Some teams privileged direct engagement platforms. Others insisted on broadcast visibility for legitimacy. This tension showed earlier debates concerning authority and symbolic approval within reputation construction (Cornelissen, 2020; Smith, 2017).

In contrast to digital exclusivity, Participant2 contended that traditional platforms retained symbolic authority:

> Social engagement travels far, but interviews still carry weight. Visibility does not equal approval. Broadcast spaces still offer recognition that social platforms cannot replace. Removing one weakens authority. Combining both preserves stature.

The findings align most closely with Brand Community Theory because management teams selected and governed platforms as spaces for cultivating shared identity, emotional attachment, and collective meaning rather than as neutral distribution channels (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). In practice, this occurred through assigning platforms specific relational functions, such as bonding, coordination, or symbolic display, which shaped how members interacted and identified with the artist community. Relationship Management Theory further explains this pattern by showing how segmentation across platforms enabled trust, commitment, and continuity to be sustained through repeated interaction and perceived mutuality (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). Dialogic communication theory complements this explanation by clarifying why interactivity was treated as equally important as reach, since dialogue, responsiveness, and openness are necessary conditions for maintaining relational legitimacy in digital environments (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2014). These perspectives demonstrate that platform decisions were guided primarily by identity construction and relationship maintenance rather than by efficiency or exposure metrics alone.

4.2.2 Message Framing and Narrative Guidance

The data revealed that communication followed narrative design rather than spontaneity, with management teams developing message themes, recurring motifs, and emotional anchors that sustained a stable identity pattern. Within this framing process, Participant4 elaborated on emotional calibration:

> Messages do not exist to inform alone. They exist to bind, to reassure, and to remind. Tone is never accidental. Imagery is calculated. Repetition is practiced. What looks simple is planned. Emotion builds memory and memory sustains loyalty.

The data also confirmed that fan leaders operated as narrative reinforcers. They interpreted, simplified, and circulated meaning. Their legitimacy derived from access and loyalty rather than formal appointment. This pattern articulated participatory culture literature which explained content transmission through peer authority (Jenkins, 1992; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2013; Hills, 2002; Fuschillo, 2020). In this regard, Participant6 corroborated mediated leadership:

> Certain fans explain us better than we ever could. They understand group language. They sense mood better than we do. We depend on them to carry meaning and maintain tone when we are absent. Their voice stabilises ours.

Contrasting strategies emerged with respect to narrative openness. Some teams invited reinterpretation. Others restricted circulation boundaries. This contrast echoed long-standing academic disagreement between co-creation and symbolic control (Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Cova & Pace, 2006). Participatory conditions strengthened belonging for some communities while introducing volatility for others.

Taking a guarded stance, Participant2 indicated strong editorial oversight:

> We encourage voice but not distortion. Freedom has limits. Narrative does not mean anything can be said. Boundaries protect meaning. Without them, identity collapses.

Where communication invited reinterpretation, emotional loyalty deepened. Where suppression increased, participation weakened. Relationship Management Theory therefore offered explanatory depth because trust emerged as the regulating condition (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2005). Dialogic theory further clarified why responsiveness sustained engagement (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Reflecting relational balance, Participant1 stated:

> Control preserves image. Engagement preserves loyalty. Excess on either side produces damage. Balance is not accidental. It is enforced through daily judgment, not rules alone.

The findings showed that framing cultivated recognition, emotional continuity, and recall, consistent with strategic communication research on consistency and visibility (Cornelissen, 2020; Smith, 2017; Silverman & Smith, 2024; Zerfass et al., 2018). Emotion operated as both motivator and regulator, with joy, pride, struggle, and aspiration deployed deliberately, aligning with work on affective bonds in brand communities and participatory ties (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Schau et al., 2009). Narrative guidance therefore functioned as social orchestration rather than top-down messaging. Brand Community Theory explained identity reinforcement, Relationship Management Theory clarified loyalty patterns, and Dialogic Communication Theory explained engagement durability. Among the theoretical frames, Relationship Management Theory provided the strongest interpretive lens because trust regulated authority, participation, and communication outcome.

