



**STRATEGIC SILENCE: ASSESSING THE EFFECTS ON STAKEHOLDER  
RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY, A  
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MTN GHANA AND TELECEL GHANA.**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION BY STUDENT – DISSERTATION

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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## SUPERVISION CERTIFICATION

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 (UniMAC).

Certified by:

Supervisor: Rev. Dr. Yaw Odame Gyau

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## ABSTRACT

This paper, titled “Strategic silence; the effects on stakeholder relationship management and organizational sustainability, a comparative analysis of MTN Ghana and Telecel Ghana”, looks at the correlation between deliberate withholding of information and stakeholder relationship management and organizational sustainability. Thus, the relationship and the effects one variable have on the other, focusing on the telecommunication industry in Ghana, specifically MTN Ghana and Telecel Ghana, based on the gathered responses, perceptions and experiences of their external stakeholders. Thus, active users of both MTN Ghana and Telecel Ghana. Anchored in the stakeholder theory and the Relationship Management Theory, the study assesses how these telecommunications organizations blend the use of strategic silence and managing stakeholder relationship and its effects on the sustainability of the organization. This study utilized a quantitative approach of which data was collected by administering questionnaires to 240 active users of these telcos. The findings of the study reveal that; users of these telcos view strategic silence not as an inherently negative practice but a communication instrument whose effectiveness depends on balance with transparency.

**Keywords:** strategic silence, stakeholder relationship management, organizational sustainability, telecommunication, communication, information, effects.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this to Madam Akosua Serwaa of blessed memory.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background of the study

Effective corporate communication is essential for maintaining favourable stakeholder relationships and ensuring long-term sustainability. However, in recent years, a growing body of research and a school of thought has drawn attention to the deliberate withholding of information by organisations and individuals as a means of managing potential crises. Organisations engage in various strategic actions, including rhetoric and symbols to cultivate positive perceptions among their target audience (Chad Carols & Lewis 2017). Strategic silence is a lack of communication from an organisation or its failure to provide clear and adequate responses to questions or concerns raised (Woon & Pang, 2017, p.35). However, strategic silence can be used intentionally or unintentionally. Further study reveals that it stems from unfavourable situations that prevent an organisation from quickly acquiring and disseminating critical information to stakeholders, and that natural silence may occur when the organisation has no other choice but to remain silent. However, strategic silence as used by organizations is a deliberate as used by organisations is a deliberate decision in this study.

Stakeholder relationship management has evolved to become a cornerstone of organisational success. Gaining and maintaining the support and commitment of stakeholders requires a continuous process of engaging the right stakeholders at the right time and understanding and managing their expectations (Bourne, 2009).

This complex interplay between communication and relationship management has generated considerable interest in exploring non-traditional practices that may enhance or undermine stakeholder trust.

Sustainability as an organisational goal now demands strategic approaches that balance openness with caution. Emerging evidence suggests that under certain conditions, strategic silence may help organisations manage uncertainty and mitigate negative market reactions, thereby contributing indirectly to sustainable practices.

Recent developments in Ghana's fast-growing telecommunications sector have underscored the need to examine these dynamics further. Increased digital penetration and evolving stakeholder expectations in Ghana have amplified the challenges of managing corporate communication during crises and transitions. The evident gap in empirical research on the impact of strategic silence on stakeholder relationships and sustainability in this sector has triggered the need for the present study. This investigation seeks to clarify how deliberate non-disclosure strategies operate in practice within a prominent Ghanaian telecommunications firm, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of effective stakeholder communication in challenging environments.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

In the rapidly evolving telecommunications industry, effective communication strategies are paramount for maintaining stakeholder trust and ensuring organisational sustainability. While transparency has traditionally been emphasised, the deliberate withholding of information, known as strategic silence, has emerged as a nuanced approach in corporate communication. This tactic involves intentionally refraining from disclosing certain information to control narratives, manage crises, or navigate complex stakeholder landscapes. However, the implications of strategic silence

on stakeholder relationships and long-term sustainability remain underexplored, particularly within the context of Ghana's telecommunications sector.

Prior research has examined various facets of strategic silence and stakeholder engagement. For instance, Pang et al. (2022) investigated the use of strategic silence in crisis communication, highlighting its potential to either mitigate or exacerbate reputational damage depending on its execution. Similarly, a study by Blak Bernat, Qualharini, and Castro (2023) emphasised the critical role of stakeholder engagement and knowledge management in enhancing sustainability practices within project management. Furthermore, Ibn-Mohammed et al. (2024) explored challenges faced by leaders of purpose-led medium-sized businesses, underscoring the interplay between corporate communication, reputation, and organisational identity. While these studies provide valuable insights, they predominantly focus on contexts outside the Ghanaian telecommunications industry. Additionally, the National Communications Authority's (NCA) Strategic Plan (2024-2028) outlines objectives for advancing Ghana's telecommunications landscape, but does not specifically address the role of strategic silence in stakeholder communication. This indicates a gap in localised research examining how strategic silence influences stakeholder relationships and sustainability within this sector.

Addressing this research gap is crucial for several reasons. First, understanding the impact of strategic silence can inform the development of communication strategies that balance transparency with discretion, thereby enhancing stakeholder trust. Second, insights from such research can guide policymakers and industry regulators in formulating guidelines that promote effective communication practices, contributing to the overall health and sustainability of the telecommunications sector. Finally, as Ghana's telecommunications industry continues to grow

and evolve, organisations equipped with nuanced communication strategies will be better positioned to navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and foster long-term sustainability.

### **1.3 Research objectives**

The general objective of this study is to;

To assess the effectiveness of strategic silence on stakeholder relationship management and sustainability within the telecommunications industry in Ghana.

#### **1.3.1 Specific objectives**

1. To examine the influence of strategic silence in stakeholder relationship management.
2. To analyse the relationship between strategic silence and long-term organisational sustainability.
3. To analyse the culture of silence and its impact on stakeholder relationships.
4. To assess the mediating roles of leadership style, ethical conduct and organisational culture on stakeholder relationship management and strategic silence.

### **1.4 Research questions**

1. To what extent does strategic silence influence stakeholder relationship management and sustainability?
2. What is the relationship between strategic silence and long-term organizational sustainability?
3. To what extent does culture of silence impact stakeholder relationship?
4. What is the mediating role of Leadership style, ethical conducts and organizational culture on stakeholder relationship management and strategic silence.

## **1.5 Research Hypothesis**

H1. Strategic Silence does not influence stakeholder relationship management and sustainability.

H2. Strategic silence does not significantly correlate with organisational sustainability.

H3. Culture of silence does not impact stakeholder relationships.

H4. Leadership style does not significantly mediate the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management.

H5. Ethical conduct does not significantly mediate the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management.

H6. Organisational culture does not significantly mediate the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

The significance of this study is its diverse contributions to theory, practice, policy, and methodology within the evolving field of Public Relations and communication at large, specifically in the context of managing stakeholder relationships and strategic silence.

### **1.6.1 Theoretical significance**

This theory contributes to the theoretical discourse on the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management by providing empirical insights into the effects of strategic silence on stakeholder relationship management and sustainability, while contributing to theoretical implications for models of corporate communication and stakeholder theory by challenging assumptions that transparency is always the optimal approach. This study also contributes to academia by offering a comprehensive evaluation of Public Relations strategies (strategic silence) and their impact on stakeholder relationship management and sustainability.

### **1.6.2 Practical significance**

Practically, the findings of this study will provide valuable insights for Public Relations practitioners and corporate executives in optimising communication strategies and incorporating a multi-industry approach while addressing long-term relationship management and sustainability. The findings of this study will bring to the knowledge of the public how stakeholders expect to be communicated and related to while aiding businesses and organisations in adapting to different and other modern communication trends to maintain and sustain relationships with stakeholders, knowing well when and how to use strategic silence in communication.

### **1.6.3 Policy significance**

This study will provide evidence-based foundation for designing and adaption other communication strategies of Public Relations at the policy level. This will inform corporate communication strategists, enabling managers to make more context-specific decisions regarding information disclosure while guiding policy makers in framing communication and disclosure regulations that support sustainable businesses and organisational practices while preserving public trust.

### **1.7 Scope of study**

This paper is geographically and professionally bounded. This study focuses on the telecommunication industry professionally, while focusing on Telecel Ghana and MTN Ghana consumers and stakeholders (Momo agents, vendors, leadership of these organisations, and other clients) only within the middle (Greater Accra Region- Ghana) and southern (Ashanti Region) belt in Ghana. Professionally, it is confined to two key categories: public relations practitioners,

communication strategists of these telecommunication industries, and the telecommunication industry itself.

### **1.8 Organisation of the study**

This research is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provides a general background of the study, including the study's problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, and organisation of the study. The second chapter focuses on a literature review, examining related research publications, concepts related to the study, and theories. This helps to identify research gaps and avoids the risk of duplicating an existing study. The third chapter focuses on data collection and analysis methods. It encapsulates the research approach, study design, sampling strategy, data collection procedure, and data analysis technique. The fourth chapter focuses on the research results and their interpretation. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes the study and provides recommendations for future studies.

### **1.9 Chapter summary**

The aforementioned methods, designs, processes, and other matters discussed in this paper will drive the study in assessing the effects of strategic silence on stakeholder relationship management and sustainability in a more detailed procedure.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter mainly focuses on examining existing research by scholars on the effects of strategic silence on stakeholder relationship management to help identify existing gaps that this study seeks to address. As Abdullah, M. (2020) argues, a literature review is significant in allowing the researcher to discover the gap in previous research that requires a new contribution to the field while providing the research findings with evidence. This chapter is divided into sections, which include the concept of strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management, a theoretical review that will look at the various theories underpinning this study, an empirical review, and the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationships.

#### **2.2 Definition of concepts**

##### **2.2.1 Strategic silence defined**

In modern organisational communication, silence is now seen as a purposeful and effective communication technique rather than just the absence of voice; however, several scholars. Silence in public relations and organisational communication can be a purposeful approach to reputation and relationship management, not just the absence of speech.

According to the Croatian Language Portal, silence is a state without sounds. Human life takes place between silence and words (Guardini, 2009). A word is one of the basic ways of human communication in general. But this is just one of the ways. Another way to communicate is through silence. As more academics realise that an organisation's decisions about what to keep quiet can

have just as much of an impact as what it discloses, the idea of strategic silence has drawn more attention, hence several publications and definitions on strategic silence. More precisely, strategic silence refers to an organisation's deliberate efforts to reduce external communication as part of a strategic communication endeavour.

Organisations that intentionally limit information sharing are said to be engaging in strategic silence. This is different from those who must stay silent due to negative situations and circumstances. Strategic silence is understood as communication silence, not when we talk about it, but when we talk through silence. That is when silence is the most powerful (Dimitrov, 2019). The objective of strategic ambiguity, which includes strategic silence, is to “create space in which multiple interpretations by stakeholders are enabled”. Strategic ambiguity is defined as the deliberate use of ambiguity to achieve objectives. It has been applied to facilitate agreement on abstract concepts, manage conflicting interests, and for different interpretations to coexist.

