SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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DEVELOPING A PUBLIC RELATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY IN GHANA: A CASE OF THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC PLANNING

BY

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DECLARATION

STUDENT

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

EDWIN SAVIOUR KWAME KOGE

…………………………..……………….… July 25, 2024 …………………………………………

Signature Date

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This Thesis has been prepared and presented under our supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Thesis laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication UniMAC.

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ABSTRACT

This study sets out to develop a Public Relations Framework for public policy advocacy in Ghana using the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MFEP) as a case study. Over the years, public policy advocacy efforts have faced and continue to be bedeviled with stakeholder resistance. The case of MFEP is no exception. Consequently, this study explored Public Relations (PR) strategies used by the MFEP over the years to ascertain why public policy advocacy fails to gain stakeholders' support. Using in-depth interviews, this study purposively selected ten (10) participants from among Public Relations and Public Policy experts to solicit primary information on past and on-going public policy advocacy efforts of the MFEP. In addition, this study used existing knowledge gathered from scholarly articles which have provided background information relative to the tenets of the Public Sphere Theory used in the study, and the analysis of public resistance to notable public policy initiatives led by the MFEP. The results of this study revealed that though the MFEP's PR strategies involved the use of traditional and digital media, its messages were often simplistic in nature. Translation of complex policies into simple narratives that resonate with everyday experiences of target audiences has not been consistently achieved. Internal structures and cultural barriers within the MFEP tend to impede effective deployment of PR strategies for public policy advocacy. In addition, bureaucratic hierarchies delay messaging, a culture that prioritizes internal politics over clear and cohesive communication strategies. The study concludes that the MFEP's PR strategies are significantly shaped by the prevailing political and social dynamics, often resulting in reactive and defensive messaging. Experts underscored the importance of adopting more innovative and engaging communication methods. Hence, they suggested a shift towards a more conversational tone and greater use of digital platforms to enhance interactivity and engagement and emphasised the need for continuous feedback mechanisms and a more proactive approach to managing public opinion.

Keywords: Ghana; MFEP; PR Experts; Public Policy Experts; Public Relations Framework; Public Policy Advocacy

DEDICATION

I dedicate the successful completion of this research work to the unwavering support and encouragement I received from Miriam Ama Odi, mother of our three adorable children – Edem, Eyram and Elorm Koge.

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E-Levy:	Electronic Transfer Levy
BoG:	Bank of Ghana
CAGD:	Controller and Accountant General's Department
COCOBOD:	Ghana Cocoa Board
GRA:	Ghana Revenue Authority
MFEP:	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning
NPRA:	National Pensions Regulatory Authority
NLA:	National Lottery Authority
P:	Participant
PP:	Public Policy
PPA:	Public Procurement Authority
PR:	Public Relations
PST:	Public Sphere Theory
RO:	Research Question
SECF:	Strategic Engagement and Communication Framework
SEC:	Securities and Exchange Commission
VAT:	Value Added Tax

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0. Introduction

Public Relations (PR) is an essential tool for facilitating public policy advocacy, acting as a crucial bridge between policymakers and stakeholders, by fostering transparent communication and enabling effective stakeholder engagement (Smith, 2020). This role is especially critical within the context of Ghana's public sector, which is tasked with implementing policies that require substantial buy-in from various stakeholder groups. The inherent complexity of public policies often leads to resistance, emphasizing the need for effective PR strategies to mitigate any such resistance.

The value of PR in public policy advocacy is highlighted by its unique ability to frame policies in ways that connect and resonate with the public (Jackson et al., 2021). By shaping the narrative and contextualizing policies, PR can help influence public opinion, build consensus, and ultimately secure the necessary support for public policy implementation (Strömbäck, 2012). This influence is evident in Ghana, where recently introduced policies such as the Electronic Transfer Levy (E-Levy), Luxury Vehicle Tax, TV License Fee and Mobile SIM Card Re-registration have been met with substantial resistance. This resistance suggests a possible gap in the current PR strategies employed for advocacy, prompting the need for more effective and strategic PR approaches.

Ghana's public sector has shown a growing appreciation for comprehensive PR strategies that can potentially connect and resonate with diverse stakeholders (Amoako, 2017). Yet, there is a lack of empirical investigation into this growing phenomenon within the Ghanaian context. This gap in research is significant, given the intricate landscape of public opinion in Ghana and the wide array of stakeholders involved; both of which present unique challenges to public policy advocacy.

To address these challenges and navigate the complexities of the Ghanaian stakeholder landscape, Sackey (2016) espouses the view that it is crucial to critically examine current PR practices and how they are deployed for public policy advocacy. Adjei et al. (2016) argued that such an examination would provide valuable insights into the current situation and the strategies that have been successful, as well as those that may have fallen short. This information could then inform the development of more effective, tailored PR strategies that better meet the needs of Ghana's public sector, fostering greater support for public policies and enhancing the success of advocacy efforts.

With this insight, the development of a comprehensive PR framework, particularly tailored to Ghana's complex socio-political landscape, is an obvious necessity. This is because it can guide the public sector in deploying PR strategies that would enhance policy advocacy, improve stakeholder communication, and potentially increase public acceptance of, and support for, critical policies. The development of such a framework, however, requires a deep understanding of the current application of PR within Ghana's public sector, including a thorough examination of the successes and failures of past and ongoing efforts.

This study seeks to fill this significant void in the literature by providing much-needed empirical insights into the role and application of PR in public policy advocacy within Ghana's public sector. The objective is to extend the existing body of knowledge in PR and public policy advocacy. More specifically, the study aims to develop a practical framework for PR practitioners and public sector officials, which will enhance the effectiveness of policy advocacy efforts through strategic PR deployment. Mohammed (2020) opined that the successful execution of public policies is heavily reliant on the effective utilization of PR strategies to rally stakeholder endorsement. Therefore, the timeliness and relevance of this study are evident, bearing substantial theoretical and practical implications, particularly in the Ghanaian context. Given the persistent resistance to policies, the potential positive impact of a well-formulated and executed PR framework cannot be overstated. This study thus not only seeks to contribute to the academic discourse on PR in public policy advocacy but also aspires to offer tangible tools, strategies, and alternatives to improve public policy acceptance in Ghana.

1.1. Statement of Problem

The issue of policy advocacy by public institutions, particularly in emerging economies has increasingly become a monumental challenge in contemporary governance (Ohemeng & Ayee 2016). The prevalence of this challenge is evident in Ghana considering the frequency of resistance met by numerous public policies including Value Added Tax (VAT), TV License Fee, E-Levy, Luxury Vehicle Tax, and Mobile SIM Card Re-registration among others in the recent past. Reports from Afrobarometer (2022); Graphic Online (2022) and The Fourth Estate (2022) clearly showcase the level of opposition these policies faced and underscored an unsettling rift between the machinery of public policy implementation advocacy and the fabric of public acceptance or resistance. The persistent resistance paints a picture of a population that is not in alignment with the policies of its governing institutions, an image which poses severe risks to societal harmony and progress. The situation suggests a significant issue gap that requires urgent attention.

It is the ardent belief of this research that, without a PR structure that can effectively rally stakeholder support, public institutions risk a continuous cycle of policy backlash that could undermine governance and foster an environment of uncertainty and mistrust (Macnamara, 2016). This state of affairs presents a compelling case to develop a framework that accurately reflects the peculiarities of public sector PR in emerging economies like Ghana.

Undoubtedly, PR as a discipline has seen significant growth over the years, with various theories and models being developed (Gregory & Willis, 2022). However, much of this theoretical advancement has focused predominantly on the corporate and non-profit sectors in developed economies (Albanna et al., 2022; Anani-Bossman, 2021; Tetteh, 2020), leaving public sector PR in emerging economies like Ghana significantly underrepresented. This discrepancy signals a glaring contextual gap that can inadvertently hamper the evolution of public sector PR practices in emerging economies. In reinforcing the contextual gap argument, Nutsugah & Anani-Bossman (2023) opined that, existing PR theories may fall short in adequately addressing the unique socio-cultural, political, and economic landscapes that influence public sector PR practices in emerging economies.

The underrepresentation of public sector PR, especially in emerging economies in theoretical discourse as argued by Albanna et al. (2022); Anani-Bossman (2021) and Tetteh (2020) is not just a scholarly oversight, but has real-world implications for public institutions in Ghana. The absence of frameworks that take into account the specific nuances of the Ghanaian context means that public sector institutions may struggle to develop effective PR strategies that resonate with their diverse stakeholder groups. Furthermore, without relevant theoretical guidance, public sector institutions risk using PR practices ill-suited for their own local contexts, which could lead to ineffective communication, misunderstanding, and resistance from stakeholders as, has been witnessed in Ghana in the cases stated earlier.

The significance of PR in public policy advocacy is increasingly acknowledged worldwide (Buhmann & White, 2022), yet the specific dynamics of its implementation in the public sector of Ghana remain profoundly understudied. Ghana, with its diverse socio-cultural composition, vibrant media landscape, and active civil society, possesses unique contextual realities that can significantly impact PR practices. These factors play a pivotal role in shaping the effectiveness of PR strategies in garnering public support for policies (Dilenschneider, 2022).

The above local realities are often marked by cultural complexity, socio-political diversity, and regional disparities, which can potentially influence public perceptions and attitudes towards public policy initiatives. Neglecting these factors can lead to misaligned PR strategies that fail to resonate with the population, thereby undermining advocacy efforts. Therefore, understanding these dynamics is not only imperative but indispensable in creating PR strategies that can effectively navigate Ghana's complex and diverse public policy advocacy landscape. This situation necessitates research that delves deeply into these contextual factors, ensuring PR strategies are tailored to the intricacies of the Ghanaian context. It is envisaged that, by filling this critical gap, we can ensure more effective advocacy, ultimately leading to the successful implementation of public policies in Ghana.

In light of this significant issue and contextual gaps, this proposed research emerges as opportune, urgent and indispensable. Since the current academic discourse surrounding PR and public policy advocacy, while growing, fails to comprehensively address the unique challenges and opportunities presented within Ghana's public sector. This shortfall has substantial practical implications as it leaves PR practitioners without the necessary tools and frameworks to effectively advocate for policy initiatives. This dire situation thus underscores the immediate need for this research, which seeks to illuminate, fill and address these gaps within both academia and practice.