4.2.3 Informal Leadership and Internal Fan Hierarchies

The findings indicated that authority within fan communities derived from recognition built through consistency, visibility, and symbolic labour rather than from formal appointment. In this connection, Participant3 clarified how authority emerged through daily conduct:

> No one walks in and declares leadership. It develops when certain people remain present day after day. They welcome new members, explain background stories, correct rumours, and calm arguments when emotions rise. Over time, others listen to them naturally. We noticed that influence grows from service, not position, and that loyalty follows clarity.

Management teams neither resisted nor ignored these formations. Instead, the findings showed selective incorporation. Teams engaged dominant voices privately, clarified expectations, and occasionally shared information in advance. This practice illustrated the literature on co-creation and community management, which held that influence networks could be stabilised through partnership rather than suppression (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013).

Expanding this point, Participant1 described deliberate cultivation:

> We pay attention to who others listen to. Once that becomes clear, we begin to work with those people quietly. We share information, explain direction, and ask for patience when necessary. They become extensions of structure in spaces where we do not always enter.

Nevertheless, the data also revealed disagreement about scale. Some teams distributed influence across several leaders to dilute risk. Others concentrated communication in a narrow inner circle to reduce unpredictability. The former approach mirrored arguments for shared ownership in community building (Schau et al., 2009), whereas the latter paralleled concern for symbolic coherence (Cornelissen, 2020; Smith, 2017).

From a more restrictive position, Participant2 stated that “too many voices create confusion. We prefer order”. Further, Participant2 explained that “a few articulate leaders produce stability. Without that, direction dissolves into argument.” Additionally, internal rivalry also surfaced. Competition for recognition sometimes fractured solidarity and weakened campaign discipline. Such moments echoed long-standing accounts of fan identity as both unifying and unstable (Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2011).

Reflecting on this vulnerability, Participant6 admitted “influence produces jealousy. Some feel ignored when others are consulted. That creates tension we have to manage”.

Among the theoretical frames, Brand Community Theory best explained persistence of informal rank despite decentralisation, while Relationship Management Theory clarified why loyalty concentrated around communicative reliability rather than formal designation. Dialogic theory illuminated the operational mechanics that sustained authority through attention and reply. Informal leadership thus appeared not as deviation from governance but as its digital form.

4.2.4 Control Mechanisms and Boundary Setting

The findings showed that participation was actively structured through rules, moderation routines, and corrective messaging rather than left unmanaged. Describing routine governance, Participant4 noted:

> Nothing is lawless. Every group carries expectations. When people cross lines, we correct gently first. If behaviour persists, access changes. Order allows expression to survive.

Debate persisted about where firmness weakened belonging. Some teams feared that excessive restriction discouraged participation. Others treated enforcement as reputation defence. This division mirrored academic tension between participation and protection (Cova & Pace, 2006; Hatch & Schultz, 2010).

Warning against excess, Participant1 stated that “oversight could suffocate warmth. When people felt watched, energy dropped.” Yet containment was also linked to crisis control. Removing false claims prevented momentum. The public relations literature identified early intervention as stabilising under uncertainty (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Smith, 2017).

Explaining firm boundaries, Participant5 argued, “if misrepresentation stood, silence became guilt. Correction protected all of us.” However, backlash followed heavy-handed intervention. The findings therefore indicated that judgement, not protocol, regulated success. Reflecting on this risk, Participant2 conceded, “deletion sometimes attracted more attention. We learned discretion mattered.”

The best explanatory frame therefore emerged from Relationship Management Theory, because every corrective act was interpreted through trust. Brand Community Theory clarified identity defence, while Dialogic theory explained why transparency preserved engagement. Boundary work thus sustained meaning and participation simultaneously.