Although not considered a particularly desirable theory of crisis communication (Coombs, 2008), it is still widely used by businesses today. Some authors emphasise that strategic silence means not only the complete absence of verbal communication, but also communication that provides little or no key information (Dimitrov, 2015). Absolute silence is often an extremely risky option as it is unlimited and thus involves the risk of creating a climate of mistrust.

Strategic silence should and can be used when an organisation needs to investigate a crisis, when the cause is unclear, when it wants to resolve a problem with a clear cause without inciting panic, and when it takes time to gather information or reach a primary response. In such cases, strategic silence can be used as a supportive strategy to prepare the formulation of the primary response (Le Phuong et al. 2019).

Although circumstantial, it has been proposed that strategic silence can be effective. It may be used when speaking up could have legal repercussions or when the available information is inadequate. When regulators receive criticism in areas where they have a solid reputation, they may strategically remain silent to convey confidence in their stance. It could be used by politicians to avoid responsibilities or confrontations. While the problem is being worked on, strategic silence can be employed to avoid sidetracking or to convey patience and composure with good intentions (such as sympathy or respect for privacy). However, this approach is only effective when stakeholders trust the organisation, a statement of justification is released, and no "no comment" statement, which frequently suggests guilt, is provided.

Further studies revealed that, in public relations, there are four different kinds of silences: anticipatory, defending, preserving, and absolute. Absolute quiet was emphasised as a riskier alternative since it is limitless and best prevents an overreaction to problems, which calls for good judgment. The other three categories entail a deliberate reaction that is used to either sidestep the actual problem (defensive), transfer the data to a platform with less visibility (preserving), or identify the worst-case scenarios in advance (anticipating).

Sometimes, when stakeholders seek answers during a crisis and are faced with silence, an information vacuum results. This can lead to speculation, dissatisfaction, and problems with trust among stakeholders, and it may even intensify or awaken into a second, larger crisis.

### **2.2.2 Concept of Stakeholder relationship management (benefits, dimensions, risks, criticisms apply to all 3 defined concepts).**

For any firm to succeed, effective stakeholder relationship management is a must. It is a deciding factor that directly affects the organisation's overall atmosphere and financial performance.

Individuals, people, or organisations that could influence or be impacted by the project's outcome are known as stakeholders. Strong relationships with pertinent stakeholder groups, such as consumers, distributors, employees, or shareholders, are a tenet of the majority of successful companies today. The active and successful management of these significant connections is known as stakeholder management. Without effective communication, the stakeholder relationships could deteriorate. How well an organisation satisfies the expectations and value perceptions of its stakeholders also determines its success or failure. Managing stakeholders' expectations and perceptions can be facilitated by effective communication. It also involves giving each stakeholder, especially the most significant ones, the information they require to feel as though their expectations are understood and being met.

In this regard, Goyder's (1999) view has a new and important dimension. According to him, "A business which better understands the needs of those with whom it has a relationship, and which better understands what they regard as value, will survive in a turbulent world". The same point is expressed by Rowley (1997), who concentrated in his work on the network of stakeholder relationships. He pointed out that stakeholder relations are always dynamic and in a constant state of flux. The attitudes and actions of stakeholders may change at different stages. Effective stakeholder relationship management is crucial to managing stakeholders and providing them with value. Managing relationships both inside and outside of a project involves striking a balance between the divergent demands and expectations of different stakeholders (Bourne, 2016).

### **2.2.3 concept of organizational sustainability**

An organisation's ability to function in a way that guarantees its long-term existence while concurrently producing favourable social, environmental, and economic results is known as organisational sustainability. It combines ideas from corporate governance, ethics, systems theory,

and sustainable development. It has developed into a strategic paradigm that prioritises long-term value creation over immediate profit maximisation. Organisational sustainability is the organisational manifestation of sustainable development concepts, which aim to maintain continuity between generations by striking a balance between social equality, environmental integrity, and profitability. In addition to being an operational objective, it is a strategic concept with roots in stakeholder engagement, ethics, and systems thinking. Sustainable businesses are flexible, responsible, and regenerative; they constantly match their internal resources to the more general demands of social and environmental well-being. It represents a multifaceted balance among social justice, environmental integrity, and economic resilience. In contrast, "adopting organisational strategies and activities that meet the needs of the enterprise and its stakeholders today while protecting, sustaining, and enhancing the human and natural resources that will be needed in the future" is what is meant by organisational sustainability.

## **2.3 Empirical Review**

The investigation into corporate communication strategies, particularly the use of strategic silence, has generated a significant and rapidly expanding body of empirical research concerning organisational ethics, reputation management, and long-term performance. This review synthesises key empirical findings related to the influence of non-communication on stakeholder relationships and organisational sustainability.

### **2.3.1 Strategic Silence in Stakeholder Relationship Management (SRM)**

The drive to understand how organisations manage relationships with their publics has focused heavily on transparent and symmetrical communication, making strategic silence a key empirical contrast.

Woon and Pang (2017) provided one of the most crucial conceptual and empirical frameworks for this topic. Their research examined the use of silence in various organisational contexts and empirically defined it as the deliberate withholding of information from specific stakeholders to achieve organisational objectives. They found that strategic silence is often employed as a reputation maintenance tactic in high-stakes situations, such as product recalls or internal scandals. Crucially, they observed that the effectiveness of silence is contingent: it only protects reputation when the stakeholders perceive the organisation's actions as temporary or unavoidable, and it is followed by decisive post-silence disclosure. This finding empirically grounds the idea that silence, as a part of SRM, is a calculated risk, not just a passive avoidance strategy.

Complementing this, Pang, Jin, and Cameron (2010) conducted an empirical study focusing on crisis communication strategies in the banking industry. Their findings demonstrated that in certain financially sensitive or volatile crises, the choice of non-communication (or strategic silence) was sometimes empirically linked to mitigating market panic and minimising immediate reputational damage, particularly when the organisation lacked confirmed information. This suggests that in the early phases of a corporate crisis, silence can function as an information control mechanism designed to prevent premature, damaging speculation, thereby preserving stakeholder trust until credible information is available. These studies collectively confirm that strategic silence is a recognised, deliberate tactic within SRM, but its success is heavily dependent on context and the eventual follow-up communication.

### **2.3.2 The Relationship Between Strategic Silence and Long-Term Organisational Sustainability**

Empirical research connecting communication decisions directly to organisational sustainability often uses the Stakeholder Theory framework to assess the long-term impact on social license and ethical standing.

Clarkson (1995) provided the definitive empirical basis for analysing corporate social performance through a stakeholder lens. While not directly about silence, his framework for evaluating corporate conduct, specifically the commitment to primary and secondary stakeholders, serves as the benchmark against which the effects of silence are measured. Empirically, the withholding of vital information (strategic silence) is viewed as a breach of the fiduciary and ethical relationship with stakeholders, which, according to Clarkson's model, would degrade a company's perceived social performance and, by extension, its long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, Carroll (1991) defined the empirical hierarchy of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which includes economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. Several studies applying this pyramid have shown that when a company utilises silence to avoid accountability for an ethical breach (e.g., environmental damage or labour issues), it directly violates the ethical and legal layers of the pyramid. This violation, in turn, empirically damages the organisation's reputation, leading to sustained investor, consumer, and regulatory mistrust, thereby compromising its organisational sustainability. The empirical evidence suggests that while short-term silence may protect the stock price, long-term sustainability requires adherence to transparent ethical practices.

### **2.3.3 The Role of Organisational Culture and Ethics in Communication Decisions**

The decision to employ strategic silence is often less about the crisis itself and more about the internal environment, specifically the culture and ethical conduct embedded within the organisation.

Morrison and Milliken (2000) provided foundational empirical work on organisational silence, though their focus was largely internal (employees withholding voice). Their findings, however, are critical for external communication: they demonstrated that a culture of silence (stemming from fear, perceived futility, or management's defensive routines) acts as a significant barrier to change and learning. Empirically, organisations with high internal silence are less likely to have the necessary systems and processes to manage external communication effectively during a crisis. This internal cultural deficit is a powerful mediator, making external strategic silence a default or reflexive action, rather than a truly strategic one, which in turn leads to poorer stakeholder relationship outcomes.

This cultural impact is mediated by ethical leadership, as demonstrated by Treviño, Weaver, and Brown (2008). Their work empirically confirmed that ethical conduct is not a solitary trait but is deeply influenced by the ethical context and organisational culture. They found that when ethical infrastructure and leadership are strong, employees and managers are less likely to engage in self-protective, reputation-damaging behaviours like covering up information or choosing silence. Conversely, a weak ethical culture provides fertile ground for strategic silence to be misused to conceal unethical behaviour, drastically compromising SRM.

### **2.3.4 Leadership and Public Accountability as Mediators in Strategic Silence**

Empirical studies highlight the critical mediating roles of leadership style and the organisation's awareness of its public accountability in determining when and how silence is used.

Bass and Avolio (1994) empirically established the framework for transformational leadership, which serves as a powerful mediator in communication decisions. Studies applying their work have empirically shown that leaders exhibiting transformational traits (e.g., promoting open dialogue, intellectual stimulation, and ethical integrity) are less likely to authorise strategic silence that could compromise stakeholder relationships. In contrast, transactional leadership, which focuses primarily on short-term exchange and compliance, is empirically more correlated with the use of silence when it serves a short-term, self-protective economic goal.

Finally, the philosophical and empirical work by Preston and Post (1975) regarding the Principle of Public Responsibility provides a lens for assessing the telecommunication company context. This work emphasises that large, public-facing corporations like those in the telecoms sector have a public charter that requires accountability. Empirically, organisations that recognise this deep public responsibility are less likely to use prolonged, obfuscating silence, as they understand that their duty extends beyond shareholder interest to the general public, directly impacting their social license to operate and, ultimately, their organisational sustainability.

### **2.3.5 Synthesis of Empirical Findings and the Research Gap**

The empirical literature strongly confirms that strategic silence is a deliberate, reputation-management tactic (Woon & Pang, 2017; Pang et al., 2010). However, its effectiveness is fragile and often undermined by a pre-existing culture of silence and weak ethical conduct (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Treviño et al., 2008). The most significant finding is that while short-term silence

may control panic, it fundamentally erodes the long-term stakeholder relationship management necessary for organisational sustainability (Clarkson, 1995; Carroll, 1991).

Despite this rich body of work, a significant empirical gap remains. The existing studies are largely conducted in Western contexts or generalised industries (banking, manufacturing). There is a distinct lack of empirical evidence from the West African telecommunications sector, a highly regulated, visible, and culturally unique market. Specifically, there is a lack of research that empirically assesses the proposed mediating roles of leadership style, ethical conduct, and organisational culture on the specific outcome of strategic silence on stakeholder relationship management and sustainability within Ghanaian telecommunications firms. This study is designed to fill this precise empirical void.

## **2.4 Theoretical Review**

This part of the paper talks about the theoretical foundations and their relevance to the study. Swanson (2013, p. 122) defines a theoretical framework as a structure that supports a theory that describes and explains a research study. The theories underpinning this study include the stakeholder theory and the relationship management theory.