In effect, the study promises not only to enhance scholarly understanding of the use of PR for public policy advocacy in emerging economies like Ghana, but also to provide a robust, context-specific framework for PR practitioners operating within Ghana's public sector. The development of this framework will serve as a beacon, guiding public sector PR practices in Ghana and beyond, and ultimately facilitating more effective public policy advocacy. Therefore, conducting this research is not a mere academic exercise; but represents a critical endeavour towards improving the acceptance of public policies in Ghana, thereby enhancing governance and ultimately promoting national development. It is thus, an urgent call to bridge the divide between public policy formulation and its acceptance through effective PR practice.

1.2. Research Questions

This study provides answers to the following questions, which are linked to the research objectives and they attempt at unraveling the gaps in the existing research studies on public relations framework for public policy advocacy in the public sectors of Ghana which this study intends to bridge.

1. How are PR strategies employed by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MFEP) to gain stakeholder support for public policy?

2. What challenges are encountered by the MFEP in deploying PR strategies for public policy advocacy?
3. What are the perspectives of Public Relations and Public Policy experts on past and on-going public policy advocacy efforts of the MFEP?

1. 3. Research Objectives

This study sets out to achieve the three main objectives namely, broad, and specific. Broadly speaking the study explores how to develop public relations framework for public policy advocacy using MFEP as a case study. However, specifically, it sought to:

1. To explore the MFEP's PR strategies employed to gain stakeholder support for public policy.
2. Identify challenges that are encountered by the MFEP in deploying PR strategies for public policy advocacy.
3. Examine the perspectives of Public Relations and Public Policy experts on past and on-going public policy advocacy efforts of the MFEP.

1.4. Scope of the Study

The study is situated within the realm of Ghana's public sector institutions with focus on understanding the use of PR for public policy advocacy. It concentrated on public policy advocacy efforts of Ghana's Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning which faced substantial public resistance during the implementation of its E-Levy and Luxury Vehicle Tax policies among others. The role of PR in public policy advocacy can vary considerably between different countries and cultural contexts, thus underscoring the importance of maintaining a context-specific for the study. Geographically, it is limited to Ghana due to its specific socio-political landscape.

Past and ongoing public policy advocacy efforts of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning will provide a valuable lens to explore the dynamics and effectiveness of PR practices in shaping public opinion and facilitating public policy acceptance. The study therefore does not include private sector or non-governmental organisations and their PR policies and programmes.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study's potential contributions span across theoretical, practical, and policy areas. Theoretically, the study seeks to address existing gaps in literature regarding the use of PR for public policy advocacy within Ghana's public sector. It is envisaged that the findings would broaden the academic understanding of this relatively underexplored area. Also, developing a context-specific PR framework would contribute to public sector PR practices and public policy advocacy literature, extending the relevance of PR theory into the context of public sectors in emerging economies, a domain yet to be thoroughly studied in current PR scholarship.

Practically, the study would provide useful insights to PR practitioners within Ghana's public sector. The context-specific PR framework developed as part of this study would serve as a reference point for effective PR practices for public policy advocacy in a Ghanaian. The framework would enable practitioners to devise more effective PR strategies for advocacy, which would in turn enhance stakeholder engagement and foster a higher degree of public acceptance of government policies.

At the policy level, the study has implications for the development and execution of public sector policies in Ghana and would provide vital insights into how PR can be effectively utilized to secure public support, potentially leading to the adoption of more nuanced policy-making processes that are guided by PR principles. Additionally, by shedding light on some of the reasons behind public resistance to specific public policies, the study would provide guidance in devising effective ways to mitigate any such resistance to future public policy implementation efforts.

1.6. Organisation of the Study

The study is structured into five comprehensive chapters. Chapter one serves as the introduction, providing the background to the study. This chapter delineates the study's context, research problem, objectives, questions, and the scope. It highlights the study's potential contributions to both theory and practice. Chapter two reviewed existing literature, offering detailed exploration of scholarly works relevant to the study. It examines the concepts of the role of PR in public policy advocacy, PR strategies in public sector institutions, challenges in deploying PR for public policy advocacy in public sector PR in Ghana, framework development in PR and applying PR theories to public policy advocacy. It also identified and discussed the gaps in the current literature that the study aimed to fill. Chapter three establishes the appropriate theory within which the study fits and provides detailed account of the methodological approach adopted for the study. It covers the research design, population, sample and sampling techniques, data collection methods and instruments, and data analysis procedures. Chapter four provides that analysis of the study’s findings, and discussion of its findings. This was done systematically to address the research questions and objectives, linking the empirical findings to the theoretical perspectives reviewed in chapter two. Chapter five presents a summary of the key research findings, draws conclusions, and makes some recommendations for future studies. It also presented a proposed PR framework for public policy advocacy in Ghana by public sector PR practitioners.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of key themes relative to public relations in the context of public policy advocacy. It aims to critically assess and synthesize prior research, providing a contextual framework within which the present study is situated. It focuses on identifying the relevant gaps or areas of contention in the existing literature which are departing from the conventional thinking, thereby justifying the contemporariness of this thesis study.

2.1. Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation is the background from which knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for research study. It serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the statement of problem, the scope, the significance, the research questions, and the objectives to be achieved. In the context of this thesis, a theoretical foundation is a formal, peer-reviewed theoretical model that used to explain the issue that is driving the research.

2.1.1. Public Sphere Theory (PST)

The Public Sphere Theory, primarily attributed to Jürgen Habermas in his seminal work "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" (1962), posits a realm of social life where individuals can engage in open discourse, unfettered by state control or commercial interests (Garnham, 2020). The basic assumption of this theory is that in a democratic society, the public sphere serves as an arena for citizens to discuss, critique, and influence public opinion and decision-making processes (Larsen, 2020).

An important strength of this theory is its normative ideal of fostering democratic engagement. It emphasizes rational-critical discourse as a mechanism for citizens to deliberate on matters of common interest (Fenton, 2018). The theory is also instrumental in evaluating the health of a democracy by assessing the extent to which public discourse is inclusive and representative of diverse viewpoints (Susen, 2011).

However, the theory has been critiqued for its limitations, most notably its exclusivity and idealism. The original conceptualization by Habermas has been criticized for being Eurocentric and gender-blind, often disregarding the marginalized voices in society, such as those of women and minorities (Johnson, 2006). Additionally, scholars like Michael Schudson argue that the Habermasian ideal of rational-critical discourse is seldom met in the real world, given the influence of power dynamics and economic interests (Schudson, 1997). In essence, the theory offers valuable insights into the conditions required for effective democratic participation life. However, it has been critiqued for its idealistic and exclusive tendencies, which often overlook the complexities of social interactions in contemporary democratic societies.

2.1.2. Relevance of PST to the Study

The Public Sphere Theory serves as a highly relevant theoretical framework for this study because one of its foundational principles is the importance of discourse in shaping public opinion and, subsequently, public policy. In a democratic context like Ghana, a public relations Framework built taking into account the tenets of this theory would inherently prioritize open dialogue, participatory governance, and civic engagement values that align closely with the ultimate goals of public policy advocacy. Since this study focuses on public policy advocacy, understanding the mechanics of effective discourse within the public sphere becomes vital. This is because advocacy groups, government organizations, and individual citizens partake in this sphere, sharing information and arguments that aim to shape policy direction.

Also, the theory's emphasis on fostering a space for open dialogue aligns seamlessly with the study's objective to develop communicative actions that are contextually relevant for Ghana. With a framework influenced by this theory, advocacy efforts can be strategically tailored to fit the unique cultural, social, and political dynamics of Ghana, thereby ensuring not just effective communication but meaningful engagement with citizens on government policies. This meaningful engagement is particularly crucial for a topic as complex and multifaceted as public policy advocacy, where stakeholder involvement is not just preferable but essential.

Furthermore, the focus of the theory on inclusion strengthens its suitability for the study. By emphasizing the importance of including diverse voices, especially marginalized ones, the theory enables us to design a framework that is both inclusive and equitable. Such a framework would be instrumental in ensuring that public policy in Ghana is reflective of the collective interests of its people and not just a select few.

Moreover, the theory is best suited for analyzing and potentially improving the policy environment in Ghana. By situating the framework within the theoretical premises of the public sphere, the study can provide insights into how changes in legislative frameworks, public opinion, and media landscapes can be navigated and even influenced. This would be particularly valuable in a rapidly evolving political landscape like Ghana, where public policies need to be both dynamic and responsive to social changes. Lastly, the theory offers ethical scaffolding that would guide the study’s recommendations, emphasizing transparency, and accountability in public policy advocacy. This aligns with the study's intent to develop a framework that is not only effective but also ethical and responsible.

2.2. Review of Relevant Empirical Literature

In this context empirical literatures review, also known as a systematic literature review, analyses previous empirical studies in order to provide an answer to a specific research topic. Rather than drawing information from theories or beliefs, empirical research relies on observations and measurements to arrive at conclusions. This study therefore adopts the thematic approach to present and discuss relevant empirical literature on Public Relations and Public Policy Advocacy globally and Ghana in particular.

2.2.1. The Role of Public Relations in Public Policy Advocacy

PR has emerged as a central driver of policy advocacy, given its capacity to foster dialogues, shape public opinion, and mobilize support (Ki et al., 2015). It provides a vehicle through which policy information is communicated and understood, impacting the manner in which policies are received by different stakeholders (Botan & Hazleton, 2010). As such, understanding the role of PR in policy advocacy presents a crucial step in exploring PR strategies in public sector institutions.

PR's role in policy advocacy can be observed through several key functions. First, PR facilitates communication between public sector institutions and their stakeholders. It allows for the translation of complex policy issues into understandable narratives that resonate with the target audience (Zerfass et al. 2018). This is pivotal in Ghana's public sector, where policies such as the e-levy or luxury vehicle tax require effective communication to secure public buy-in.