4.3 RO2: Public Relations Outcomes of Fan Mobilisation

This section reports the communication effects that resulted from structured engagement with fan communities. The findings indicated that mobilisation produced visible shifts in attention flows, narrative framing in the media, and durability of audience attachment. Outcomes were therefore assessed in terms of reach, reputation, and relationship continuity rather than in terms of activity alone.

4.3.1 Visibility and Message Amplification

The findings showed that fan mobilisation transformed visibility by shifting circulation from formal accounts into dense interpersonal networks. In this respect, Participant4 described how support transformed reach into something less controllable but more extensive:

> When we make an announcement, it travels at a predictable speed. When fans take that same message and retell it in their own language, it moves far beyond our calculations. It enters family chats, professional groups, school circles, and neighbourhood associations that we could never have mapped. What begins as a single post becomes hundreds of conversations. We watch our work appearing in spaces where we have no direct presence, and that is where real visibility takes shape.

At the same time, the findings pointed to tension between reach and precision. As messages travelled through multiple layers of sharing, nuance reduced and emphasis shifted. Management teams acknowledged that while increased circulation displayed their desire for prominence, it also created distance from the original framing of content. This experience was consistent with Jenkins' (2006, 2013) account of spreadable media, where circulation enhanced impact but loosened producer control. In this context, messages gained impact precisely because they were adapted by supporters to fit local meanings and conversational norms, even though this adaptation altered original intent. Dialogic communication theory accounts for this transformation by conceptualising communication as a co-created process in which meaning emerges through interaction rather than remaining fixed at the point

of production (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Consequently, amplification functioned not as linear transmission but as negotiated sense-making, producing both reputational advantage and interpretive instability.

From a more cautious position, Participant2 echoed on this trade-off between breadth and accuracy:

> The more people repeat our stories, the less they stay exactly as we have crafted them. Excitement increases the volume but reduces the precision. Some details disappear; some are exaggerated. We welcome the energy because it pushes the brand into new spaces, yet we also know that every retelling carries the possibility of distortion. In that sense, amplification is both a benefit and a responsibility that demands constant monitoring.

Capacity limits further shaped the extent to which visibility gains could be consolidated. Teams with few staff reported difficulty tracking the volume of user-led content, responding to emerging threads, or correcting misinterpretations promptly. Resource Dependence Theory offered a useful lens here, as it emphasised how constraint influenced organisational responses to opportunity (Emerson, 1962; Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005; Drees & Heugens, 2013). Even when fan energy presented clear promotional advantages, limited human resources restricted the ability of management to convert heightened attention into sustained engagement.

In this connection, Participant6 noted that opportunity sometimes outpaced structure:

> There are nights when activity exceeds anything the team can reasonably track. Mentions explode, videos spread, and discussions multiply faster than we can respond. We can see that we are benefitting from extraordinary exposure, but we also know that we are leaving many conversations unattended. That imbalance reminds us that visibility without enough hands creates blind spots that might later demand more work to repair.

Despite these constraints, the data illustrated broad agreement that fan mobilisation enhanced visibility to a degree that formal communication could not replicate. Among the theoretical frames, Brand Community Theory best captured why advocacy emerged spontaneously from identification, while Relationship Management Theory clarified the role of trust and satisfaction in sustaining participation (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2005). Dialogic communication theory contributed by explaining how interactional patterns shaped the pathways through which messages moved. Visibility therefore appeared as a relational outcome rooted in community life rather than a purely technical effect of platform algorithms.

Summarising this appreciation, Participant1 remarked:

> Our most successful campaigns are not the ones with the largest budgets. They are the ones where fans feel that the message belongs to them. When that happens, they carry it into corners of the digital world we cannot even name. In those moments, communication stops being a broadcast and becomes a shared project.