### **2.4.1 stakeholder theory**

Stakeholder theory is not a singular theory of itself; rather, it is a collection of diverse narratives that have arisen from and are open to various interpretations and applications, ranging from corporate social responsibility and business ethics to strategic management, corporate governance, and finance. Widely disparate conceptualisations of "what is a stakeholder?" have formed both inside and within these narratives as various definitions are developed to serve various purposes, each concentrating on characteristics that are pertinent to context. "Any group or individual who

can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives" is the conventional definition of a stakeholder. The scope of managerial responsibility is expanded under this definition to encompass a variety of players in addition to investors, including workers, clients, suppliers, communities, governments, and the environment. As a result, stakeholder theory highlights the reciprocity and interdependence of organisational actors and aims to strike a balance between conflicting interests to create sustainable value.

Stakeholder theory incorporates both instrumental and ethical aspects from a conceptual perspective. According to the ethical dimension, companies have a moral obligation to take into account the rights and interests of all parties involved (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Fairness, justice, and respect for human dignity are the cornerstones of this viewpoint. In contrast, the instrumental dimension argues that addressing stakeholder interests enhances long-term profitability, risk management, and organisational performance (Jones, 1995). Stakeholder engagement is therefore both tactically beneficial and normatively desirable.

Stakeholder theory functions as a framework that is both prescriptive and descriptive. From a descriptive perspective, it offers a prism through which to view how businesses function within a network of stakeholder interactions. Prescriptively, it provides recommendations on how businesses can act to preserve their credibility and attain long-term success (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & De Colle, 2010). Since then, the theory has developed from a variety of viewpoints, including normative, instrumental, and integrative stakeholder theories, which collectively highlight the complexity of organisational value creation and accountability.

#### **2.4.1.1 Relevance of the theory to the study**

The conceptual perspective for evaluating how strategic silence impacts stakeholder involvement, trust, and legitimacy perceptions—all of which have an impact on the organisation's sustainability—is provided by stakeholder theory. The study investigates the fine balance between communication discretion and relational accountability that supports sustainable stakeholder management by placing strategic silence within the larger stakeholder framework. The theory emphasises how organisations have an ethical duty to uphold accountability, equity, and transparency toward all stakeholders. It suggests that strategic communication choices that manage stakeholder perceptions and trust can improve organisational performance and sustainability.

#### **2.4.2 Relationship Management Theory**

Relationship Management Theory is a fundamental paradigm in organisational communication and public relations that describes how organisations proactively establish, nurture, and maintain relationships with their primary stakeholders or publics that are mutually beneficial. According to the theory, public relations now focuses on managing long-term, dynamic relationships that are marked by mutual control, trust, commitment, satisfaction, and openness rather than just communication output. Fundamentally, Relationship Management Theory asserts that an organisation's efficacy, reputation, and long-term success are all strongly impacted by the strength of its interactions with its publics (Ledingham, 2003). According to the theory, communication is a relational process that aims to foster understanding, cooperation, and goodwill rather than just disseminating information. While poorly managed and weak relationships can result in conflict, mistrust, and reputational harm, strong relationships encourage stakeholder loyalty and support. As a result, Relationship Management Theory offers a normative and strategic framework for examining how communicative behaviours—like participation, discussion, or even strategic

silence affect the well-being of organisational relationships. It highlights that in complicated stakeholder situations, obtaining organisational legitimacy, social capital, and sustainability requires excellent relationship management.

#### **2.4.2.1 Relevance of the theory to the study**

Relationship Management Theory is pertinent to this study because it offers the conceptual framework for understanding how communication patterns like strategic silence shape and influence the quality of relationships between organisations and their stakeholders. According to this theory, communication involves managing relational dynamics that uphold organisational efficacy and legitimacy in addition to disseminating messages. According to Relationship Management Theory, the organisation's ability to maintain mutual understanding and long-term cooperation by striking a balance between discretion and transparency is critical to the health of stakeholder relationships. Strategic Silence can strengthen credibility and safeguard corporate interests when utilised wisely, but poorly executed silence can undermine stakeholder confidence and erode trust.

### **2.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter focused on identifying research gaps that exist in previous studies with the aim of not replicating research that has already been conducted by another researcher. It seeks to provide detailed insight into the topic under study, develop a fresh perspective, and further broaden the topic to contribute to knowledge in academia.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the research methodology used to investigate the topic under study. The chapter outlines the research paradigm, approach, design, sampling strategy, sample size, data collection techniques, data collection processes, data analysis, validity and reliability considerations, and ethical considerations, and provides a summary of the chapter. For researchers who need to comprehend the paradigms that direct their study, they must have a thorough awareness of the research paradigms and methodologies, as well as research designs that can best solve the research problems through the research process, methodological choices in data collection, analysis and interpretations, as well as in reporting findings.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

Research paradigm establishes the foundation of all studies. It is the initial stage of determining the primary research directions. A paradigm establishes a viewpoint on a certain problem, which is a research model.

Research paradigms guide scientific discoveries through their assumptions and principles (Park et al. 2020). Scholars like Alharthi (2016) have argued that a paradigm is a basic set of beliefs and a theoretical framework that makes assumptions regarding ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methodologies. Similarly, Ryan (2018), also delineates paradigms as the values and beliefs that inform the design of a research study as well as the data gathering and analysis. Researchers can never be completely separate from their values and beliefs, so these will inevitably inform how

they collect, interpret and analyse data. Alternatively, it is how we examine and comprehend the world as it is. Following these assertions, the positivist paradigm was used in this study, which is based on the assertion that only sense-confirmed knowledge is validated as knowledge and that positivists are the only ones who distinguish between normative and scientific claims and hold that only scientific claims are the real purview of scientists because normative claims cannot be verified by the senses.

It is also known as the scientific paradigm. Positivism is a scientific paradigm that seeks to explore, validate, or forecast behavioural patterns. It is most frequently applied to test theories or hypotheses. The researcher is kept apart from the respondents to exclude any prejudice that can compromise impartiality. This paradigm holds that there is only one reality that can be quantified and established objectively.

In both the scientific and social sciences, positivism holds that phenomena are measurable and objective. It highlights the impartiality and objectivity of researchers and alludes to verifying and testing current theories.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

There are two types of research approaches, namely, the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach. However, a third approach, the mixed methods approach, has been added (Creswell, 2003, 2014). Following the research paradigm, the study will employ a quantitative research approach. The positivist paradigm serves as the basis for the quantitative method, which is defined by presumptions consistent with positivist philosophy.

The high efficiency and applicability of the quantitative approach, particularly when working with a large sample, are indicative of its advantages because of its possibility of gathering data in

multiple methods in a comparatively short amount of time, and it is cost-effective. This approach's positivist foundation is the source of its flaws. By narrowing his horizons and concentrating on objective facts or verifying preexisting hypotheses and assumptions, the researcher may fail to see certain events. Additionally, the knowledge acquired in this manner might not be practical because of the restriction to perfect truth and exclusive objectivity.

The quantitative approach works best when determining the variables that affect the final result, examining the impacts of an activity, and testing theories. An additional benefit of this strategy relates to meticulously defined study protocols and guidelines. This makes it more comfortable for the researcher to conduct the study. The goal of quantitative research is to measure data and extrapolate conclusions from a study sample from multiple angles. To support the hypothesis developed in a particular study, quantifiable data must be gathered, analysed, and interpreted. This study used the quantitative research approach to describe the specific qualities and rather important differences to generate conclusions, thereby creating more consideration about the problem under study.

### **3.3 Research Design**

Kothari (2004) defines research design as "a plan, a guide, or a template to carry out inquiry devised to obtain responses to research questions. This study employed a quantitative correlational design. The statistical link between two or more numerical variables can be measured and analysed using a quantitative correlational research design, which is a non-experimental method without changing the variables. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that correlational research "determines whether a relationship exists by examining the association or co-variation between variables." This study employed a correlational design to be able to find variables that are related so that a change

in influences a change in another. In this study, the variables are strategic silence, stakeholder relationship management and organisational sustainability to check whether there is a statistically significant relationship between them. The purpose of a correlational design is to ascertain the degree of relationship between quantifiable variables. Correlational designs are used to deduce the strength and direction of correlations between variables that can be measured.

Correlational research allows researchers to investigate patterns of relationships in real-world environments without imposing treatments or interventions by examining variables as they naturally occur. Although it does not allow for causal inferences since correlations may be modified by other or unmeasured variables, this design is especially useful for evaluating theoretical linkages and forecasting outcomes. In social and organisational research, the quantitative correlational design offers a rigorous framework for determining empirical connections between variables.

### **3.4 Sampling Strategy**

Lindelof and Taylor (2017) assert that a sampling strategy helps the researcher in determining what to study and also provides justification for what to study. This way, the researcher reduces the possibility of engaging in wasteful efforts because the exact unit or units to be studied are predetermined and well thought through. Sampling techniques have two main forms, which are probability and non-probability sampling. Under the non-probability sampling, a purposive sample strategy was deployed. Purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of an individual or data for investigation based on particular attributes and characteristics crucial to the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The purposive sampling technique is appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to purposively select consumers of both MTN Ghana and Telecel Ghana for the study who have the information and experience to address the needs of the research objective. Since the study seeks to examine the effects of strategic silence on stakeholder relationship management and organisational sustainability, purposive sampling ensures that only participants with relevant experience with these telcos are included, leading to more meaningful and contextually rich data.

### **3.5 Research Population**

According to Albudaiwi (2018), A population consists of all the objects or events of a certain type about which researchers seek knowledge or information. The study's population comprises active users of both MTN Ghana and Telecel Ghana who have experienced the services and policies, and even how these organisations relate to or communicate with their stakeholders. This population is relevant because it aligns with the objectives of the study and has a propensity to identify what the study seeks to address.

### **3.6 Sample size**

The number of individual samples examined or observations made in an investigation or survey is referred to as sample size (Zamboni, 2019). This relates to the number of people the researchers selected for participation in the study. The study, therefore, selected a total of 240 respondents. A sample size of 240 respondents is appropriate for this study because of its ability to generalise the findings of the study. In quantitative research, the purpose of sampling is to conclude the group. The researcher uses randomisation to collect a sample that is representative of the population from which it is drawn objectively.

### **3.7 Data collection technique**

Techniques for gathering numerical data that may be statistically examined to test hypotheses, look at relationships, or measure variables objectively are known as quantitative data collection techniques. To guarantee accuracy, dependability, and generalizability, these methods rely on regulated processes and structured tools. This study employed a survey for data collection. The data collection was done by administering questionnaires to the preferred population for the study (active users of both MTN Ghana and Telecel Ghana). While using structured, closed-ended items like Likert scales and multiple-choice questions to measure the perceptions of the respondents.