Second, PR can build relationships and cultivate trust with stakeholders, fostering a conducive environment for policy advocacy (Rhood, 2020). This function is vital in the Ghanaian context, where stakeholder trust in public institutions has implications for policy acceptance. Lastly, PR can frame policies in a way that influences public attitudes and perceptions (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020), a phenomenon crucial in understanding how policy advocacy can be enhanced in Ghana.

In light of these roles, PR has significant implications for policy advocacy in Ghana's public sector. It underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of how PR is deployed for policy advocacy, highlighting the relevance of the first research objective of this study which is to explore the MFEP's PR strategies employed to gain stakeholder support for public policy advocacy. The exploration and understanding of PR strategies employed for policy advocacy would contribute to the broader academic discourse on PR's role in policy advocacy, thus aligning with the theoretical and practical underpinnings of this study.

2.2.2. Global Perspectives of Public Relations Strategies in Public Sector Institutions

Public sector institutions employ a variety of PR strategies to communicate, engage, and build relationships with their stakeholders (Luoma-aho & Canel, 2020). These strategies span from traditional media engagement and press releases to more contemporary digital communication and social media interaction (Ni & Sha, 2023). Their application and effectiveness, however, largely depend on the specific institutional environment and the context within which they operate.

In public sector institutions, PR strategies often encompass educating the public about institutional policies, facilitating transparency, and managing crises (Grunig, 2023). These strategies are utilized to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders and to build trust that could facilitate policy implementation. A critical aspect of these strategies involves the framing of policies to resonate with stakeholder interests and values, thereby fostering policy acceptance and support (Winkler & Schoeneborn, 2022).

Within the Ghanaian public sector context, understanding the PR strategies employed is crucial to identifying potential gaps and areas for improvement. Notably, given the resistance that often accompanies policy implementation, it is vital to explore how PR strategies could be refined to enhance stakeholder understanding and acceptance of such policies. This discussion of PR strategies in public sector institutions directly aligns with the first objective of this study, which seeks to explore and understand the PR strategies employed for policy advocacy in Ghana. This exploration is essential as it provides the foundation upon which this study can identify challenges and propose a framework to guide future policy advocacy efforts in Ghana's public sector institutions. Thus, this theme resonates with both the academic and practical goals of this study, given its potential to enrich the academic discourse on PR in public sector institutions and inform more effective PR practices in policy advocacy.

2.2.3. Challenges in Deploying PR for Public Policy Advocacy in Emerging Economies

Emerging economies present unique challenges to the deployment of PR for policy advocacy (Mahmood et al., 2019). Factors such as political instability, socio-cultural diversity, economic disparities, and low levels of media literacy often influence PR practices and policy advocacy efforts in these contexts (Jiang & Luo, 2018). These complexities create a multifaceted environment where PR strategies must navigate a labyrinth of competing interests and differing viewpoints.

In policy advocacy, the key challenge often lies in framing and communicating policies in ways that resonate with diverse stakeholder interests. This difficulty is exacerbated in emerging economies, where diverse cultural, socio-economic, and political backgrounds can result in heterogeneous stakeholder perspectives (Ihlen et al. 2018). Moreover, the presence of a vibrant civil society and a critical media landscape often require a more nuanced and context-specific PR approach (Botan & Taylor, 2004). Another challenge that arises is the crisis of trust. In emerging economies, public institutions often struggle with credibility issues due to historical incidences of corruption and inefficiency (Verčič et al., 2015). This makes the task of gaining public support for policies even more daunting, necessitating robust PR strategies to build and sustain trust.

2.2.4. Deploying PR for Public Policy Advocacy in the Ghanaian Context

In the Ghanaian context, understanding these challenges is essential, given the resistance that policies such as E-Levy, Luxury Vehicle Tax, VAT, and SIM Card Re-registration have faced. This exploration is directly tied to the second objective of this study, which seeks to identify and analyze the challenges in deploying PR for policy advocacy in Ghana's public sector institutions. Insight into these challenges can inform the development of a practical PR framework that considers the unique Ghanaian context, thereby making strides toward the third objective of the study. This discussion is, thus, central to both the academic and practical contributions of the study, and the development of an effective policy advocacy PR framework.

The public sector in Ghana, similar to other emerging economies, operates within a unique socio-political and economic environment that significantly influences the deployment of PR for policy advocacy (Agyapong et al., 2022). Over the years, various public sector policies such as the e-levy, luxury vehicle tax, VAT, and SIM Card re-registration have been met with significant resistance, suggesting gaps in the effectiveness of PR strategies for policy advocacy. Boakye (2021) posits that PR in Ghana's public sector plays a crucial role in managing relationships with various stakeholders, shaping public opinion, and facilitating the successful implementation of policies. However, it appears that PR practices within this context are not always successful in achieving these outcomes. Reasons for this may include a disconnect between policy formulation and public sentiment, a lack of transparency in policy communication, and a crisis of trust due to historical incidences of corruption (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Freitag & Stokes, 2009; Smith, 2013).

Moreover, Ghana's socio-cultural diversity poses its own challenges. With over 100 ethnic groups, each with unique traditions and languages, crafting a one-size-fits-all PR strategy for policy advocacy is practically impossible (Kuyini Mohammed, 2023). Therefore, PR strategies need to be tailored to resonate with the diverse stakeholder perspectives present in the Ghanaian context. This discussion directly relates to the objectives of the study. A nuanced understanding of Ghana's public sector PR practices, as well as the unique challenges they face, is key to fulfilling the first and second objectives of the study: to explore and understand these PR strategies and to identify and analyze the challenges encountered in their deployment. Insights gained from this exploration will provide a foundation for the development of a practical PR framework for policy advocacy in Ghana's public sector, aligning with the third objective of the study.

2.2.5. Developing a Public Relations Framework for Public Policy Advocacy

The development of frameworks in the field of PR serves as a way to understand, structure, and guide PR practices (Anani-Bossman & Mudzanani, 2020), including policy advocacy.

Frameworks provide a strategic basis that integrates the complex processes involved in PR, such as stakeholder identification, message creation, media selection, and evaluation, among others (Anani-Bossman & Tandoh, 2023). In policy advocacy, Logan (2021) notes that a PR framework could entail stages like understanding the policy environment, identifying key stakeholders, crafting resonating messages, selecting appropriate communication channels, and evaluating the impact of these PR efforts.

In the context of the public sector, and particularly in emerging economies like Ghana, the creation of tailored PR frameworks is crucial due to the unique socio-cultural, political, and economic environments as already established. The reason is that these frameworks can serve as roadmaps that guide PR practitioners in devising and implementing effective strategies that resonate with diverse stakeholders and facilitate the successful advocacy of policies (Hoffmann, J., Jorgensen, K. N., Averhoff, C. V., & Olesen, S. 2020).

A significant part of developing such a framework involves a thorough understanding of existing PR practices and the challenges faced in their deployment, which aligns directly with the first two objectives of this study. It is only after understanding the intricacies of current practices and challenges within the Ghanaian context that a relevant and practical framework for policy advocacy can be proposed, which addresses the third objective of this research. Therefore, the discussion around framework development in PR directly relates to and indeed forms a central part of this study.

2.2.6. Applying Public Relations Theories to Public Policy Advocacy

The application of PR theories to policy advocacy provides a foundational understanding and practical guidance in structuring communication strategies aimed at securing public support for policies (Clark, Guivarra, Dodson & Widders Hunt, 2019). Theoretical frameworks, such as Grunig's Four Models of PR and the Excellence Theory, allow for the extrapolation of PR strategies and practices from a theoretical standpoint (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1992). For instance, Grunig's Four Models can help assess whether a PR approach used for policy advocacy in Ghana's public sector aligns more with the Public Information, Press Agentry, Two-Way Asymmetric, or Two-Way Symmetric model. Understanding this alignment can elucidate the nature of engagement with stakeholders, the flow of information, and ultimately, the effectiveness of the PR strategies employed.

Similarly, the Excellence Theory provides a normative model for effective PR, emphasizing the importance of strategic management, symmetrical communication, and relationship-building (Anani-Bossman, 2021; Grunig, 1992). Applying this theory to the analysis of PR in policy advocacy can provide insights into how well current practices align with these principles of excellence and can guide the development of improved strategies. For this study, which aims to explore and understand PR strategies in Ghana's public sector, identify challenges in deploying PR for policy advocacy, and develop a practical PR framework, applying PR theories provides a necessary theoretical lens. This theoretical analysis can facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the existing state of PR practices for policy advocacy in Ghana's public sector, inform the identification of challenges, and ultimately guide the development of a practical framework aligned with best-practice principles derived from PR theory.

2.3. Brief Background of the MFEP

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning was established under sections 11 & 13 of the Civil Service Law 1993 (PNDCL 327) as amended by an Executive Instrument 28 (E.I.

28) Civil Service (Ministries) (Amendment Instrument, 2017). Its mandate is to ensure effective and efficient Macroeconomic and Financial Management of Ghana's economy.

As stated at its website (https://mofep.gov.gh/about-mof), the ministry's vision is "to be the lead Economic Management Institution for development and prosperity for all Ghanaians" and its mission "to ensure effective economic policy management for the attainment of macroeconomic stability and sustainable economic growth through sound fiscal policy and efficient public financial management by deploying competent staff and robust systems for the development of Ghana'. Additionally, the ministry's goal is "to ensure efficient and effective management of the economy towards the attainment of upper middle income status and poverty reduction".

Functions of the MFEP include:

- Formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate macroeconomic, fiscal and financial policies for sustainable development.
- Ensure effective mobilization of domestic and external resources.
- Ensure efficient and effective allocation and prudent management of resources.
- Establish and disseminate performance-oriented guidelines and deploy efficient financial management information systems.
- Ensure commitment to transparency, probity and accountability in the management of financial resources.
- Ensure sustainability of public debt.
- Development of an efficient financial sector that supports structural transformation of the economy promotes financial inclusion and is well integrated into the global financial system.

The following are departments and agencies under the MFEP: Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA), Controller and Accountant General's Department, Institute of Accountancy Training , Financial Intelligence Centre, Ghana Infrastructure Investment Fund and Public Procurement Authority (PPA).