The findings shows that fan mobilisation increased visibility by shifting communication from official accounts into personal networks. Supporters reposted and adapted messages because they identified with the artist, not because of platform mechanics alone. This extended reach into spaces beyond managerial access. However, wider circulation also reduced message precision as content was reframed through repeated sharing. Visibility therefore emerged as a relational outcome driven by community attachment, producing both expanded exposure and reduced control over meaning.

4.3.2 Narrative Defence and Image Restoration

The data showed that fan mobilisation played a direct role in narrative defence and image repair during moments of controversy. Emphasising this dynamic, Participant3 described how community defence unfolded before official statements were prepared:

> During tense periods, we find that some of the most persuasive responses do not come from our desks. They surface from supporters who understand both the artist and the audience. While we are drafting careful language, they are already explaining context, challenging unfair assumptions, and steering discussions away from exaggeration. By the time we release a formal statement, the emotional damage has often already been reduced because people who matter to the community have spoken with credibility.

However, the findings also revealed that narrative defence carried risks. Passionate responses sometimes escalated conflict rather than calming it. In certain instances, fans responded aggressively to criticism, thereby drawing more attention to issues that management preferred to treat with restraint. This tension indicated observations in both fan and public relations research that defensive mobilisation could reinforce in-group bonds while simultaneously hardening opposition (Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2006; Kent & Taylor, 2014).

Acknowledging this double-edged quality, Participant5 reflected on episodes where support harmed as well as helped:

> There are times when loyalty translates into confrontational behaviour. Supporters do not always separate unfair attacks from reasonable questions. When they respond with anger to everything, discussions become louder, not clearer. Some observers who had been neutral feel pushed away. We appreciate the intention, yet we also recognise that unmanaged defence can deepen division and make reconciliation more difficult.

Management teams therefore experimented with guidance rather than mere appreciation. The data showed efforts to supply key messages to trusted leaders, clarify what information could be shared, and signal when withdrawal was preferable to extended argument. This practice evidenced strategic communication advice which recommended structured messaging and controlled emphasis during image repair (Smith, 2017; Cornelissen, 2020; Zerfass et al., 2018).

Describing this shift from passive observation to guided support, Participant1 explained:

> We have moved from simply thanking fans for defending us to quietly providing talking points when necessary. We now explain which details are safe to mention, which issues remain under discussion, and when silence protects everyone better than debate. We do not script them, but we offer direction so that their energy does not accidentally injure the brand they are trying so hard to safeguard.

Even with such guidance, management could not fully predict or control how narratives evolved. Resource constraints limited the extent to which every conversation could be monitored, and the independent status of fan publics meant that support could never be reduced to an extension of official communication. These conditions echoed the broader observation that publics in digital environments retained agency even when they mirrored organisational interests (Jenkins et al., 2013; Botan, 2021).

Reflecting this persistent autonomy, Participant6 noted:

> No matter how structured our approach becomes, fans still act according to their own judgment. They are partners, not staff. We can influence direction, but we cannot dictate every word. That independence sometimes makes situations unpredictable, yet it also makes the support feel genuine to observers.

Taken together, the findings suggested that narrative defence and image restoration were co-produced by management and fan communities. Brand Community Theory explained why members experienced reputational harm as a shared injury, Relationship Management Theory clarified how trust underpinned willingness to defend, and Dialogic Communication Theory elucidated the role of ongoing interaction

in enabling rapid, credible responses. Among these, Brand Community Theory offered the most persuasive account because it captured defence as an expression of collective identity rather than merely a response to strategic prompting.

4.3.3 Relationship Continuity and Loyalty Formation

The findings showed that digital mobilisation supported long-term continuity rather than short campaigns alone. Capturing this extended orientation, Participant1 described loyalty as a product of consistent recognition rather than occasional spectacle:

> People stay with the brand not because of a single concert or announcement, but because they feel remembered. When names are mentioned, when comments receive responses, and when suggestions are acknowledged, a quiet bond forms. Months later, those same individuals are still present, still defending, still sharing. Loyalty grows from small, repeated gestures more than from rare, dramatic events.