### **3.8 Data collection process**

The methodical and organised steps researchers take to acquire numerical data that can be statistically evaluated to address research questions or test hypotheses are referred to as the quantitative data collecting process. (Creswell & Creswell 2018) state that to guarantee reliability, validity, and objectivity, quantitative data gathering must adhere to a structured process. The process of quantitative data collection in this study involved defining the sample size, determining what type of data to collect and selecting research instruments, i.e. administering a questionnaire

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

Quantitative data analysis involves several interrelated techniques. The data must first be arranged for analysis. It entails determining how to assign numerical scores to the data, assessing the score categories, using statistical software, and inputting the data into the computer. Analysing the data is the second phase. A descriptive analysis of the data usually presents the variance and central tendency measurements. The hypotheses are then tested, and confidence ranges and effect sizes are assessed using more complex inferential analysis. The third step involves summarising,

debating, and contrasting the findings with earlier theories and literature in addition to presenting the research findings through tables and figures. It should conclude with the research's limitations and suggestions for further study. To answer all of the study's questions and hypotheses, the data must be analysed after it has been prepared and arranged (Creswell, 2002).

### **3.10 Reliability and validity**

A technique that measures something consistently is referred to as reliable. When the same procedure continually yields the same results, the measurement is considered dependable, while a method that accurately measures something is said to be valid. Research with high validity yields results that are consistent with true characteristics and differences in the social or physical realities. High reliability indicates whether a measurement is genuine or not, and a method is likely invalid if it lacks reliability.

### **3.11 Ethical Consideration**

Ethics is a collection of moral guidelines of conduct that govern the actions when making decisions by a person or a community (Agwor & Osho, 2017; Ezigbo, 2009). As a result, researchers in social and behavioural fields are required to anticipate issues of ethics that may develop throughout their research. The University of Media, Arts, and Communication -Institute of Journalism has standard research standards that students must follow when undertaking any type of study. The researcher for this study adhered to these ethical standards and ensured that data were collected following the university's requirements. Seeking the consent of the respondents is one of the research ethics guidelines prioritised by the university. This involves the researcher requesting permission from respondents, reminding them of their right to consent or decline to engage in any type of research (Kankam, Asiedu-Addo, Ameyaw, Mensah, & Abban, 2018). To meet this

provision, the researcher reminded the respondents of their right to agree or decline answering the survey since it was on a voluntary basis. Some of the ethical codes that guided this study also included anonymity and confidentiality. With anonymity, the identities of the respondents were not collected. And with confidentiality, the information acquired from the respondents was only made available to the researchers.

### **3.12 Chapter Summary**

This chapter focused on the research method, research approach, research design and data collection techniques and processes, research population and sampling strategy used in assessing the effects of Strategic Silence on Stakeholder Relationship Management and Organisational sustainability.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and interprets the empirical data collected to examine the relationship between strategic silence and organisational sustainability within the framework of stakeholder relationship management. Drawing upon the theoretical foundations of Stakeholder Theory and Relationship Management Theory, the analysis seeks to determine how deliberate non-disclosure, delayed responses, and selective communication influence stakeholder trust, loyalty, and perceptions of corporate legitimacy. The chapter systematically presents descriptive statistics and inferential analyses based on responses from 240 participants representing users of MTN Ghana and Telecel Ghana. Each section of the analysis corresponds directly to the research objectives, exploring the influence of strategic silence on stakeholder relationships, organisational sustainability, and the mediating roles of leadership style, ethical values, and organisational culture. The presentation of findings is structured around frequency distributions, percentages, and Pearson correlation coefficients to illustrate key patterns and statistically significant relationships. Furthermore, the analysis explores how respondents interpret corporate silence, whether as a strategic communication approach or a barrier to transparency, and its implications for long-term organisational sustainability. The findings are discussed in relation to existing scholarly literature, offering a contextualised understanding of how communication discretion operates within the Ghanaian telecommunications sector. Overall, this chapter provides the quantitative foundation upon which the subsequent discussion, conclusions, and recommendations are drawn.

#### **4.1 Research Objective One: To examine the influence of strategic silence in stakeholder relationship management**

This objective seeks to explore how deliberate non-disclosure, delayed responses, or selective communication by organisations such as MTN and Telecel affect the quality of relationships with key stakeholders. It aims to determine whether strategic silence strengthens or weakens trust, loyalty, and mutual understanding between the organisation and its customers. The analysis focuses on how silence, as a controlled communication strategy, influences stakeholder perceptions, engagement, and confidence in the organisation’s integrity and responsiveness

**Table 1: Please indicate which of the telcos you actively use.**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	MTN GHANA	114	47.5
	TELECEL GHANA	126	52.5
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The data presented in Table 1 reveal that, out of the 240 sampled respondents, 47.5% reported actively using MTN Ghana, while a slightly larger proportion, 52.5%, indicated TELECEL Ghana as their preferred telecom service provider. This nearly balanced distribution suggests a competitive marketplace where consumer loyalty is relatively split between the two major players. From the perspective of stakeholder relationship management, these findings imply that both telcos are maintaining a comparable level of stakeholder engagement, though TELECEL Ghana currently

holds a marginal lead. In the context of strategic silence, the deliberate withholding of communication to shape stakeholder perceptions or manage conflict, such data becomes critically informative. A company that exercises strategic silence effectively may still maintain strong stakeholder relations, provided it understands the thresholds and preferences of its customer base. For instance, the slight edge held by TELECEL may be attributed not solely to overt engagement strategies but perhaps also to a strategic communication style that resonates more subtly with stakeholders, balancing visibility with discretion. Conversely, MTN Ghana’s slightly lower figure could signal a need to reassess how its silence or communication gaps are perceived by stakeholders, especially in terms of transparency, responsiveness, and trust. From a sustainability perspective, the long-term implications of these dynamics are profound: organisations that miscalculate the balance between strategic silence and communicative transparency risk alienating key stakeholder groups, which can compromise both customer retention and corporate resilience.

**Table 2: MTN/Telecel sometimes delays responses or withholds information about important issues (e.g., service disruptions, pricing policies, fraudulent activities, etc.).**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	108	45.4
	Disagree	27	11.3
	Strongly Agree	99	41.3
	Strongly Disagree	5	2.1
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

From the frequency in Table 2, distribution, an overwhelming 86.7% of respondents (comprising 45.4% who agreed and 41.3% who strongly agreed) acknowledged that these telcos often delay responses or withhold vital information regarding issues such as service disruptions, pricing

policies, or fraudulent activities. This overwhelming consensus suggests that strategic silence is not merely incidental but may be an embedded aspect of corporate communication culture, designed perhaps to control narratives, mitigate reputational risks, or manage stakeholder expectations during periods of uncertainty. Conversely, only a marginal 13.4% (11.3% disagreeing and 2.1% strongly disagreeing) did not perceive such behaviour, indicating limited dissent among stakeholders on this perception. This asymmetry in perception underscores the pervasiveness of strategic silence as a recognised organisational behaviour. Within the theoretical framework of organisational sustainability, these findings can be interpreted as a double-edged sword: while strategic silence might serve short-term objectives such as preventing panic, maintaining investor confidence, or ensuring message consistency, it may simultaneously erode long-term stakeholder trust, transparency, and relational commitment, key pillars of sustainable stakeholder engagement. The high rate of agreement suggests that stakeholders are acutely aware of communicative opacity, which may contribute to a perception of manipulation, diminished accountability, and ultimately weakened organisational legitimacy.

**Table 3: When the company remains silent on an issue, it influences my trust in the organisation.**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	106	44.2
	Disagree	6	2.5
	Strongly Agree	122	50.8
	Strongly Disagree	6	2.5
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The findings from Table 3 reveal that an overwhelming majority of respondents, 95% combining both “Agree” (44.2%) and “Strongly Agree” (50.8%), perceive the organisation’s silence on critical issues as having a tangible influence on their trust toward the company. This striking consensus suggests that silence, whether intentional or accidental, is not a neutral act but a potent communicative strategy that directly affects stakeholder perceptions and relational outcomes. The negligible percentage of respondents who “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” (a combined total of only 5%) underscores that few stakeholders interpret silence as inconsequential. In the context of strategic silence theory, this distribution indicates that the act of remaining silent is often decoded by stakeholders as a form of meaning-making rather than mere absence of information. When an organisation withholds commentary on contentious or significant matters, stakeholders may infer hidden motives, ethical lapses, or managerial opacity, thus reshaping their trust calculus. Conversely, strategic silence can also serve as a form of calculated restraint, signalling prudence, confidentiality, or respect for due process, attributes that can strengthen trust if stakeholders perceive the silence as purpose-driven rather than evasive. Within the framework of organisational sustainability, which relies heavily on transparent, trust-based relationships between firms and their stakeholders, the implications of these findings are profound.

**Table 4: Delayed communication helps the organisation maintain a professional relationship with customers (stakeholders).**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	15	6.3
	Disagree	90	37.5
	Strongly Agree	15	6.3
	Strongly Disagree	120	50.0

Total	240	100.0
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*Source: Field Data 2025*

The data presented in Table 4 above indicate that only 6.3% agreed and an additional 6.3% strongly agreed with the notion that delayed communication contributes positively to maintaining professional stakeholder relationships. Conversely, a significantly larger proportion, 37.5% disagreed, while an overwhelming 50.0% strongly disagreed with the statement. This dominant negative response indicates that the vast majority of participants perceive delayed communication not as a strategic or beneficial form of organisational silence, but rather as a hindrance to effective stakeholder engagement and relationship sustainability. Such findings reveal that in most organisational contexts, timely and transparent communication is considered a cornerstone of professionalism and trust-building. The high percentage of disagreement (a combined 87.5%) suggests that stakeholders tend to associate delays in communication with inefficiency, lack of accountability, or disregard for stakeholder concerns, factors that can severely undermine organisational credibility and long-term sustainability.

**Table 5: The way MTN/Telecel manages communication influences my decision to continue using their services.**

		Frequency	Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	124	51.7
	Disagree	14	5.8
	Strongly Agree	91	37.9
	Strongly Disagree	11	4.6
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The data presented in Table 5 indicates that out of the 240 respondents, a substantial majority, comprising 51.7% who agreed and 37.9% who strongly agreed, indicated that the way these organisations manage their communication directly influences their decision to continue using the services. This collectively represents almost 90% (precisely 89.6%) of the total sample, suggesting a strong positive correlation between effective communication strategies and customer loyalty. Only a small proportion, 5.8% disagreeing and 4.2% strongly disagreeing, expressed dissenting opinions, which reinforces the dominant perception that communication is a critical determinant of stakeholder satisfaction. The single response (0.4%) recorded as “Agree, Strongly Agree” appears to be a data entry anomaly but minimally affects the overall interpretation. From a theoretical standpoint, this finding aligns with stakeholder relationship management models emphasizing the significance of transparent, timely, and responsive communication as a driver of trust, credibility, and long-term sustainability. The results also shed light on the concept of strategic silence, where an organisation’s deliberate non-communication or delayed communication can have both constructive and destructive effects depending on the context. In this case, the high level of agreement implies that stakeholders value consistent engagement and interpret silence negatively, potentially as negligence, indifference, or lack of accountability.