In delivering on its mandate as stated above, the Ministry collaborates with the following institutions: Bank of Ghana (BOG), National Pensions Regulatory Authority (NPRA), Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD), Securities and Exchange Commission ,National Lottery Authority (NLA). Also, to ensure effective and efficient delivering of its functions, the Ministry relies on the following divisions: Budget,, Economic Strategy & Research, Financial Sector, Human Capital & General Administration, Policy Coordination, Monitoring & Evaluation, Public Investment & Assets, Resource Mobilisation & Economic Relations and Treasury & Debt Management

2.4. Operational Definitions of Terms

This section aims to clarify key terms and concepts that will be frequently used throughout the study. So doing, it ensures that readers have a clear understanding of the terms' specific meanings in the context of this study.

1. **Public Relations Framework**: Refers to the systematic set of strategies, tools, and processes aimed at managing and enhancing the relationship between an organization and its publics.
2. **Public Relations:** The practice of deploying communication tools, tactics and strategies to manage how others see and feel about a brand, company or situation.

3. **Public Policy Advocacy**: The act of influencing public policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions for the welfare of the public.

4. **Public Policy:** A proposal with laws, regulations, guidelines, and actions meant to solve a relevant problem
5. **Advocacy:** The act of supporting or courting support for a cause, initiative or proposal.
6. **Stakeholders**: Individuals, groups, or institutions that have an interest in the public policy decisions made in Ghana and are affected by or can affect the outcomes of those decisions.
7. **Publics**: The differentiated groups of individuals that interact with or are affected by the public policy decisions in Ghana.
8. **Communicative Actions**: Refers to the methods and mediums through which messages are conveyed in the realm of public policy, which may include but are not limited to press releases, social media, and public consultations.
9. **Policy Environment**: The contextual setting in Ghana within which public policies are developed, discussed, and implemented; it includes legislative frameworks, public opinion, and media landscapes.
10. **Public Policy Experts:** Someone who understands and influences changes in public policy on a determined subject
11. **PR Experts:** Someone who understands and uses Public Relations tools to shape and maintain a positive image for a client.

2.5. Conclusion and Gaps in Research

This chapter has offered a thorough exploration of the multifaceted role of public relations in public policy advocacy. By starting with a foundational discussion of Public Sphere Theory, the review sets the stage for understanding the broader implications of public relations activities. The focus then narrows to the tactical aspects, showcasing various strategies and challenges specific to the public sector, especially in the context of emerging economies like Ghana. The review also serves as a bridge between theory and practice by discussing the applicability of public relations theories to public policy advocacy. Ultimately, this chapter serves not only as a repository of existing knowledge but also as a catalyst for future research, unlocking avenues for a more effective and context-sensitive approach to public policy advocacy through public relations.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0. Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology that was employed to meet the objectives of the investigation. It provides detailed explanations for the selection of participants, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. The aim was to ensure that the research process is transparent and can be replicated, thereby contributing to its reliability and validity.

3.1. Research Design

Due to the nature of the study, the researcher adopted the qualitative approach in order to adequately address the objectives of the study. Qualitative research is a methodological approach that aims to explore social phenomena in depth, offering rich descriptions and understandings rather than numerical measurements, Hennink et al. (2020). This research paradigm has its roots in disciplines like Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology, among others (Denzin et al., 2023). It is characterized by its focus on understanding human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour. Qualitative research method is often chosen for its ability to delve into the complexities and processes that are either difficult to measure quantitatively or are not adequately represented by numerical data (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Methodologically, qualitative research adopts various techniques such as interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), observations, and document analysis, among others in collecting data, (Patton, 2014). These techniques are well-suited to capture the nuanced perspectives and lived experiences of a study’s participants. In addition, qualitative research often utilises an inductive approach, allowing themes and patterns to emerge naturally from data collected, rather than being imposed (Hesse-Biber, 2010). This is in contrast to the deductive approach often employed in quantitative research, where hypotheses are tested against collected data.

Justification for using qualitative research approach is manifold and often dependent on research questions. First, when the phenomenon of interest is not well understood, qualitative research offers the flexibility to explore the subject matter without the constraints imposed by predetermined categories or scales (Maxwell, 2012). Second, when the aim is to understand context, motivations, or specific instances deeply, qualitative methods are deemed more appropriate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For instance, in studies examining the patient experiences of healthcare delivery, a qualitative approach can yield insights into emotional and psychological aspects that a quantitative survey may overlook (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). By focusing on the 'why' and 'how' behind social phenomena, it aids in constructing a more nuanced understanding of the social world.

3.2. Sampling

The focal participants of the study comprise professionals engaged in the fields of public relations and public policy, specifically the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and the Ministry of Information, as well as experts in public relations and public policy operating within the broader professional landscape. A sample of ten (10) participants was chosen for the study. The ten was chosen taking into account the amount of time available for the conduct of the study, and the availability of participants. The ten is composed as follows: one public relations practitioner each from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and the Ministry of Information, and four experts each in Public Relations and Public Policy. The selection is made to help the research collect tailored data that will help address the study’s specific questions and corresponding objectives set forth in chapter one.

As opined by Maxwell (2021), the process of sampling entails choosing a subset from a larger group under investigation for a research endeavour. Hennink et al. (2020) also posits that either probability sampling or non-probability sampling techniques could be used in selecting a research sample. The choice between these two sampling methods is fundamentally influenced by the research methodology employed. Given the qualitative orientation of this study, non-probability sampling is deemed most suitable. According to Liamputtong (2020), sample selection using non-probability techniques involves a researcher's subjective judgment. In alignment with the specific objectives and scope of this study, purposive sampling technique of the non-probability sampling method was used in selecting the study’s sample. Purposive sampling according to Tracy (2019) ensures reliability of data and findings by closely tailoring the sample to research objectives.

3.3. Sources of Data

The study employed a combination of primary and secondary data sources to obtain a nuanced understanding of the research topic. Primary data was collected through interviews with subject matter experts and examination of pertinent original documents as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2016). These primary sources provided direct, unmediated information that was crucial for constructing foundational knowledge on the research topic. In contrast, secondary data came from scholarly articles, academic books, and peer-reviewed journals, which offer critical interpretations and analyses of the primary data, as described by Hennink et al. (2020). Utilizing both primary and secondary sources of data helped to augment the study by validating findings and situating them within the wider academic discourse on the subject being studied.

3.4. Data Analysis Technique

The analytical framework for this research was grounded in thematic analysis. As described by Braun et al. (2022), thematic analysis serves as a structured technique for discerning, categorizing, and providing thorough understanding into recurring patterns of meaning, termed as themes, within a given dataset. Braun et al. (2023) further elaborate that this analytical approach is commonly employed on textual data, including but not limited to, interview transcripts. Thematic analysis exhibits considerable versatility, accommodating a broad array of research needs and yielding an intricate yet comprehensive representation of the data (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). One of its distinct advantages is that it does not mandate the same degree of theoretical or methodological acumen as other qualitative methodologies, making it a more accessible analytical tool (Clarke & Braun, 2021). This accessibility renders thematic analysis especially favorable for those at the nascent stages of their research careers. In practical terms, the analysis involves a multi-step process commencing with the disaggregation of textual data. Following this, codes are assigned to identify specific patterns within the data. Ultimately, these codes serve as the bedrock upon which substantive themes are uncovered, offering a basis for subsequent interpretation of the findings.

According to the methodology outlined by Elliot (2018), the initial step in qualitative data analysis involves attentively listening to the verbal accounts given by participants. Subsequent to this, researchers must rigorously read and revisit the verbatim transcripts or written replies from these participants. The analytical process also incorporates Tesch's (2013) structured approach to qualitative data analysis, which consists of several sequential steps as follows:

A. The researcher reviews audio recordings and re-examines the full set of transcriptions. This exercise aims to provide a holistic understanding of the collected data, during which emergent ideas are noted.
B. Transcripts from individual interviews are then scrutinized one at a time. The objective is to discern the underlying meanings within the data, which are annotated in the transcript margins. Instances reflecting positive experiences are distinguished separately from those signalling negative experiences across all transcripts.
C. An inventory of salient topics is compiled, followed by the aggregation of related topics. Columns are subsequently formulated to distinguish between major topics, unique topics, and remaining miscellaneous topics that do not align with predefined categories.
D. Employing the compiled list, the data undergo comparison and thematic coding. These codes are marked adjacent to relevant text segments, with the provision for introducing new categories and codes if they arise.
E. Descriptive terms that encapsulate the essence of each topic are assigned, converting topics into definitive categories. Topics exhibiting mutual relations are amalgamated to refine the categorization.
F. All categories are meticulously examined and arranged in alphabetical order.
G. Finally, the data are systematically dissected to derive meanings. For validation purposes, participants are asked to review the analysed data, followed by adjustments or recoding as deemed necessary.

3.5. Ethical Issues and Considerations

For this study, ethical considerations of the utmost importance, such as anonymity, informed consent, and confidentiality, were rigorously upheld in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the research regulations of the University of Media, Arts and Communication – Ghana Institute of Journalism campus (UniMAC-GIJ). Participants were thoroughly briefed about the study's aims and objectives, and their explicit; informed consent was obtained prior to their inclusion. Measures were scrupulously implemented to ensure the secure handling of personal and professional information, which will be utilized solely for the purposes of academic research. The preparation and submission of requisite ethical documentation will be executed in collaboration with the academic supervisor, thereby emphasizing the study's unwavering commitment to ethical rigor. All sources of information have been duly acknowledged and full references cited on the reference pages this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0. Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed analysis and discussion of the data gathered from interviews with the study participants. The chapter highlights the strategies, challenges, and impacts of the Ministry's public relations efforts in policy advocacy. It merges qualitative insights with theoretical underpinnings, offering a varied perspective of how PR tactics are employed and perceived in public policy. The chapter lays the groundwork for a critical evaluation, juxtaposing the opinions of experts with existing literature to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Ministry's PR practices.