The findings also highlighted differences between surface-level engagement and deeper attachment. Management teams distinguished between casual followers who appeared during high-profile moments and committed supporters who remained active during quieter phases. This distinction rendered discussions in engagement scholarship, which separated transient interaction from sustained psychological investment (Dessart et al., 2015). The data suggested that relationship continuity depended on the latter.

Differentiating these layers, Participant2 articulated on patterns observed over extended periods:

> Many people touch the brand briefly and then disappear. They stream a song, comment on a post, or attend one event. A smaller group stays through silent periods, through delays, and even through mistakes. Those are the people we count as a community. They do not require constant spectacle; they require consistent regard.

Resource constraints again limited the extent to which management could maintain personalised contact, yet even modest gestures appeared to carry disproportionate weight. Simple responses, reposts of fan content, and direct messages signalled appreciation. Relationship Management Theory interpreted such actions as reinforcement of mutuality and control, because supporters saw evidence

that their contributions influenced visibility and narrative direction (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000).

Emphasising the power of seemingly minor contact, Participant3 explained:

> A short response sometimes does more work than a full campaign. When someone who has followed quietly for years suddenly receives an acknowledgement, commitment deepens. They feel seen. That feeling translates into patience when we later face delays, missteps, or external pressure.

Yet continuity was not guaranteed. Where communication slowed drastically or where perceived disrespect accumulated, some supporters withdrew, reduced participation, or redirected attention to other artists. These patterns echoed both relationship management and resource dependence perspectives, which recognised that relationships required investment and that neglect could shift dependency balances (Emerson, 1962; Hung, 2005).

Acknowledging this fragility, Participant4 observed:

> Relationships weaken quietly long before they break publicly. When responses become rare and recognition disappears, some long-term supporters simply stop turning up. They do not always announce their exit. They just redirect their energy. By the time we notice, their absence has already reshaped the community.

Dialogic communication perspectives enriched the explanation by emphasising conversation as an ongoing practice rather than a campaign technique. Relationship continuity thus appeared as the cumulative effect of many small communicative acts that, taken together, transformed casual interest into sustained attachment.

4.4 RO3: Conditions Shaping Effectiveness and Risk

This section examined the relational, ethical, and environmental factors that enabled or constrained success. The findings showed that outcomes depended on trust structures, credibility of management teams, and the conduct of engagement practices. Risk emerged where influence outpaced relational depth or where communication appeared manipulative.

4.4.1 Control Tensions and Narrative Instability

While sustained engagement strengthened attachment, the findings also showed that control over communication remained unstable. In this connection, Participant2 explained the elusiveness of narrative control under pressure:

> We issue carefully written statements, yet by the following morning the circulating story often bears little resemblance to our message. Segments are lifted, emotions are added, and assumptions fill gaps we do not anticipate. It feels as though the narrative rebuilds itself each hour. We are not correcting one account but chasing several versions unfolding in parallel.

Furthermore, emotional allegiance complicated communicative judgement. Silence provoked suspicion, whereas immediacy invited allegations of defensiveness. Management therefore balanced responsiveness against composure with little predictive certainty. Relationship Management Theory illuminated this dilemma by linking communicative conduct to perceived commitment and trust (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2005). Each choice recalibrated relational capital, either consolidating confidence or diluting credibility.

Elaborating this predicament, Participant4 described uncertainty around timing and tone:

> Responding early carries the risk of appearing unsettled, while hesitation looks evasive. Neither position offers safety. We learned that every decision generates interpretation rather than closure. What we control is not outcome but posture.

Control also redistributed authority within communities. Certain supporters emerged as informal interpreters, mediating between institutional output and communal sense-making. Their paraphrases, summaries, and judgments circulated faster than official materials. Brand Community Theory clarified this drift by showing how communities produced status through contribution and recognition (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009). Authority thus relocated from organisational centre to influential peripheries.