**Table 6: Limited communication by MTN/Telecel affects how I view its long-term reliability.**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	117	48.8
	Disagree	12	5.0
	Strongly Agree	108	45.0
	Strongly Disagree	3	1.3
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

Table 6 shows that an overwhelming 93.8% agreed, with 48.8% agreeing and 45.0% strongly agreeing, indicating that nearly all respondents perceive limited communication as a determinant of diminished trust and long-term reliability. This suggests that when MTN and Telecel adopt strategic silence, whether deliberate or circumstantial, it significantly shapes stakeholders' judgments about their credibility, transparency, and commitment to sustainable engagement. The minimal proportions of disagreement (5.0%) and strong disagreement (1.3%) reinforce that only a negligible minority are unaffected by reduced communication, implying that open dialogue remains central to sustaining positive stakeholder relationships.

**Table 7: I believe that how the company handles communication (using silence) impacts its overall reputation and sustainability.**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	115	47.9
	Disagree	9	3.8
	Strongly Agree	110	45.8
	Strongly Disagree	5	2.5
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The data from Table 7 indicates that a significant majority, 115 participants (47.9%), agreed, while 110 (45.8%) strongly agreed, that the way a company manages silence in its communication practices directly affects its overall reputation and sustainability. Collectively, this means that 225 out of 240 respondents, representing a remarkable 93.7% consensus, recognise a positive association between the strategic use of silence and an organisation's sustainable reputation management. Only a minimal proportion of respondents expressed dissent, with 9 individuals (3.8%) disagreeing and a mere 5 (2.5%) strongly disagreeing, suggesting that opposition to this

notion is statistically insignificant. This overwhelming agreement demonstrates that stakeholders interpret silence not as a void or lack of transparency, but rather as a strategic communicative choice that can convey prudence, control, and professionalism when appropriately timed and contextualised.

#### **4.2 Research Objective Two: To analyse the relationship between strategic silence and long-term organisational sustainability**

This objective examines the extent to which strategic silence contributes to or undermines an organisation’s sustainability in the long term. It seeks to assess how communication restraint or delayed disclosure influences stakeholder confidence, corporate reputation, and the organisation’s ability to maintain stable operations and relationships over time. The analysis will help determine whether the practice of silence serves as a protective mechanism that enhances sustainability or as a communication gap that erodes stakeholder trust and organisational resilience.

<b>Correlations</b>			
		MTN/Telecel sometimes delays responses or withholds information about important issues (e.g., service disruptions, pricing policies, fraudulent activities, etc.).	The way MTN/Telecel manages communication influences my decision to continue using their services.
<b>MTN/Telecel sometimes delays responses or withholds information about important issues (e.g., service</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.463**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	240	240

<b>disruptions, pricing policies, fraudulent activities, etc.).</b>			
<b>The way MTN/Telecel manages communication influences my decision to continue using their services.</b>	Pearson Correlation	.463**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	240	240

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The correlation analysis presented reveals a statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationship ( $r = 0.463$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between the variable “MTN/Telecel sometimes delays responses or withholds information about important issues” and the variable “The way MTN/Telecel manages communication influences my decision to continue using their services.” This finding suggests that the degree to which the company engages in strategic silence, through delayed responses or withholding critical information, has a meaningful and measurable impact on customer decision-making and loyalty. Within the context of the study, this result implies that corporate silence, whether intentional or inadvertent, can play a double-edged role in sustainability dynamics. On one hand, strategic silence may be deployed as a calculated communication strategy to manage crises, protect sensitive data, or control narratives in times of uncertainty; however, the data indicates that such silence may also erode trust and influence customers’ perceptions of transparency, accountability, and reliability. The moderate positive correlation signifies that as the perceived frequency of delayed or withheld communication increases, stakeholders’ decisions about continued patronage become more dependent on how the organisation manages its overall

communication strategy, suggesting that communication behaviour acts as a mediating factor in sustaining long-term customer relationships.

<b>Correlations</b>				
				Limited communication by MTN/Telecel affects how I view its long-term reliability.
	MTN/Telecel avoids open discussions on certain service challenges (e.g. network disruptions, pricing policies, fraudulent activities, etc).			
		Pearson Correlation	1	.576**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	240	240
	Limited communication by MTN/Telecel affects how I view its long-term reliability.			
		Pearson Correlation	.576**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	240	240

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data 2025

The correlational analysis between MTN/Telecel’s tendency to avoid open discussions on sensitive service challenges (such as network disruptions, pricing policies, and fraudulent activities) and the perception of its long-term reliability among stakeholders provides compelling empirical evidence regarding the dynamics of strategic silence in organisational sustainability. The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = .576, p < .01$ ) reveals a moderately strong and statistically significant positive relationship between these two constructs, indicating that as MTN/Telecel’s strategic silence on service-related issues increases, stakeholders are more likely to question the organisation’s reliability and future dependability. This implies that withholding communication, while possibly intended as a strategic maneuver to protect corporate image or mitigate reputational risk, inadvertently erodes trust and weakens stakeholder confidence in the company’s long-term viability. The significant p-value (.000) reinforces that this relationship is not due to chance, thereby confirming that limited transparency in communication has tangible consequences for stakeholder perception.

<b>Correlations</b>			
		I believe leadership style within MTN/Telecel has the propensity to influence communication with customers (stakeholders).	I believe that how the company handles communication (using silence) impacts its overall reputation and sustainability.
<b>I believe leadership style within MTN/Telecel has the propensity to influence communication with</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.535**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	240	240

<b>customers (stakeholders).</b>			
<b>I believe that how the company handles communication (using silence) impacts its overall reputation and sustainability.</b>	Pearson Correlation	.535**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	240	240

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The correlation results presented reveal a statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationship between leadership style within MTN/Telecel and the way the company manages communication, particularly the strategic use of silence, and its subsequent impact on organizational reputation and sustainability ( $r = .535, p < .01$ ). This finding implies that leadership behavior and approach are crucial determinants of how communication strategies, including silence as a deliberate tactic, are perceived and enacted within the organization. In the context of stakeholder relationship management, leadership style not only sets the tone for interpersonal and organisational communication but also influences the organisation's strategic posture during periods of uncertainty, crisis, or reputational risk. The positive correlation suggests that leaders who adopt participatory, transformational, or visionary leadership styles are more likely to promote communication strategies that balance openness with discretion, thus leveraging silence as a strategic asset rather than a communicative deficiency. Such leadership-driven communication approaches tend to foster stakeholder trust, signal organisational control and confidence, and ultimately contribute to the firm's long-term sustainability. Conversely, ineffective or authoritarian leadership styles may mismanage silence, leading stakeholders to perceive the organisation as

evasive or unresponsive, potentially eroding trust and damaging its public image. The significant p-value ( $p = .000$ ) underscores that this relationship is not due to chance, confirming that leadership style has a measurable and meaningful influence on how communication silence is operationalised and interpreted in stakeholder interactions. From a strategic management perspective, this correlation supports the theoretical assertion that leadership and communication are interdependent components of corporate reputation management frameworks, where silence, when guided by strategic intent and ethical leadership, can serve as a mechanism for reflection, information control, and image restoration. Moreover, in competitive telecommunications environments like those in which MTN and Telecel operate, leaders' capacity to harness silence strategically could enhance resilience by mitigating misinformation, managing stakeholder expectations, and maintaining credibility during crises.

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### Correlations

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		Ethical values (honesty, fairness, and social responsibility) influence how the organisation chooses to share or withhold information.	This culture of silence negatively affects customer trust and loyalty.
<b>Ethical values (honesty, fairness, and social responsibility) influence how the organisation chooses to share or withhold information.</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.536**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	240	240
	Pearson Correlation	.536**	1

<b>This culture of silence negatively affects customer trust and loyalty.</b>	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	240	240

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The correlation analysis presented above reveals a statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationship ( $r = .536, p < .01$ ) between ethical values, specifically honesty, fairness, and social responsibility, and the effects of a culture of silence on customer trust and loyalty, based on a sample size of 240 respondents. This finding indicates that as ethical values within an organisation increase, the extent to which a culture of silence negatively impacts customer trust and loyalty also becomes more pronounced. At first glance, this might appear counterintuitive, but within the context of strategic silence and organisational sustainability, the interpretation becomes more nuanced. Ethical values influence how an organisation chooses to manage information disclosure, whether to be transparent, selective, or silent in communication with stakeholders. Organisations guided by strong ethical standards may employ silence not as deception, but as a strategic tool to protect stakeholder interests, manage sensitive information, or avoid premature dissemination of uncertain data.

However, when this strategic silence becomes systemic and is perceived externally as concealment or lack of transparency, it can erode customer trust and loyalty, even if the underlying intention is ethically justified. The significant correlation suggests that the more an organisation values ethical principles, the more sensitive its communication practices become, potentially heightening the risk of misunderstanding by customers who interpret silence as withholding or dishonesty. This

dynamic aligns with stakeholder theory, which posits that sustainable organisational success depends on maintaining trust-based relationships with all stakeholders. The findings thus emphasise the delicate balance between ethical discretion and open communication in sustaining long-term organisational legitimacy and reputation. In practice, leaders must ensure that ethical communication frameworks are coupled with proactive transparency strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of silence on stakeholder trust. Moreover, this result highlights that strategic silence, when not managed through clear ethical communication channels, may undermine the very values it seeks to protect.

<b>Correlations</b>			
		The organisational culture of MTN/Telecel influences open communication with customers.	Excessive silence makes me lose confidence and interest in MTN/Telecel.
<b>The organisational culture of MTN/Telecel influences open communication with customers.</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.434**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	240	240
<b>Excessive silence makes me lose confidence and interest in MTN/Telecel.</b>	Pearson Correlation	.434**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	240	240

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data 2025

The correlation analysis between the variables “The organisational culture of MTN/Telecel influences open communication with customers” and “Excessive silence makes me lose confidence and interest in MTN/Telecel” reveals a statistically significant positive relationship ( $r = 0.434$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $N = 240$ ), indicating that as the organisational culture promoting open communication strengthens, customer perceptions of silence as a negative and confidence-reducing factor also intensify. This moderate yet significant correlation suggests that the cultural orientation of MTN/Telecel towards openness and engagement substantially shapes how stakeholders interpret the company’s communicative behaviour, particularly in contexts of silence. In other words, customers who perceive the company’s culture as communicatively open are more sensitive to instances of silence, potentially because they expect transparency and responsiveness as cultural norms. From the lens of strategic silence and organisational sustainability, this finding underscores a critical balance between intentional silence, used strategically to manage sensitive information or crises, and unintentional communicative gaps that can erode stakeholder trust. The data imply that in a corporate environment where openness is culturally embedded, silence may be construed less as strategic restraint and more as neglect or disengagement, thereby weakening customer confidence and long-term loyalty. Consequently, for MTN/Telecel’s sustainability strategy, organisational culture must be carefully aligned with communication management practices to ensure that silence, when employed, is contextualised, purposeful, and consistent with the company’s relational ethos. The significance of the correlation ( $p = 0.000$ ) further highlights that this relationship is not due to chance but reflects a systemic dynamic within stakeholder perception, emphasising that communication culture directly affects how customers interpret corporate behaviour. Therefore, the results advocate for a nuanced approach to silence as a strategic tool within stakeholder relationship management: silence must not contradict the cultural

identity of openness but rather reinforce credibility through transparency in intent. This empirical insight contributes to the broader understanding that sustainable organisational performance depends not only on what is communicated but also on how communicative pauses are managed within a culture of trust, reciprocity, and accountability. Ultimately, for MTN/Telecel, embedding strategic silence within an open communicative culture requires deliberate leadership communication, stakeholder education, and the cultivation of interpretive tolerance among customers to prevent silence from being misinterpreted as disregard, thus aligning communication strategy with the pillars of organisational sustainability.