In terms of analysis, participants are referred to using pseudonyms, denoted as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6, to maintain their privacy and anonymity, adhering to ethical research standards. These pseudonyms facilitate a clear and concise narrative structure within the discussion. This approach ensures participant confidentiality while adjusting the discussion closely with the study's objectives. The analysis and discussion are structured around these objectives, with themes emerging from the research reflecting the core aims of the study.

4.1. Brief Background of Key Participants

The study's key participants included Public Relations and Public Policy experts and practitioners drawn from industry and academic. This was to enable the researcher find a converging point for the views of practice and theory. All the participants were male, and were aged between 41 to 56 years. Each participant is a member of the Institute of Public Relations – Ghana and has served for a minimum of 8 years in their current roles.

4.2. RO1: To explore PR Strategies Employed by the Ministry for Public Policy Advocacy

4.2.1. Communication Strategies in Public Policy Advocacy

Understanding the specific public relations strategies employed is essential for gauging the Ministry's effectiveness in communicating public policy advocacy initiatives. This inquiry was vital for assessing how well the strategies match the complexity of public communication and stakeholder engagement. P2 observes that the Ministry's strategy "hinges on transparency and consistent communication," highlighting the use of "public forums" and "media briefings." This approach, as P2 notes, is "pivotal in demystifying policy intentions" and fosters "a climate of trust and understanding." This perspective echoes the principles outlined by Grunig and Hunt (1984), where transparency is fundamental in public relations. Additionally, P1 offers a different viewpoint, describing the Ministry's approach as "predominantly leveraging a multifaceted communication approach." This includes "engaging stakeholders through interactive platforms" and utilizing both "traditional and digital media." The emphasis on "tailored messaging" to align with "the diverse interests of various stakeholder groups" resonates with Heath's (2022) notion of segmented communication strategies.

Meanwhile, P4 provides insight into a more narrative-based approach. The Ministry, according to P4, "adopts a narrative-driven PR approach" where "stories are used to illustrate the impact of policies on everyday lives." This strategy of humanizing communication through stories, as Kent (2015) suggests, can be highly effective in public relations. On the same plain, the proactive and politically nuanced strategy described by P3, where the Ministry "anticipates public concerns" and addresses them through "clear, concise messaging," aligns with Coombs' (2021) crisis communication theory. This is evident in their “regular press releases and social media engagements,” aiming to “inform and educate the public.”

Further, P5 highlights the Ministry’s adaptability, particularly to digital trends, by “effectively utilizing social media” and creating “informative content” designed to be “shareable online.” This approach, as Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) discuss, is increasingly essential in public relations. Finally, P6 focuses on cultural sensitivity, stating that “Cultural sensitivity is at the core of their strategy.” The Ministry’s engagement in “local languages when necessary” reflects an understanding of the “cultural landscape,” which is crucial in multicultural communication strategies (Curtin & Gaither, 2005). The data show a myriad of viewpoints presented by the participants and cover how the Ministry effectively communicates and engages with its stakeholders. This approach aligns with established theories and models in the field of public relations including the PST sees the public sphere as an arena for citizens to discuss, critique, and influence public opinion and decision-making processes in a democratic society (Larsen, 2020).

Observations from each contributor serve to enrich the collective understanding of the Ministry's strategies in engaging and communicating with its stakeholders. Such insights are pivotal in appreciating the effectiveness of these communication strategies.

4.2.2. Tailoring Messages for Diverse Stakeholders

Examining the customization of public relations messages for diverse stakeholder groups is key to evaluating the reach and impact of these communications. This probe was crucial in ensuring messages are effectively tailored, fostering widespread understanding and support for policy initiatives. Here, P2 pointed out the current shortcomings, stating:

> The Ministry's messages often come across as generic. I think they could do more to understand their audiences. Tailoring messages isn't just about changing a few words. It's about the message's core.

This participant believes that tailoring messages goes beyond superficial changes, emphasizing the need for a deeper understanding of audiences. This critique complies with the communication theory that effective messaging must be audience-centric, as described by Dan et al. (2020), who advocate for audience-specific communication strategies.

P3 offers a perspective on geographical disparities, noting, "in urban areas, especially among the business community, the Ministry's messages are clearer and more targeted." However, P3 observes a stark contrast in rural areas, where messages are often "too complex or irrelevant." This echoes the research by Lane (2023), which highlights the challenges in effectively communicating with diverse demographic segments. Alongside this, P5 acknowledges the Ministry's efforts but suggests a need for greater diversity in communication methods. P5 pointed out that:

> The Ministry's efforts are there, but it's a bit basic. For a start, they need to diversify their communication methods more. Relying too much on traditional media doesn't cut it these days

This means that reliance on traditional media is viewed as insufficient in today's digital age. This observation is supported by the shift towards digital communication platforms in public relations, as discussed by Breakenridge (2012). In addition to this, P1 recognized some adaptability in the Ministry's communication but criticizes its superficiality, summing, "the real issue is the substance." This participant emphasizes understanding what different stakeholders truly care about, beyond just language. This reflects the principles of stakeholder theory, which suggest that understanding and addressing stakeholders' underlying concerns is key to effective engagement (Freeman, 2010).

From another perspective, P4 commended the Ministry's use of digital channels to engage younger, tech-savvy audiences but notes a lack of dynamic engagement. P4 suggests, "engagement isn't just about broadcasting; it's about conversation." This perspective is in line with the two-way symmetrical model of public relations which emphasizes dialogue over one-way communication. The findings here underscore an imperative for the Ministry to enhance its comprehension of the varying needs of its audience demographics. It is essential to incorporate dynamic and interactive methods of communication. This strategic shift is expected to foster a more profound and effective resonance with the diverse groups of stakeholders involved.

4.2.3. Impact of Media on Public Relations Efforts

Exploring the impact of current media landscapes on PR strategies offers insights into how information dissemination methods affect communication effectiveness. In a changing media environment, understanding its influence on PR tactics is essential for maintaining effective and adaptable communication strategies. P3 spoke to the challenges posed by the fragmented media landscape, stating:

> The media landscape today is incredibly fragmented, which presents both opportunities and challenges for the Ministry. The opportunity lies in the ability to target specific groups through various channels. However, the challenge is in crafting messages that are adaptable to these different channels while still maintaining a coherent narrative.

The rapid dissemination of information and the rise of social media require "swifter, more agile PR strategies," as P3 suggests. This perspective is supported by literature that highlights the need for public relations strategies to be adaptable and quick to respond in a fast-paced media environment (Smith, 2020). As well, P2 highlights a critical gap in the Ministry's approach, noting, “the Ministry’s interaction with the current media landscape reveals a gap in adaptability and innovation.” This observation points to the Ministry’s over-reliance on traditional media and a lack of engagement in more dynamic forms of communication. P2 elaborates saying:

> Social media, for instance, is a potent tool for real-time engagement and feedback, but it’s underutilized by the Ministry. Their efforts often lack the conversational tone that resonates on these platforms. As a result, they miss out on the opportunity to shape narratives and public opinion effectively in an increasingly digital world.

This conforms with contemporary PR theories that emphasize the importance of interactive and conversational communication in the digital age (Staab & Thiel, 2022). In the same vein, P4 echoes this sentiment, pointing out that “the engagement often lacks depth” in the Ministry’s use of digital platforms. The criticism here is focused on the Ministry’s failure to capitalize on the interactive nature of these platforms, with P4 noting the need for “content that is not just informative but also interactive and shareable.” This reflects a broader trend in public relations that prioritizes two-way communication and community building.

Likewise, P5 emphasizes the need for a change in communication mind-sets, arguing that “it’s not enough to just ‘be there.’” The recommendation to shift from a “broadcast model to a conversational model” underlines the necessity for the Ministry to engage more effectively with its digital audience. This view is consistent with Breakenridge’s (2012) position that the evolving understanding of digital communication in public relations, where engagement metrics are becoming increasingly important. As well, P6 introduces the importance of analytics in shaping PR strategies, highlighting that:

> there seems to be a lack of emphasis on data-driven decision-making in the Ministry’s PR efforts. Incorporating these analytical tools could significantly enhance the effectiveness of their communication strategies in this diverse media landscape.

This observation points to a need for the Ministry to leverage analytics to enhance the effectiveness of its communication strategies, a practice that is gaining prominence in contemporary public relations. As an addition, P1 provides a holistic view of the challenges and opportunities, stating, "the current media landscape is a double-edged sword for the Ministry's PR efforts." This encompasses the need for "more proactive and interactive communication strategies" in a media environment that demands agility and responsiveness, aligning with the view that the traditional PR approaches are less effective in the dynamic digital sphere (Heath, 2022).

An analysis of the data gathered points to an urgent requirement for the Ministry to recalibrate its public relations tactics to meet the evolving demands of the contemporary media environment. A transition to communication strategies that are more interactive, engaging, and grounded in data analysis is crucial. Additionally, there is a need to prioritize speed and flexibility in responses. Such adaptations are necessary to navigate the rapidly changing dynamics of digital media effectively.

4.3. RO2: To Examine Challenges the Ministry Encounters in Deploying Public Relations for Public Policy Advocacy Initiatives.

4.3.1. Identifying Key Challenges in Public Relations for Policy Advocacy

Identifying the key challenges in leveraging public relations for policy advocacy sheds light on areas requiring strategic improvement. Recognizing these obstacles is fundamental for developing effective strategies to enhance PR efficacy in policy communication. Concurrently, the point raised by P1 and P4 about the Ministry's focus on technical aspects and the lack of emotional resonance in communication is well-supported by literature. Smith (2013) for instance argues that effective public relations must go beyond disseminating information to building relationships and emotional connections with stakeholders. The critique that "the Ministry's communication tends to focus more on the technical aspects of policies" (P1) attunes with the need for more narrative-driven, empathetic communication strategies in public relations, particularly in policy advocacy (Grunig, 2013).

In another light, P2 and P6's emphasis on trust-building and stakeholder engagement resonates with the principles of two-way symmetrical communication. The observation that the Ministry's efforts are "more about persuasion than genuine dialogue" (P2) underscores the importance of mutual understanding and dialogue in public relations, rather than one-way persuasion. Similarly, P6 espouses the view that:

> The Ministry's PR strategies often do not sufficiently consider or address the diverse range of stakeholders affected by policies such as the E-Levy. By this, a more detailed understanding of stakeholder dynamics and tailored communication strategies to engage these diverse groups are essential for effective policy advocacy.