Reflecting on this relocation, Participant3 noted:

> When a respected fan frames an issue, that framing settles debate more decisively than anything we released. Our documents exist, but their interpretations travel first.

Dependence on unofficial voices generated exposure. When influential figures misunderstood context, confusion propagated rapidly. Resource dependence perspectives explained this vulnerability by highlighting reliance on actors beyond formal authority (Emerson, 1962; Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005; Drees & Heugens, 2013).

Describing that fragility, Participant1 observed that "we leaned on people we could not command. Their influence helped, until it misfired. Then the same channels magnified error." Accordingly, instability appeared not as administrative failure but as a structural feature of digital engagement. Dialogic theory accounted for constant renegotiation of meaning, Relationship Management Theory clarified its impact on relational stability, and Brand Community Theory explained migration of authority. Narrative could be steered, yet it resisted enclosure.

4.4.2 Platform Pressures and Cultural Context

Extending this tension beyond audience dynamics, the findings showed that platform architecture exerted constant pressure on communication practice. In this regard, Participant1 recalled volatility as routine:

> Strategies expire quickly. Platforms change exposure patterns without explanation. Content that performs reliably one week may disappear the next. It feels like building on moving ground.

Cultural dynamics further filtered reception. Communication that echoed local registers attracted resonance, while technocratic tone distanced audiences. Ghanaian expressive culture privileged warmth, humour, and communal allusion. Dialogic communication theory interpreted this through responsiveness and voice, rather than format, as drivers of engagement (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Illustrating this adaptation, Participant5 explained tone calibration as "when communication sound official, people scrolled past. When it feels conversational, they pause. Familiarity carries influence."

Cultural context also shaped authority. Instruction detached from collective identity encountered resistance; appeals to shared belonging mobilised cooperation. Brand Community Theory clarified this through moral obligation and shared consciousness (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Describing this orientation, Participant3 explained that "requests sounded better as invitations. Orders rarely travelled far." Finally, platform volatility intersected with cultural interpretation to heighten unpredictability. Technological shifts altered visibility while cultural currents redirected meaning. Dialogic theory therefore explained interactional flow, Brand Community Theory clarified solidarity mechanisms, and Resource Dependence Theory elucidated vulnerability to external systems. Communication practice advanced within cultural rhythm while constrained by technological design, producing motion without guarantee.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined how fan communities were engaged as strategic publics within Ghana's music industry and how such engagement shaped communication practice. The findings showed that management teams adopted deliberate platform choices and structured messaging to stimulate participation, shape interpretation, and manage publicity. Fan mobilisation generated outcomes in the form of heightened visibility, narrative defence, and sustained audience attachment, although these effects depended largely on trust, credibility, and ethical conduct. The data also demonstrated that attempts to guide fan behaviour without relational depth frequently introduced instability and reputational exposure rather than control. The next chapter will consolidate these insights by presenting conclusions, policy and practice recommendations, and areas for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter brought together the central insights of the study and set out their implications for scholarship, policy, and practice. It moved from empirical description to interpretive consolidation, and then to action-oriented guidance. The discussion revisited the aim and objectives, synthesised the main findings across the three research questions, and drew out what these findings suggested for digital public relations in Ghana's music industry. The chapter then outlined practical recommendations for management teams, industry bodies, and training institutions, before proposing directions for further research that would deepen and extend the present work.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

The study set out to examine how artist management teams in Ghana's music industry used digital public relations strategies to engage and mobilise online fan communities, what public relations outcomes emerged from this mobilisation, and under what conditions such mobilisation became effective or risky. It therefore aimed to understand digital communication not only as promotional activity but as a relational and organisational practice embedded in resource dependence, cultural context, and platform architecture. Three objectives guided the inquiry. The first was to explore the digital public relations strategies that management teams adopted in working with online fan communities. The second was to identify the public relations outcomes associated with fan mobilisation. The third was to analyse the conditions that shaped the effectiveness and vulnerability of these practices.