<b>Correlations</b>		
	Strategic silence is generally an effective communication strategy for organisations.	A better balance between transparency and silence would improve my trust and relationship with the company.
<b>Strategic silence is generally an effective communication strategy for organisations.</b>	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.502**
	N	240
<b>A better balance between transparency and silence would improve my trust and relationship with the company.</b>	Pearson Correlation	.502**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1
	N	240

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The correlation analysis between the two constructs, “Strategic silence is generally an effective communication strategy for organizations” and “A better balance between transparency and silence would improve my trust and relationship with the company”, reveals a statistically significant and moderately strong positive relationship ( $r = .502$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 240$ ). This finding suggests that stakeholders who perceive strategic silence as an effective organisational communication strategy are also more likely to believe that achieving an optimal equilibrium between silence and transparency enhances their trust and relationship with the organisation. In the context of organisational sustainability, this correlation underscores a nuanced dynamic in stakeholder relationship management, where silence, often perceived negatively in traditional communication paradigms, emerges as a deliberate and potentially beneficial strategic choice. The result implies that when silence is employed purposefully, such as during crisis management, sensitive negotiations, or periods of strategic transition, it can contribute to sustainable relationship management by minimising misinformation, avoiding premature disclosures, and allowing organisations to communicate from a position of preparedness and authenticity. However, the positive correlation also indicates that silence alone is not sufficient; stakeholders still value transparency and interpret silence as effective only when it is balanced with adequate openness and accountability. In this sense, the data support the argument that strategic silence, when embedded within a transparent communication framework, enhances stakeholder trust, a key driver of organisational legitimacy and long-term sustainability.

### 4.3 Research Objective Three: To analyse the culture of silence and its impact on stakeholder relationships

This objective investigates how the internal culture of silence within an organisation shapes the openness, transparency, and communication climate that influence stakeholder relationships. It seeks to understand how collective avoidance of communication, whether through institutional norms, leadership practices, or fear of accountability, affects customers' perceptions of reliability, honesty, and fairness. The analysis focuses on identifying whether such a culture fosters misunderstanding, mistrust, and disengagement among stakeholders, or if it serves any strategic benefit to organisational stability.

**Table 8: MTN/Telecel avoids open discussions on certain service challenges (e.g. network disruptions, pricing policies, fraudulent activities, etc).**

		Frequency	Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	111	46.3
	Disagree	26	10.8
	Strongly Agree	90	37.5
	Strongly Disagree	13	5.4
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The data presented in Table 8 indicates that out of 240 respondents, a substantial majority, 46.3% agreed and 37.5% strongly agreed, indicating that approximately 83.8% of participants perceive the company as strategically silent on crucial service-related issues that directly affect customer trust and satisfaction. In contrast, only a small minority, comprising 10.8% who disagreed and 5.4% who strongly disagreed, believe the organisation is transparent and open in addressing these

matters. This overwhelming consensus in favour of the “agreement” responses suggests that MTN/Telecel’s communication strategy may rely heavily on a deliberate form of information management, which organisational communication theorists refer to as strategic silence. Such silence can be viewed as a calculated corporate tactic aimed at minimising public scrutiny, managing reputational risks, and preserving internal control over sensitive information that could otherwise trigger customer backlash or regulatory intervention.

**Table 9: This culture of silence negatively affects customer trust and loyalty.**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	110	45.8
	Disagree	1	.4
	Strongly Agree	125	52.1
	Strongly Disagree	4	1.7
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The data presented above from Table 9 shows that from the 240 valid responses analysed, a significant 97.9% of respondents, comprising 45.8% who agreed and 52.1% who strongly agreed, affirm that a culture of silence within organisations negatively affects customer trust and loyalty, whereas only 2.1% (0.4% disagree and 1.7% strongly disagree) refute this position. This overwhelming consensus demonstrates that employees and stakeholders perceive silence not as a neutral or strategic tool, but as a detrimental communication pattern that undermines the relational fabric between the organisation and its external publics. The data suggests that when employees or management withhold information, avoid feedback, or fail to communicate transparently, customers interpret such silence as a lack of accountability, responsiveness, and ethical responsibility. This erosion of open communication channels can ultimately damage brand

reputation and weaken stakeholder confidence, which are critical pillars of sustainable organisational performance. In essence, the high percentage of agreement reinforces the argument that organisational sustainability cannot be achieved in isolation from stakeholder relationship management, and that trust and loyalty, key components of long-term customer retention, are directly contingent upon transparent, two-way communication. The findings imply that strategic silence, when misused or overemphasised as a defensive or protective mechanism, may create an environment of uncertainty and suspicion, thereby diminishing the organisation’s social capital and resilience in competitive markets. Furthermore, the dominance of “strongly agree” responses signal a deep-seated awareness among respondents of the harmful consequences of communicative suppression, suggesting that the issue of silence extends beyond individual behaviours to reflect systemic cultural patterns within organisations.

**Table 10: I prefer full transparency from the company rather than silence or withholding communication when challenges arise.**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	42	17.5
	Disagree	4	1.7
	Strongly Agree	193	80.4
	Strongly Disagree	1	.4
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The findings from Table 10 reveal an overwhelmingly positive orientation toward transparency, with 80.4% of respondents strongly agreeing that they prefer full transparency from the company rather than silence or withholding communication when challenges arise, and an additional 17.5% agreeing with this sentiment. This means that a combined 97.9% of stakeholders advocate for open,

honest, and consistent communication, leaving only a marginal 2.1% who either disagree or strongly disagree. Such results demonstrate that strategic silence, although sometimes employed as a tactical measure to manage crises or protect organisational reputation, may, in fact, carry significant risks when it conflicts with stakeholder expectations for transparency.

**Table 11: I believe leadership style within MTN/Telecel has the propensity to influence communication with customers (stakeholders).**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	137	57.1
	Disagree	1	.4
	Strongly Agree	100	41.7
	Strongly Disagree	2	.8
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

From the 240 valid responses collected, a substantial majority of participants, comprising 57.1% who agree and 41.7% who strongly agree, affirm that leadership style has a significant influence on communication with customers and other stakeholders. This combined 98.8% consensus underscores an overwhelming belief among employees or respondents that leadership approaches directly shape the nature, quality, and effectiveness of organisational communication. Only a negligible minority, 0.4% disagreeing and 0.8% strongly disagreeing, contest this position, suggesting near-unanimous recognition of leadership’s communicative impact. Interpreting this pattern quantitatively within the context of strategic silence and organisational sustainability, it becomes evident that leadership behaviour, whether participative, transformational, or autocratic, establishes the tone for how transparency, responsiveness, and stakeholder engagement are managed. In organisations such as MTN and Telecel, operating in highly competitive, dynamic,

and regulation-sensitive environments, strategic silence may sometimes be employed by leaders as a deliberate communication strategy to maintain organisational image, protect proprietary information, or navigate crises. However, the overwhelming agreement in the data suggests that when leadership uses silence strategically rather than neglectfully, it can strengthen trust, convey control, and ensure long-term stakeholder confidence, thereby enhancing sustainability. The high percentage of agreement also implies that employees perceive leadership not merely as an administrative function but as a communicative force that determines whether silence is interpreted as prudence or as disengagement. Consequently, this finding supports the notion that leadership communication orientation, especially the balance between disclosure and silence, acts as a critical mediator between organisational decisions and stakeholder perceptions.

#### **4.4 Research Objective Four: To assess the mediating roles of leadership style, ethical conduct, and organisational culture on stakeholder relationship management and strategic silence**

This objective seeks to evaluate how leadership behaviours, ethical principles, and organisational culture collectively mediate the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management. It aims to determine whether these internal factors amplify or mitigate the effects of silence on communication outcomes, trust, and organisational image. The assessment focuses on how leadership's communication approach, ethical standards, and cultural orientation influence the balance between silence and transparency, thereby shaping both stakeholder engagement and sustainable organisational practices.

**Table 12: Ethical values (honesty, fairness, and social responsibility) influence how the organisation chooses to share or withhold information.**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	132	55.0
	Disagree	7	2.9
	Strongly Agree	100	41.7
	Strongly Disagree	1	.4
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The findings presented in Table 12 reveal that of the 240 respondents surveyed, a substantial majority, representing 55% who “agree” and 41.7% who “strongly agree,” acknowledge that ethical principles significantly influence decisions regarding information sharing or withholding. This overwhelming consensus, accounting for nearly 97% of the total participants, underscores the perception that ethics are not merely abstract ideals but central determinants in strategic communication processes that impact stakeholder relationships and institutional reputation. The minimal proportion of dissenting views, 2.9% “disagree” and 0.4% “strongly disagree”, suggests that there is near-unanimous recognition of the moral dimension embedded in organisational communication strategies. The dominance of agreement among respondents indicates that ethical considerations form a foundational layer in the exercise of strategic silence, where the choice to withhold information is not necessarily an act of deception, but a deliberate, values-driven decision aimed at protecting stakeholders’ interests, maintaining competitive advantage, or safeguarding organisational integrity. In the context of stakeholder relationship management, this finding implies that organisations that anchor their communication policies in honesty, fairness, and social responsibility are more likely to build resilient trust networks and maintain legitimacy in the eyes of their stakeholders, even when full transparency is not possible. This reinforces the theoretical proposition that ethical alignment acts as a mediating factor between strategic silence and

sustainability outcomes: when ethical norms guide communication restraint, silence becomes a strategic tool for long-term value creation rather than a mechanism for obfuscation.

**Table 13: The organisational culture of MTN/Telecel influences open communication with customers.**

		Frequency	Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	123	51.2
	Disagree	19	7.9
	Strongly Agree	94	39.2
	Strongly Disagree	4	1.7
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The data presented in Table 13 reveals that out of the 240 respondents, a significant majority comprising 123 respondents (51.2%) agreed and 94 respondents (39.2%) strongly agreed that the organisational culture of MTN/Telecel promotes open communication with customers. This cumulative 90.4% positive response rate implies that the corporate culture is largely supportive of transparency, inclusivity, and responsiveness in external communication. Only a small fraction of respondents, 19 (7.9%), disagreeing and 4 (1.7%) strongly disagreeing, reflect minimal dissent, possibly indicating isolated cases of communication barriers or hierarchical constraints that impede full transparency.