This echoes that critical aspect of strategic public relations, as stakeholder engagement is crucial for policy acceptance and implementation (Grunig, 2013). In a different scope nevertheless, the critiques by P3, P5, and P6 regarding the Ministry's slow response and lack of adaptability in the rapidly evolving media landscape are echoed in recent public relations scholarship. Nutsugah and Anani-Bossman (2023) highlight the importance of agility in public relations, particularly in managing digital media and social platforms. The need for quick, agile responses (P5) and the importance of adapting PR strategies to the digital age (P6) are critical for effective communication in today's fast-paced media environment.

The respondents' views on the importance of narrative building and consistency in communication are also supported by the literature. Moyer-Gusé (2008) emphasizes the power of narrative persuasion in policy communication, suggesting that crafting compelling stories can be more effective in changing attitudes than mere presentation of facts. The call for “consistent, regular communication” (P4) balances with the need for ongoing engagement and narrative consistency in PR efforts. In endorsing these views, it is evident that the Ministry’s PR strategies would benefit from incorporating principles of emotional resonance, two-way symmetrical communication, agility in digital media engagement, and narrative persuasion. These strategies in sync with contemporary public relations theory and practice, emphasizing relationship-building, stakeholder engagement, and adaptability in a rapidly changing media landscape.

4.3.2. Internal Limitations in Public Relations Deployment

Analyzing internal limitations within the Ministry is critical for understanding impediments to successful PR deployment in policy advocacy. This evaluation was key to identifying areas for internal organizational improvement and enhancing external communication effectiveness. The participants point to various issues such as lack of professional development, hierarchical structure, insufficient specialized expertise, resistance to innovation, poor resource allocation, and lack of coordination, all of which contribute to the challenges faced by the Ministry. P6 highlights a fundamental issue related to professional development in the Ministry: “There is a lack of continuous professional development in PR practice within the Ministry.” This observation points to a stagnation of skills and approaches, which is detrimental in an environment where adapting to evolving PR trends and technologies is crucial. The mention of “the lack of appreciation of the role of PR” by P6 also suggests an organizational culture issue that may be impacting the effectiveness of PR strategies. This fits with modern organizational theory which emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and adaptation for effective communication (Argenti, 2016).

In a distinct vein, the hierarchical structure within the Ministry is identified by P1 as a significant limitation. P1 mentions that:

> In my view, one of the critical internal limitations is the Ministry's hierarchical structure. This often leads to delayed decision-making processes. When a rapid response is required, especially in a dynamic PR landscape, this bureaucracy can be a significant hindrance.

This points to the fact that, the bureaucratic nature of the Ministry and the resulting slow response time are critical issues in a dynamic PR landscape where rapid response is essential (Grunig, 2009). P1 also notes the internal politicking, which can lead to "a lack of clarity and coherence in communication strategies." In an alternate manner, P2's comment on the lack of specialized PR expertise, "the Ministry often relies on generalists or external consultants for PR," as well underlines the disconnect that can arise between policy content and communication strategy. This lack of in-house expertise is a significant impediment to developing measured and effective PR campaigns, as suggested by Grunig (2023).

From another perspective, the resistance to innovation, as pointed out by P4, "there's a tendency to stick to traditional communication methods," illustrates a reluctance to embrace new and more engaging PR tactics. P4 throws more light on this saying:

> This reluctance to embrace newer, more engaging PR tactics can hinder their ability to connect with a broader audience. Furthermore, internal politics and potential sabotaging between departments can be detrimental. When departments are not aligned in their objectives or compete for dominance, it affects the consistency and effectiveness of the overall PR strategy.

This resistance can hinder the Ministry's ability to connect with a broader audience in a digital age, a key aspect highlighted in contemporary PR practice. Additionally, P3 and P5 bring up the issues of resource allocation and lack of coordination, respectively. P3's observation that "the Ministry often allocates insufficient resources for comprehensive PR campaigns” speaks to the challenge of developing effective strategies with limited resources. P5’s point about the lack of coordination, “there seems to be a disconnect between the policymakers, the communication team, and the implementation team,” underscores the need for synergy in PR campaigns. This lack of coordination can lead to disjointed campaigns that fail to resonate with the public, as coherence and alignment are essential in effective communication (Smith, 2020).

The findings show that the internal challenges within the Ministry reveals several critical factors hindering effective public relations for policy advocacy. These factors include gaps in professional development, rigid hierarchical structures, an absence of specialized expertise, reluctance towards embracing innovation, scarcity of resources, and inadequate coordination. Such limitations have substantial implications for the Ministry’s capacity to utilize PR as a tool for policy advocacy. This analysis underscores the imperative for both structural and cultural reforms. Aligning the Ministry’s PR strategies with modern theories and practices in public relations is essential for enhancing their efficacy.

4.3.3. External Influences on Public Relations Strategies

Investigating how external political and social dynamics influence PR strategies is crucial for marrying these tactics with the broader socio-political environment. This exploration was vital for crafting PR strategies that are responsive and adaptive to external socio-political influences. These dynamics include political climate, public sentiment, interplay between government and opposition, social media trends, and the broader socio-political environment. From P1’s perspective, it is observed that the influence of the political climate, stating, “the Ministry’s PR strategies are often crafted under the influence of the prevailing political climate.” This is particularly evident when the Ministry becomes “defensive rather than informative" in politically tense situations. This defensiveness, as P1 notes, can reduce the effectiveness of PR strategies and lead to a perception of insensitivity, especially "during times of economic hardship." The literature (Verčič et al., 2015; Zerfass et al., 2018) on public relations supports this observation, emphasizing the need for sensitivity and adaptability to public mood in crafting communication strategies.

In a different light, P3 and P4 point out the impact of political pressures and agendas. P3 notes:

> The interplay between the government and opposition parties, shape the Ministry's PR strategies significantly. When there's political pressure, the Ministry's messaging can become overly politicized, focusing more on countering opposition narratives than on clear, objective communication of policies. Also, public opinion and media narratives, also influence the Ministry's PR, but there's a tendency to underestimate these factors. We have seen this happen with the E-levy where we as well as other CSOs brought out position papers and views yet we were overlooked. The Ministry often misses opportunities to leverage positive social dynamics, like grassroots support, to bolster their policy advocacy. Now you see that IMF is forcing the hands of government to embark or hold on with some policies so we can receive the capital injection.

Similarly, P4 mentions that:

> Political agendas can overshadow objective communication. This is especially evident in periods leading up to elections or during politically charged debates. The messaging can become more about gaining political leverage than educating the public. In the digital age, the quick diffusion of information and misinformation via social media presents a dilemma. The Ministry's response to misinformation is frequently delayed or inadequate, distorting public perception of its policies.

These insights buttress Strömbäck and Kiousis (2011), who highlight the challenges of maintaining objective and transparent communication in a politically charged environment.

Then again, P2 and P5 discuss the Ministry's reactive approach to social dynamics. P2 observes:

> social dynamics, like public outcry or social media trends, do impact the Ministry's PR, but the response is often reactive. The Ministry seems to struggle in proactively using social dynamics to their advantage. They often appear to be playing catch-up rather than leading the conversation.

On the other hand, P5 echoes this by stating, "the Ministry's involvement in these social dynamics is typically shallow." Both participants suggest a need for more proactive engagement with social dynamics, a perspective supported by research (Jackson et al., 2021; Sackey, 2016) advocating for anticipatory and responsive PR practices in the digital age. Equally, P6's comment on the alignment with political narratives, "the frequent alignment of certain individuals or entities with the dominant political narrative," underscores the risks of compromised objectivity and public trust. This insight is in line with the concept of public trust in PR, where maintaining objectivity and credibility is vital for effective communication and long-term trust-building with audiences (Botan & Hazleton, 2010).

Analysing the various perspectives elucidates that the Ministry's strategies are significantly affected by external political and societal factors. The Ministry exhibits tendencies towards defensiveness, political bias, and reactive measures. Moreover, there is a noticeable deficiency in effectively engaging with societal dynamics. This situation necessitates a shift towards more strategic, proactive, and impartial PR methods. An effective approach must take into account the intricate interactions between political influences, public opinion, and societal trends. This will enable the Ministry to communicate more effectively and advocate for policies with greater impact.

4.4. RO3: To Understand Past and On-going Public Policy Advocacy Efforts of the Ministry from the Perspectives of Public Relations/Public Policy Experts

4.4.1. Evaluating Impactful Public Relations Campaigns

Evaluating the most impactful public relations campaigns provides key insights into the factors contributing to their success. This analysis offered valuable lessons for effective PR practices and sets benchmarks for future policy advocacy efforts. On this subject, P3 discusses the fiscal responsibility campaign, noting its success in making “complex economic policies more comprehensible.” This success, however, was tempered by political influences and a lack of sustained interaction, as P3 points out:

> It suffered from a lack of sustained interaction and follow-up. These elements are vital to keep public interest alive. Continued conversations and regular updates could have maintained a steady public engagement. Such consistent information flow is crucial in keeping the populace well-informed and connected to policy developments.

The importance of continuous engagement in PR campaigns is well-documented in the literature (Grunig, 2023; Heath, 2022; Smith, 2020), emphasizing that ongoing communication is vital to maintaining public interest and support. As an addition, P1’s insights on the financial inclusion campaign highlight its grassroots approach:

> By actively reaching out to local communities, the campaign educated people about the advantages and practical applications of digital financial tools, thereby enhancing its reach and fostering a deeper sense of community involvement and empowerment. This hands-on approach was instrumental in demystifying digital finance and making it more accessible to the general population. However, the initiative encountered notable challenges.

This approach corresponds with PR practices (Albanna et al., 2022) that emphasize community involvement and empowerment. However, P1 also notes the challenges in “bridging the digital divide,” suggesting a need for more inclusive strategies. Further, P2 critiques the tax reform campaign, specifically around the E-Levy. P2 notes that:

> despite its wide reach and comprehensive strategy, it encountered notable challenges. A key issue was the public’s perception, particularly among lower-income demographics. These groups expressed concerns, feeling disproportionately impacted by the E-Levy. This reaction underscores a vital lesson for future campaigns: the importance of deeply understanding and empathetically addressing the apprehensions of such affected groups.