The findings related to the first objective showed that management teams treated digital platforms as differentiated communication environments rather than neutral channels. Instagram, X, TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp were used for distinct purposes, including visibility work, coordination, conversation, and symbolic reinforcement. Management teams developed platform logics that

distinguished between high-exposure arenas and more controlled spaces. They also framed messages through recurrent themes, emotional anchors, and narrative guidance, while working with informal fan leaders who emerged through participation and trust. Control mechanisms, such as group rules and moderation roles, were used to shape interaction without extinguishing energy. In combination, these strategies demonstrated that digital public relations in this context involved the management of space, narrative, and informal authority rather than content production alone.

Findings related to the second objective indicated that fan mobilisation produced clear public relations outcomes. Visibility increased as fans circulated messages beyond official accounts into personal networks. Narrative defence became a collective activity, with supporters correcting misinformation, reframing criticism, and restoring positive images during moments of controversy. Relationship continuity and loyalty formation were strengthened through routine acknowledgements, conversational engagement, and symbolic inclusion. However, these same processes carried risks. Defensive behaviour sometimes escalated conflict, and visibility gains occasionally outpaced managerial capacity to monitor or respond. The evidence therefore showed that fan mobilisation functioned as a source of both strength and exposure.

The third objective revealed that conditions of trust, access, and recognition shaped whether mobilisation helped or harmed institutional interests. Where management cultivated trust through consistent behaviour and shared information with selected supporters, fan communities tended to act with restraint and responsibility. Where recognition was uneven or perceived as unfair, resentment emerged. Ethical concerns also surfaced regarding the use of fan labour in ways that approached exploitation, especially when commercial gain was pursued without transparency or reciprocity. Control tensions appeared as management teams attempted to stabilise narrative in environments where supporters retained autonomy. Platform pressures and Ghanaian cultural practices further conditioned outcomes, as algorithmic change, expressive communication styles, and collective identity norms influenced how messages were received and recirculated.

The findings ultimately established that digital public relations in Ghana’s music sector depended on the interplay between strategic planning, fan community dynamics, platform design, and local

communicative culture. Management teams did not simply deliver information; they negotiated meaning with publics who possessed agency, emotional investment, and their own networks of influence. Fan communities enhanced visibility, defended image, and sustained loyalty, but they also introduced dependence, ethical tension, and narrative instability. The study thus demonstrated that fan mobilisation could not be treated as a cost-free extension of promotional work. It required sustained relationship management, ethical reflection, and adaptive strategy.

4.3 Conclusion

Digital communication in the music industry extends beyond techniques of circulation and visibility. It operates as a space where relationships, authority, and organisational endurance are negotiated daily. Engagement with fan communities functions less as support activity and more as the means through which meaning and attachment are built. Communication does not only deliver messages. It establishes belonging, signals obligation, and defines who matters within the cultural field. Fan communities therefore take form as active social groupings that produce loyalty through shared recognition and sustained involvement.

Against this background, digital public relations appears less concerned with promotion alone and more oriented toward coordination and control. Communication across platforms requires constant judgement about tone, access, and timing. Supporters assume informal leadership roles. Expectations emerge through routine interaction. Participation is guided toward specific outcomes, sometimes deliberately and sometimes indirectly. Ghana’s digital music spaces thus become settings in which legitimacy is claimed, conflict is settled or stirred, and moral standing is placed under pressure. Authority is worked out line by line, not issued from fixed positions.

At the same time, these practices expose management teams to clear limits on power. Activity unfolds within systems shaped by platform design, group dynamics, and cultural interpretation. Visibility can protect reputation, yet it also attracts risk. Misunderstanding spreads quickly. Disputes escalate easily. Supporter effort becomes productive labour, yet often without structure or recognition. Digital public relations therefore stands as a field marked by uneven control, where responsibility is carried by many actors with very different capacities to shape consequences.