**Table 14: Strategic silence is generally an effective communication strategy for organisations.**

		Frequency	Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Agree	18	7.5

Disagree	48	20.0
Strongly Agree	12	5.0
Strongly Disagree	162	67.5
Total	240	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The data from Table 14 indicates that a striking majority of 162 individuals, representing 67.5%, strongly disagreed that strategic silence is an effective communication strategy for organisations. This overwhelming rejection of silence as a viable strategy indicates a prevailing sentiment that silence, when used deliberately or reactively in organisational contexts, may not foster transparency, trust, or positive engagement with key stakeholders. Furthermore, 48 respondents, or 20%, simply disagreed, reinforcing the dominant narrative that most stakeholders or employees perceive silence as counterproductive to sustainable communication and relationship management. In contrast, only 18 respondents (7.5%) agreed, and an even smaller portion of 12 respondents (5%) strongly agreed that strategic silence can be effective. This marginal support highlights a minority belief that, under specific contextual conditions, such as during crises, negotiations, or reputation management, strategic silence might serve as a calculated move to prevent misinformation, mitigate conflict, or allow time for internal alignment before external engagement. However, the overall interpretation from the data suggests that the organisational community leans heavily toward valuing open, transparent, and consistent communication over silence, emphasising that stakeholders interpret silence not as a strategy but as avoidance or lack of accountability.

**Table 15: A better balance between transparency and silence would improve my trust and relationship with the company.**

	Frequency	Percent
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<b>Valid</b>	Agree	59	24.6
	Disagree	3	1.3
	Strongly Agree	177	73.8
	Strongly Disagree	1	.4
	Total	240	100.0

*Source: Field Data 2025*

The data presented from Table 15 reveals that out of 240 respondents, a significant majority of 177 individuals, representing 73.8%, strongly agreed that achieving a better balance between transparency and silence would enhance their trust and relationship with the company. This finding underscores the fundamental importance of equilibrium in communication strategies within organisations, particularly in maintaining and strengthening stakeholder relationships. An additional 24.6% of respondents agreed with this statement, bringing the total positive perception to an overwhelming 98.4%, which demonstrates near-unanimous stakeholder consensus on the need for measured communication. Only a negligible portion of the population expressed disagreement (1.3%) or strong disagreement (0.4%), suggesting that resistance to this perspective is virtually absent. Interpreting these results through the theoretical lens of strategic silence, the data suggest that stakeholders do not necessarily perceive silence as inherently negative; rather, they appreciate when silence is exercised judiciously, aligning with the principles of strategic communication and responsible disclosure. This perspective aligns with existing literature that views selective silence as a managerial tool for safeguarding sensitive information, maintaining competitive advantage, and controlling organisational narratives without compromising ethical standards. The findings imply that organisations that cultivate a transparent communication culture while practising purposeful silence can simultaneously foster trust and protect institutional integrity.

## **4.5 Hypothesis Testing and Interpretation**

This section presents the statistical testing of the six hypotheses formulated in Section 1.5 of this study. The hypotheses were designed to determine the extent to which strategic silence influences stakeholder relationship management and organisational sustainability, and to assess the mediating effects of leadership style, ethical conduct, and organisational culture on this relationship. Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed as the primary statistical tool to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the variables. This choice was appropriate because the study involved continuous variables derived from Likert-scale items, allowing for the identification of statistically significant associations between strategic silence (independent variable) and stakeholder-related outcomes (dependent variables). The results and interpretations are presented below.

### **4.5.1 Hypothesis One (H1)**

H1: Strategic silence does not influence stakeholder relationship management and sustainability.

Statistical Test: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

Results:  $r = .502$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $N = 240$ )

Interpretation:

The correlation analysis revealed a moderately strong positive relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management. The correlation coefficient ( $r = .502$ ) with a significance value of  $p < .001$  indicates that the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This means that stakeholders who perceive strategic silence as an effective communication strategy also tend to exhibit higher levels of trust and stronger relationships with the organization. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H1) is rejected, confirming that strategic silence significantly

influences stakeholder relationship management and organisational sustainability. This finding supports *Ledingham (2003)* and *Freeman et al. (2010)*, who argue that communication discretion, when ethically and contextually applied, enhances stakeholder trust and long-term organizational legitimacy.

#### **4.5.2 Hypothesis Two (H2)**

H2: Strategic silence does not significantly correlate with organisational sustainability.

Statistical Test: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

Results:  $r = .463, p < .01$  (N = 240)

Interpretation:

The results show a significant positive correlation between strategic silence and organizational sustainability, suggesting that the way MTN and Telecel manage information withholding or delayed responses impacts stakeholders' perceptions of reliability and long-term viability. The p-value ( $< .01$ ) indicates that this relationship is statistically significant, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H2). Therefore, strategic silence significantly correlates with organizational sustainability. The implication is that when silence is practiced deliberately and explained transparently, it can stabilize stakeholder confidence and mitigate reputational risks, aligning with *Clarkson's (1995)* stakeholder performance framework and *Carroll's (1991)* CSR model, both of which emphasize ethical communication as foundational to sustainability.

#### **4.5.3 Hypothesis Three (H3)**

H3: Culture of silence does not impact stakeholder relationships.

Statistical Test: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

Results:  $r = .536, p < .01$  (N = 240)

Interpretation:

The correlation between a culture of silence and stakeholder trust and loyalty was found to be statistically significant ( $r = .536, p < .01$ ). This indicates that organizational cultures that normalize silence negatively affect customer trust and loyalty. Hence, the null hypothesis (H3) is rejected. The findings reveal that a culture of silence significantly impacts stakeholder relationships, often in a detrimental way, especially when it replaces open communication with avoidance. This outcome supports *Morrison and Milliken (2000)*, who contended that organizational silence undermines transparency and collective learning, thereby weakening long-term stakeholder engagement. It also implies that sustained relational trust requires communication cultures that promote openness rather than concealment.

#### **4.5.4 Hypothesis Four (H4)**

H4: Leadership style does not significantly mediate the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management.

Statistical Test: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

Results:  $r = .535, p < .01$  ( $N = 240$ )

Interpretation:

The correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between leadership style and the way organizations handle communication silence ( $r = .535, p < .01$ ). This demonstrates that leadership behaviour plays a mediating role in how stakeholders interpret silence—whether as prudence or avoidance. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H4) is rejected, indicating that leadership style significantly mediates the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management. This finding confirms *Bass and Avolio's (1994)* transformational leadership model

and *Treviño et al. (2008)*, who emphasized that ethical, participatory leadership enhances communication credibility and fosters stakeholder trust. Leaders who communicate with integrity and transparency can leverage strategic silence as a tool for reflection and credibility rather than secrecy.

#### **4.5.5 Hypothesis Five (H5)**

H5: Ethical conduct does not significantly mediate the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management.

Statistical Test: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

Results:  $r = .536$ ,  $p < .01$  (N = 240)

Interpretation:

The analysis demonstrated a significant correlation between ethical values and the perceived impact of silence on stakeholder trust. The positive correlation ( $r = .536$ ) with a significance value ( $p < .01$ ) indicates that ethical conduct is a strong mediator in determining how silence affects stakeholder relationships. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H5) is rejected, affirming that ethical conduct significantly mediates the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management. This supports *Treviño et al. (2008)* and *Carroll (1991)*, who argue that ethics underpin effective communication and corporate legitimacy. When organizations manage silence with fairness, honesty, and social responsibility, stakeholders interpret the communication restraint as protective rather than deceptive, reinforcing trust and corporate reputation.

#### **4.5.6 Hypothesis Six (H6)**

H6: Organisational culture does not significantly mediate the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management.

Statistical Test: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

Results:  $r = .434$ ,  $p < .01$  ( $N = 240$ )

Interpretation

The findings indicate a significant positive correlation between organisational culture and stakeholder responses to communication silence ( $r = .434$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This means that the strength of open communication culture directly influences how silence is interpreted, positively or negatively. The null hypothesis (H6) is therefore rejected, confirming that organizational culture significantly mediates the relationship between strategic silence and stakeholder relationship management. This aligns with *Bourne (2016)* and *Morrison and Milliken (2000)*, who maintain that transparent cultures enhance stakeholder confidence, while closed, hierarchical cultures amplify suspicion and mistrust. Consequently, maintaining an open culture where silence is ethically contextualized contributes to long-term relationship stability and sustainability.

#### **4.6. Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented an analysis of the research findings that were analysed from the set of data collected from the responses of consumers of both telcos (MTN Ghana and Telecel Ghana). The research findings were discussed under the research questions set out in chapter one to help attain the objective of the study. This part of the study also tested the hypothesis set out in chapter one of the study to assert and refute the initial predictions.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the synthesis of the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations derived from the study. It integrates insights from the data analysis in the preceding chapter with the theoretical frameworks of Stakeholder Theory and Relationship Management Theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of how deliberate communication restraint, commonly referred to as strategic silence, affects stakeholder trust, corporate reputation, and long-term sustainability. The chapter begins by summarising the key empirical findings that emerged from the quantitative analysis, emphasising the relationships between strategic silence, leadership behaviour, ethical values, organisational culture, and stakeholder engagement. It then draws conclusions based on the statistical evidence, highlighting how communication balance between silence and transparency shapes organisational legitimacy and relational stability. Finally, the chapter offers practical recommendations for improving stakeholder relationship management and communication ethics within corporate settings, followed by an outline of the study's limitations and suggestions for future research. Collectively, this chapter bridges empirical evidence with theoretical implications, offering both academic and practical contributions to the understanding of sustainable corporate communication in contemporary organisational contexts.

#### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

1. The findings of this study reveal that strategic silence, when applied deliberately and ethically, serves as a meaningful communication tool that influences stakeholder trust and organisational

sustainability. The quantitative analysis established a moderately strong and statistically significant relationship ( $r = .502, p < .001$ ) between perceptions of strategic silence and the belief that balancing silence with transparency enhances trust and relationship quality. This suggests that silence, when strategically managed, can positively shape stakeholder perceptions and contribute to sustainable organisational communication.

2. The second major finding shows that leadership style, ethics, and organisational culture significantly mediate how strategic silence affects stakeholder relationships. The data indicate that ethical and transformational leadership fosters constructive silence that builds trust, while unethical or suppressive silence erodes it. Ethical values such as honesty, fairness, and social responsibility strongly influence how information is shared or withheld, reinforcing the importance of leadership and ethical conduct in shaping positive stakeholder perceptions.

3. Another key finding highlights stakeholders' strong preference for transparency, even when silence might be strategically appropriate. The majority of respondents favoured open communication and timely disclosure, emphasising that trust and relationship quality are best maintained through clarity and responsiveness. This demonstrates that while silence can be strategic, it must always be balanced with openness to sustain credibility and stakeholder engagement.

4. The study also found that organisational culture plays an essential role in determining how stakeholders interpret communication practices. Companies with open and inclusive cultures were perceived as more trustworthy during periods of silence, whereas those that normalised communication suppression faced diminished trust and engagement. This indicates that fostering a culture of openness enhances the effectiveness of strategic silence in maintaining stakeholder confidence.