Additionally, P2 emphasizes the importance of understanding and empathetically addressing public apprehensions, a key aspect in effective PR campaigns. In a similar voice, P5 comments on the digital financial services campaign, particularly its shortcomings in clarity pointing out the “complexities of the E-Levy were not distilled into easily comprehensible terms.” This observation highlights the necessity for clear and transparent communication in PR, a principle echoed in the field of public relations (Smith, 2013).

From another standpoint, P4’s assessment of the response to the economic fallout from COVID-19 illustrates the campaign’s impact, especially among small businesses highlighting that “their campaign highlighted governmental commitment during the crisis.” However, P4 also notes the disconnect between promises and actual support, pointing out the importance of resonating promised support with reality. That notwithstanding, P6 discusses the economic digitization campaign’s use of a data-driven PR approach saying “the strategy adeptly harnessed digital platforms.” However, P6 suggests the need for “ongoing feedback loops” to enhance effectiveness, synthesizing with contemporary views on the importance of real-time sentiment analysis in PR.

Examining the data reveals potential areas for enhancement. These areas include maintaining ongoing interactions, embracing inclusivity, ensuring clarity in communication, and incorporating real-time feedback. To improve the impact and efficacy of such campaigns, it is vital to focus on continuous engagement and inclusive communication strategies. Further, there is a need for transparent messaging and implementing mechanisms that provide prompt and responsive feedback. Such improvements are crucial in augmenting the success of the Ministry's PR campaigns.

4.4.2. Effectiveness in Communicating Complex Policies

Assessing the effectiveness of communication regarding complex policy issues is essential for understanding public comprehension and support. This assessment was crucial for ensuring that complex policies are communicated clearly, fostering public understanding and backing. A synthesis of perspectives garnered here reveals several commonalities in their critique, alongside a few nuanced differences in their observations. From the fieldwork, a recurring theme across the responses was the Ministry's failure to simplify and contextualize complex policies for the general public. P2 articulates this issue, stating, "complex policies, particularly those with significant economic impacts, are seldom distilled into easily understandable terms." This sentiment is echoed by P3, who observes that during the introduction of the E-Levy, the policy was conveyed in a way that "many found confusing." Similarly, P1 comments on the use of specialized terminology, which "creates a chasm in understanding" between policy formulators and the general populace. These insights align with communication theories emphasizing the need for clarity and audience-tailored messaging in public relations (Heath, 2022).

Another shared concern was the Ministry's one-way communication approach, which lacks interactive engagement with the public. P2 highlights this by stating that:

> You see, the Ministry's communication strategy reveals a marked reluctance to engage in two-way dialogue. Information dissemination tends to follow a unidirectional flow. It emanates from the Ministry to the public with little scope for reciprocal communication. Such a method leaves little room for the public to seek clarifications or pose questions. This is particularly problematic when dealing with intricate policy issues. Without the opportunity for dialogue, misunderstandings persist. The public's ability to grasp and accept complex policies is significantly hindered.

This perspective is supported by P1, who notes the Ministry's "pattern of top-down communication." The importance of two-way communication and public engagement is well-established in public relations literature (Anani-Bossman, 2021; Smith, 2020; Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011), emphasizing that effective communication is not just about disseminating information but also about fostering dialogue and understanding. Moving to a different area, P4 and P5 point out the inadequacy of the Ministry's communication methods in the digital age. P4 observes, "they often rely on conventional press briefings and reports that lack engagement and clarity." P5 adds that the communication often remains "ensconced in technical jargon, impenetrable to the layperson." This critique resonates with the contemporary emphasis on utilizing diverse and innovative communication tools, such as infographics and interactive online platforms, to enhance public comprehension (Albanna et al., 2022). While P6 does not explicitly mention the simplicity of language, there is an emphasis on the missed opportunity in "leveraging academic collaboration for simplifying complex policy content." This suggestion points to a potential avenue for improving the Ministry's communication strategies, underscoring the value of external expertise in public relations.

The participants' feedback from the study highlights specific areas for improvement in the Ministry's communication strategies. There is a notable requirement for clearer and more relatable language in conveying complex policy issues. Additionally, engaging in reciprocal communication and adopting innovative methods are recommended. These changes could substantially elevate the Ministry's ability to advocate policies effectively. A more inclusive, dialogic, and creative approach in communication is pivotal for enhancing the Ministry's efficiency in policy advocacy and increasing public comprehension of intricate policy matters.

4.4.3. Managing Public Opinion and Feedback

Examining methods for managing public opinion and integrating feedback is key to understanding the democratic engagement in policy advocacy. This examination was critical for ensuring that policy advocacy is responsive to public input and maintains legitimacy. Here as well, a constant issue in the data was the Ministry's reactive and frequently defensive approach. P2 captures this sentiment by stating that:

> Instead of actively seeking and incorporating public feedback, the Ministry tends to respond only when there is considerable public outcry. This reactionary stance undermines the potential for constructive dialogue and can lead to policies that are out of touch with public needs and sentiments. In instances where feedback is solicited, it often lacks depth and breadth. The Ministry's efforts seem to target only a certain segment of society, neglecting broader, more diverse public inputs. This selective engagement fails to capture the full spectrum of public opinion, leading to a skewed understanding of the populace's views.

P5 alike observes that:

> The Ministry's current approach to managing public opinion is inadequate. It lacks proactive measures and often feels like a scramble to address public discontent after it has already escalated. This reactive approach is less effective in shaping and managing public

> opinion compared to a strategy that anticipates and addresses concerns preemptively.

These critiques are in line with public relations theories advocating for proactive and continuous engagement with stakeholders. It is therefore no surprise that the participants also highlighted the Ministry's tendency towards superficial engagement and the absence of meaningful dialogue. P4 in this regard noted:

> While there are efforts to engage with the public, these often lack depth and do not foster meaningful dialogue. The engagement strategies employed typically do not facilitate an in-depth exchange of views, which is crucial for understanding the public's stance on various policies. Moreover, the Ministry's response to public feedback is often slow and bureaucratic. By the time a response is formulated and communicated, the public discourse may have already evolved, making their input seem out-dated or irrelevant.

This observation suggests that the Ministry's engagement strategies are insufficient for facilitating an in-depth exchange of views, a crucial element for understanding public opinion on policy matters. This view correlates with the emphasis on two-way symmetrical communication in public relations practice, which advocates for mutual understanding and dialogue.

From a separate viewpoint, the use of traditional media channels and the underutilization of digital platforms are also points of concern. P3 points out that:

> the Ministry's reliance on traditional media channels is noteworthy. While these channels are important, they often don't provide opportunities for immediate, candid feedback like social media or public forums do.

This reliance results in less effective communication in gauging and responding to public opinion in real-time. P5 echoes this by highlighting the Ministry's failure to leverage the full potential of digital platforms, a missed opportunity in today's digital age. Furthermore, the participants suggest that the Ministry's approach lacks transparency and systematic methods for integrating public feedback into policy decisions. P3 remarks, "the process of how public feedback influences policy decisions is opaque." This lack of transparency fosters skepticism about the authenticity of the Ministry's engagement efforts. P6 reinforces this by stressing the need for a more systematic approach to gather, analyze, and act on public feedback, advocating for collaboration with communication scholars to develop more effective strategies.

The perspectives from the data suggest that the Ministry's approach to managing public opinion and feedback in policy advocacy is characterized by reactivity, superficial engagement, underutilization of digital communication tools, and a lack of transparency and systematic methods for incorporating public feedback. Adopting a more proactive, in-depth, and transparent approach, and leveraging modern communication channels and academic expertise, could significantly enhance the Ministry's effectiveness in managing public opinion and feedback.

4.4.4. Recommendations for Future Public Relations Approaches

Proposing recommendations for future public relations activities is pivotal for guiding the Ministry towards more effective public policy advocacy. Offering constructive suggestions was vital for shaping future PR strategies that are more impactful and successful in policy advocacy. P3 emphasizes the importance of digital engagement "the Ministry's adoption of digital platforms for public engagement is crucial." This includes using "live Q&A sessions and feedback mechanisms on these platforms" to foster interactive discourse. The suggestion to use "infographics and short videos" harmonizes with modern information consumption trends, making complex policy content more accessible. This approach resonates with the increasing emphasis on visual communication in public relations (Smith, 2020).

P1 and P2 focus on the participatory nature of communication and the need for a proactive approach. P1 suggests, “the Ministry needs to embrace a more participatory approach in their PR endeavors,” involving stakeholders early in the policy-making process. P2 recommends adopting “a proactive communication strategy,” involving “listening to public feedback and adapting accordingly.” These suggestions highlight the importance of two-way communication and stakeholder involvement in effective public relations. Shifting focus, the importance of transparency and responsiveness is echoed by P1 and P4. P1 notes that “there’s a pressing need for transparency in their communication,” while P4 suggests forming “a specialized team” to swiftly address public inquiries and concerns. These recommendations are consistent with the principles of openness and responsiveness in public relations (Heath, 2022).

In a different scope, P6 and P5 advocate for evidence-based strategies and a conversational tone, respectively. P6’s suggestion to “incorporate evidence-based strategies” and establish “a continuous feedback loop” aligns with the increasing focus on data-driven approaches in public relations (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). P5’s recommendation for “a more conversational and less formal tone” reflects the trend towards more relatable and humanized communication in PR (Heath, 2022). Overall, the findings point to the fact that the Ministry’s future PR endeavors should include embracing digital and visual communication tools, adopting a more participatory and proactive approach, ensuring transparency and responsiveness, utilizing evidence-based strategies, and maintaining a conversational tone.

These strategies, grounded in public relations theory and practices, are likely to enhance the Ministry’s effectiveness in public policy advocacy.