For this reason, stability depends on deliberate attention to trust and restraint. Engagement proves most durable when relationships are treated as cooperative rather than extractive. Where participation is encouraged but respected, loyalty deepens. Where it is used only for amplification, fragility grows. Over time, confidence weakens and conflict hardens. What emerges is not a fixed model of strategy, but an ongoing process of adjustment. Communication becomes a form of negotiation rooted in culture, sustained through mutual obligation rather than command.

5.4 Recommendations

The recommendations were derived from the findings. The guidance below therefore moved beyond advice on communication technique and addressed organisational responsibility, professional practice, and sector-wide governance.

The findings indicated that artist managers should institutionalise digital public relations as a core managerial function rather than an informal or ad hoc activity. Management teams should assign clear responsibility for fan engagement, platform oversight, and moderation, supported by documented routines for posting, response timing, and crisis intervention. Dedicated personnel or clearly mandated officers should oversee community interaction to ensure consistency, reduce reputational exposure, and prevent overreliance on personal discretion. Managers should also establish clear boundaries for fan participation, including guidance on narrative defence and acceptable conduct, to balance engagement with reputational protection.

In addition, management teams should adopt transparent systems for recognising fan contribution and communicating decisions that affect community expectations. Regular acknowledgement practices, predictable access rules, and structured engagement with trusted community figures should be standardised to prevent perceptions of favouritism or neglect. At the policy level, industry associations and cultural regulators should develop ethical guidelines for digital public relations and fan mobilisation, including standards on transparency, unpaid fan labour, and accountability in online engagement. Training institutions should integrate digital community management and ethics into music business and arts management curricula to strengthen professional capacity across the sector.

5.5 Areas for Further Research

The study has opened several avenues for further inquiry. Future research could examine fan perspectives directly in order to complement the management-centred view presented here and to explore how supporters themselves understood their labour, influence, and expectations. Comparative studies across different genres or across other creative industries in Ghana could reveal how far the patterns identified in this work travelled beyond the cases studied. Longitudinal research following specific communities over time would also help to clarify how relationships evolved through periods of success, controversy, and decline. Finally, further work on platform governance and policy, with particular attention to African creative sectors, would deepen understanding of how structural decisions by technology companies affected the communication possibilities and constraints faced by artists and their publics.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Icebreakers

1. Can you tell me about your role in the artist's management team and how long you have worked in the industry?
2. How would you describe the general relationship between Ghanaian artists and their fans?

Objective 1: Identifying and Categorising Digital Public Relations Strategies

(To understand how digital tools and techniques are used to engage fan communities.)

1. What digital platforms or tools does your team rely on most when interacting with fans?
2. What deliberate strategies or approaches do you use to maintain fan engagement online?
3. How are these strategies incorporated into your broader public relations or promotional plans?

Objective 2: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Fan Community Engagement in Achieving PR Outcomes

(To assess the impact of fan engagement on visibility, reputation, and crisis management.)

1. In what ways has fan participation contributed to achieving specific PR goals such as visibility, media attention, or reputation building?
2. Can you share an instance where fans played a key role during a publicity campaign or a crisis?
3. How does your team determine whether engagement with fans has been effective?

Objective 3: Determining the Conditions Under Which Fan Mobilisation Enhances or Threatens PR Outcomes

(To explore the relational, contextual, and ethical factors that shape engagement outcomes.)

1. What conditions make fan mobilisation most effective in supporting your communication objectives?
2. Have there been situations where fan activity created challenges or reputational risks? How did your team handle them?
3. What ethical or relational considerations guide your approach to working with fan groups?

Conclusion

1. What lessons or best practices would you recommend for artist managers seeking to strengthen collaboration with fan communities?

Is there anything else you would like to add about managing fan relations as part of your public relations work?

Thank You