5. Finally, the study concludes that strategic silence has both constructive and destructive effects on organisational sustainability, depending on its intent, ethical grounding, and timing. While silence may protect reputation in certain contexts, prolonged or unexplained silence can weaken trust and long-term loyalty. Therefore, organisations that balance transparency with strategic restraint can strengthen their relationships, enhance corporate credibility, and support long-term sustainability, whereas misuse of silence risks reputational damage and stakeholder disengagement.

## **5.2. Discussion of Findings**

### **5.2.1 RQ1: To what extent does strategic silence influence stakeholder relationship management and sustainability?**

The findings of this study reveal that strategic silence, when used judiciously and ethically, significantly influences stakeholder trust and organizational sustainability. The positive and statistically significant correlation ( $r = .502$ ,  $p < .001$ ) indicates that silence, when perceived as intentional and well-timed, contributes to stakeholder relationship quality. This supports the view of Pang et al. (2022), who found that controlled silence in corporate crises can preserve trust by reducing speculation and emotional escalation. Similarly, Le et al. (2019) argued that silence can stabilize stakeholder perceptions during uncertainty if it is accompanied by subsequent transparency. From the perspective of Stakeholder Theory, silence must be viewed as a communicative responsibility rather than avoidance (Noland & Phillips, 2010). The present findings confirm that, when used strategically and within an ethical framework, silence enhances relational trust, supporting Dimitrov's (2017) conceptualization of indirect communication as an instrument for sustaining stakeholder dialogue.

### **5.2.2 RQ2: What is the relationship between strategic silence and long-term organizational sustainability?**

The correlation analysis further shows that strategic silence is positively associated with organizational sustainability. This suggests that silence, when grounded in responsibility and timing, reinforces stakeholder confidence and contributes to reputational stability. Wang, Jia, and Zhang (2021) found that firms practicing quiet giving enhance legitimacy through understated ethical behavior. Similarly, Maor, Gilad, and Bloom (2013) demonstrated that silence in regulatory communication can sustain reputation when accompanied by ethical action. Within the framework of Relationship Management Theory, sustainable stakeholder relationships emerge from achieving equilibrium between communication and discretion. Morsing and Schultz (2006) also argued that authentic engagement, not continuous disclosure, is the cornerstone of credibility. Thus, silence enhances sustainability only when stakeholders perceive it as an ethical and deliberate choice aligned with long-term relational integrity and mutual understanding.

### **5.2.3 RQ3: To what extent does the culture of silence impact stakeholder relationships?**

A key insight from this study is that the organizational culture surrounding silence profoundly affects stakeholder relationships. The data show that when silence becomes institutionalized or normalized, it erodes trust. This finding aligns with Trinkaus and Giacalone (2005), who documented how stakeholder silence during the Enron scandal undermined corporate accountability and transparency. Likewise, Fassin and Buelens (2011) illustrated that communication hypocrisy damages stakeholder confidence by creating ethical dissonance. The current study also supports Johansen and Nielsen (2011), who found that relational trust depends on open stakeholder dialogue rather than top-down silence. In contrast, cultures that emphasize openness and mutual listening cultivate stronger trust and commitment. This aligns with

Macnamara (2016), who argued that organizations achieve legitimacy through listening rather than through message control. Thus, a culture of enforced silence weakens relationship management, while a culture of open dialogue promotes sustained engagement.

#### **5.2.4 RQ4: What is the mediating role of leadership style, ethical conduct, and organizational culture in stakeholder relationship management and strategic silence?**

The findings demonstrate that leadership, ethics, and organizational culture play critical mediating roles between strategic silence and stakeholder relationships. The significant correlations ( $r = .535$ ,  $p < .01$  for leadership;  $r = .536$ ,  $p < .01$  for ethics) indicate that these mediators shape whether silence is interpreted as prudent or deceptive. Ethical and transformational leadership promotes constructive silence that builds trust, while authoritarian approaches amplify suspicion and disengagement. Yusuf, Yousaf, and Ishaque (2024) confirmed that ethical framing determines whether silence is viewed as transparency or concealment. Likewise, Seppälä (2006) proposed that transitioning from corporate silence to constructive engagement requires moral courage and participatory dialogue. Meintjes (2012) further emphasized that governance-oriented leadership enhances ethical communication and stakeholder inclusion. Collectively, these findings indicate that the effectiveness of silence depends on the ethical and cultural framework in which it is practiced, confirming Reijntjes and Groeneveld's (2025) conclusion that strategic CSR silence can only function responsibly when informed by moral intent and transparent follow-up communication.

Integrating these findings through the lenses of Stakeholder Theory and Relationship Management Theory, the study reveals that strategic silence is both a communicative and ethical choice that directly affects sustainability outcomes. It corroborates Dimitrov's (2017) notion that silence functions as a form of meta-communication—a relational signal that conveys prudence and respect

when executed transparently. The Ghanaian findings add regional nuance, demonstrating that stakeholders value balanced transparency rather than complete openness. This observation extends the international model proposed by Pang et al. (2022), highlighting cultural expectations as a moderating factor in interpreting silence. Therefore, strategic silence, when guided by ethics, responsible leadership, and transparent culture, emerges as a viable communication strategy that reinforces stakeholder trust and promotes long-term organizational sustainability.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The study concludes that strategic silence, when exercised within ethical, transparent, and relationally sensitive frameworks, can significantly contribute to organisational sustainability. The moderate positive correlation between strategic silence and stakeholder trust implies that silence is effective only when it complements, rather than replaces, transparent communication. Drawing on Stakeholder Theory, this conclusion underscores that stakeholders are not passive recipients of information but active interpreters of communicative intent. Organisations that maintain a deliberate balance between discretion and disclosure demonstrate respect for stakeholder intelligence and moral autonomy, thereby sustaining legitimacy and trust. Within Ghana's telecommunications sector, where information sensitivity and competition are high, strategic silence can function as a risk management mechanism, but only when used with ethical justification and followed by adequate explanation. Therefore, the sustainability of MTN and Telecel depends on their ability to institutionalise a communication culture that values ethical restraint without compromising relational transparency.

Additionally, the research concludes that leadership, ethics, and organisational culture are pivotal mediators in determining the effectiveness of strategic silence. The empirical evidence clearly

shows that silence, when guided by ethical leadership and reinforced by an open culture, enhances stakeholder confidence and preserves reputational capital. Conversely, silence rooted in avoidance, manipulation, or managerial authoritarianism erodes trust and undermines the organisation's social contract. Relationship Management Theory supports this by emphasising that relationships are sustained through mutual understanding, communication satisfaction, and trust. Thus, sustainable organisations are those that perceive communication as a moral responsibility, not merely a strategic function. Strategic silence, therefore, is not a denial of communication but a sophisticated extension of it, requiring timing, ethics, and stakeholder empathy to transform silence from a threat into an instrument of sustainability.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for future researchers**

- Future research should include a bigger sample from different regions and sectors and industries to present a broader view of the effects of strategic silence on stakeholder relationship management.
- Future research should investigate the specific situations and instances that required the use of strategic silence, its successes and its failures in order to determine when and how organizational heads use that for effective practice.
- Future researchers should use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore and understand the effects strategic silence has on stakeholder relationship management and organizational sustainability.
- Future research should compare cross-cultural perceptions of strategic silence to examine how cultural communication norms influence stakeholder responses.

#### **5.4.1 Recommendations for organizations**

- Organization should adopt a balanced communication framework that integrates strategic silence with proactive transparency.
- The study recommends that organizations emphasize on cultivating an open organizational culture that aligns with stakeholder expectations.
- The study recommends continuous stakeholder engagement and education on strategic silence as a communication strategy.

#### **5.5 Limitations of the Study**

- Study was confined to the Ghanaian telecommunications sector, focusing on MTN and Telecel, which limits the generalizability of findings across other industries or cultural contexts.
- The study relied primarily on quantitative survey data, which, while statistically robust, may not have captured the deeper emotional and cultural nuances of how stakeholders interpret silence. Perceptions of communication ethics, trust, and transparency are inherently subjective and may benefit from qualitative triangulation through interviews or focus groups.
- Self-reported data are susceptible to response bias, as participants may have provided socially desirable answers rather than their true perceptions. This limitation may have affected the precision of correlational interpretations.

## **5.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter summarized the entire study, detailing the summary of the entire research, the study limitations and recommendations for future studies and organizations.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

#### **SECTION A (RQ1): STRATEGIC SILENCE AND STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT.**

1. MTN/Telecel sometimes delays responses or withhold information about important issues (e.g. service disruptions, pricing policies and fraudulent activities).
2. When the company remains silent on an issue, it influences my trust in the organization.
3. Delayed communication helps the company maintain a professional relationship with customers.

#### **SECTION B (RQ2): STRATEGIC SILENCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY.**

4. The way MTN/Telecel manages communication influences my decision to continue using their services.
5. Limited communication by MTN/Telecel affects how I view its long-term reliability.
6. I believe that how the company handles communication (using silence) impacts its overall reputation and sustainability.

#### **SECTION C (RQ3): CULTURE OF SILENCE AND STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS.**

7. MTN/Telecel avoids openly discussing certain service challenges (e.g. network disruptions, fraudulent activities and pricing policies).
8. The culture of silence by these organizations negatively affects customer trust and loyalty.

9. I prefer full transparency from the company rather than silence or withholding communication when challenges arise.

**SECTION D (RQ4): MEDIATING FACTORS (LEADERSHIP, ETHICS, ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE).**

10. I believe leadership style within MTN/Telecel have potencies of influencing communication with customers.
11. Ethical values (honesty, fairness and social responsibility) influence how the company chooses to share or withhold information.
12. The organizational culture of MTN/Telecel influences open communication with customers.

**SECTION E: GENERAL PERCEPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.**

13. Strategic silence is generally an effective communication for organizations.
14. Excessive silence makes me lose confidence and interest in MTN/Telecel.
15. A better balance between transparency and silence would improve my trust and relationship with the organization.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Indicate whether you are an MTN user, Telecel user or both.

Response format: each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

1= strongly disagree

2= disagree

3= agree

4= strongly agree

Dear respondent, I am a postgraduate student at the University of Media, Arts, and Communication—Institute of Journalism. I would like to know your opinion/experience(s) concerning stakeholder relationship management with regard to the telcos in Ghana, specifically MTN Ghana and Telecel Ghana. For the purpose of elaboration, stakeholder relationship management is essentially about building and maintaining healthy trust-based connections with the people and groups who are affected by or can influence an organization. It involves communication and engagement practices that align stakeholder needs and expectations with organizational goals to reduce conflict and enhance long-term sustainability.

It will take you about 5 minutes to complete this questionnaire. Participation is strictly on a voluntary basis, and all information will be kept anonymous. I will, therefore, urge you to be as objective in your responses as possible. Thank you for your cooperation. Further inquiries should be directed to the corresponding author via [juliet.a.koomson@gmail.com](mailto:juliet.a.koomson@gmail.com).