4.5. Discussion of Findings

4.5.1. Strategies for Effective Public Relations in Public Policy Advocacy

In examining the efficacy of the Ministry’s public relations strategies in gaining stakeholder support and acceptance for public policy advocacy initiatives, it is imperative to consider various dimensions of their communication approach. The Ministry’s strategy encompasses a blend of traditional and digital communication channels, but it tends to exhibit a tendency towards conventional methods, which, in the current media environment, may not be as effective in reaching and engaging a diverse audience. The findings suggest that the communication of public policy advocacy initiatives often relies on the dissemination of technical information, which, while informative, may not always resonate with the general public. The utilization of complex financial and economic terminology can lead to a disconnect between the Ministry’s messaging and the stakeholders’ understanding. This gap underscores the necessity of simplifying policy communication to ensure that it is not only informative but also comprehensible to a wider audience.

Further, research in public relations and communication consistently emphasizes the importance of clarity and relatability in messaging (Luoma-aho & Canel, 2020). By incorporating storytelling techniques and real-life examples, the Ministry can enhance the accessibility and impact of its messages. In terms of tailoring messages for diverse stakeholder groups, the Ministry’s efforts appear to be somewhat segmented, primarily focusing on broad demographic groups rather than on nuanced segmentation. While there is evidence of message adaptation, such as simpler language for grassroots groups, the core of the messages often remains unchanged, lacking depth in addressing specific stakeholder concerns. This approach may lead to the perception of insensitivity to the diverse needs and contexts of different stakeholder groups. Effective public relations strategies, as suggested by Smith (2020), should involve a two-way symmetrical model, fostering mutual understanding and dialogue.

In another vein, the impact of current media landscapes on the Ministry's PR efforts is significant. With the rapid evolution of digital media, traditional communication channels such as press releases and TV appearances are no longer sufficient to engage a diverse and tech-savvy audience. The Ministry's efforts in digital media are commendable, yet there is room for improvement in terms of engaging content and interactive platforms. Social media offers an opportunity for real-time engagement and feedback, aspects that are currently underutilized by the Ministry. As Ki et al. (2015) note, the digital age demands more than just the presence on digital platforms; it requires an active, engaging, and conversational approach. This point to the fact that the integration of these elements is vital in ensuring that public policy advocacy initiatives are not only communicated effectively but also resonate deeply with a diverse array of stakeholders.

4.5.2. Navigating Public Relations Challenges in Public Policy Advocacy

Exploring the challenges faced by the Ministry in utilizing public relations for policy advocacy revealled a landscape marked by both internal and external complexities. A critical challenge is the Ministry's approach to communicating policies. Often, these communications are laden with jargon and technical language that may alienate the general public. This issue is not merely about language but rather about the ability to contextualize and present policies in a way that resonates with the daily experiences of individuals. The literature (Gregory &

Willis, 2022; Ihlen et al., 2018; Johnson, 2006) underscores the importance of crafting messages that are not only clear but also relatable to the target audience. Internally, the Ministry grapples with structural and cultural barriers that impede effective PR deployment. Bureaucratic hierarchies often result in delayed decision-making and a dilution of key messages as they navigate through various approval levels. Furthermore, the internal culture, which sometimes leans towards politicking, can lead to inconsistent messaging. These internal dynamics highlight the need for a more agile and cohesive communication strategy within the organization, as suggested by Grunig and Hunt (1984).

Externally, the Ministry's PR strategies are significantly influenced by political and social dynamics. The political climate often dictates the tone and approach of PR strategies, where messages can become defensive or overly politicized. This scenario is particularly evident in periods of political tension or opposition to policies. Additionally, the Ministry's PR efforts are shaped by the current media landscape, which demands agility and adaptability in the face of rapidly evolving digital platforms and social media trends. The role of these external factors underscores the need for a proactive and dynamic PR strategy that can effectively navigate and leverage the complex media environment (Strömbäck, 2012). This means that embracing these changes could significantly enhance the Ministry's ability to employ PR effectively in public policy advocacy.

4.5.3. Expert Insights on Public Relations in Public Policy Advocacy

In examining the perspectives of public relations and policy experts on the Ministry's past and ongoing public policy advocacy efforts, several critical areas emerge. The effectiveness of PR campaigns, communication of complex policies, management of public opinion and feedback, and recommendations for future strategies are all pivotal elements in this analysis.

The data points to the fact that the Ministry's most impactful public relations campaigns often shared key attributes: they communicated complex economic policies with clarity and resonance. Successful campaigns utilized storytelling and relatable examples, translating abstract economic concepts into tangible impacts on everyday life. This approach integrates with the literature, emphasizing the importance of narrative in making complex information accessible and engaging (Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

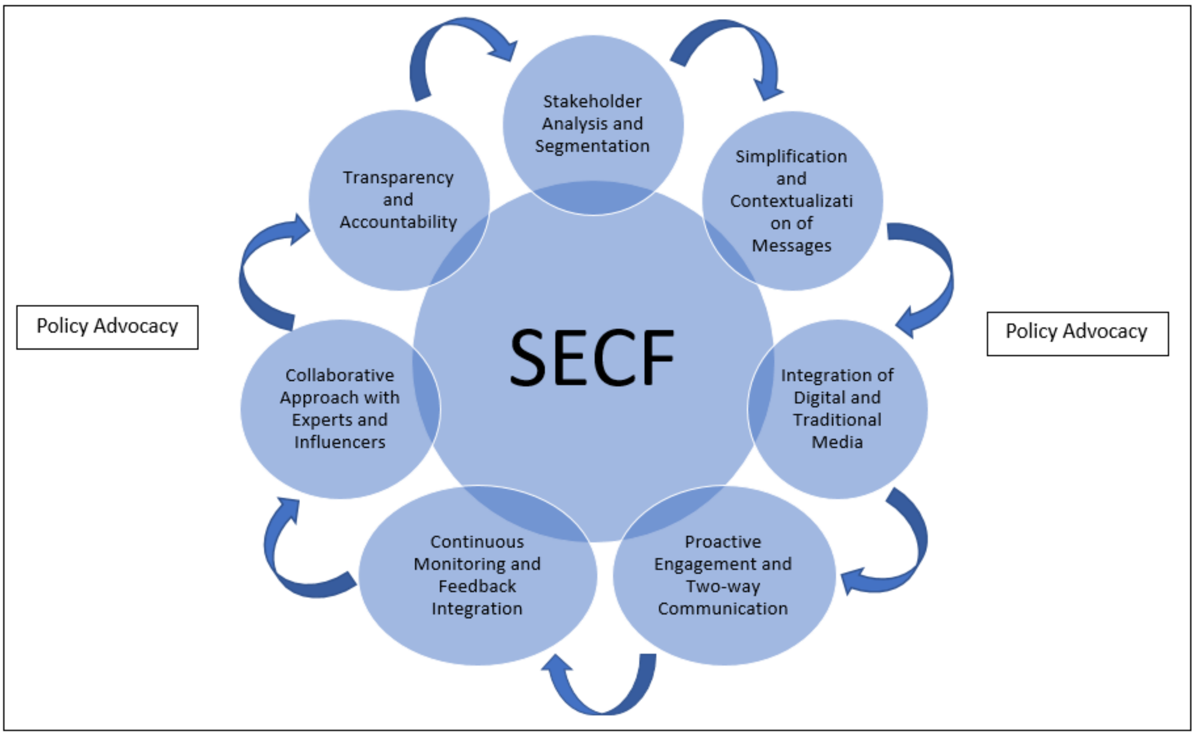
Nevertheless, the Ministry's overall effectiveness in communicating complex policy issues to the public reveals certain shortcomings. Communications frequently rely on specialized terminology, which can create barriers to understanding. This gap highlights the necessity for more straightforward and jargon-free language in public communications, a strategy supported by public relations research advocating for clarity and audience-centric messaging (Winkler & Schoeneborn, 2022). Additionally, the findings illuminate that regarding the management of public opinion and feedback, the Ministry's approach often appears reactive rather than proactive. Typically, engagement with public sentiment occurs post-facto, in response to emerging discontent or misunderstanding. This reactive stance can hinder the development of trust and rapport with the public. Effective public relations practices, as outlined by Anani-Bossman (2021), recommend proactive engagement and dialogue to foster mutual understanding and trust.

For future public relations endeavors, the Ministry would benefit from integrating digital engagement strategies, embracing more participatory communication approaches, and establishing continuous feedback mechanisms. Incorporating digital platforms effectively, particularly social media can facilitate real-time interaction and engagement with diverse audiences. A participatory approach, involving stakeholders early in the policy-making process, can foster a sense of ownership and alignment of interests. Moreover, establishing mechanisms for continuous feedback, as suggested by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), will allow the Ministry to gauge public sentiment effectively and adjust policies and communication strategies accordingly. Ultimately, it can be said that these strategies sync with contemporary PR theories and practices, suggesting that their adoption could significantly enhance the Ministry's capacity for effective public policy advocacy.

4.6. Proposed Framework: Strategic Engagement and Communication Framework (SECF)

The Strategic Engagement and Communication Framework (SECF) embody an integrated model, crafted to elevate public relations and public policy advocacy. Central to SECF is the concept of a comprehensive, dynamic communication approach, grounded in clarity, engagement, adaptability, and inclusivity. The SECF's begins with "Stakeholder Analysis and Segmentation" as visualized in Figure 1 below. This crucial first step delves into understanding the diverse needs and preferences of various audiences. It ensures communication strategies are meticulously tailored, resonating distinctly with each group. Following this, the framework embraces the "Integration of Digital and Traditional Media." Acknowledging the shifting media landscape, SECF melds modern digital platforms with traditional outlets. This synergy expands reach and caters to diverse audience predilections.

Figure 1: Strategic Engagement and Communication Framework (SECF)



Source: Researcher's Own Construct (2024)

The next phase, "Proactive Engagement and Two-way Communication," marks a strategic shift. It moves from reactive to anticipatory modes of communication. This shift fosters an ongoing dialogue, enabling swift, effective responses to public sentiment, thereby nurturing trust and rapport. A critical component is the "Simplification and Contextualization of Messages." This involves distilling complex policies into understandable content. Utilizing relatable language and examples ensures that policies are comprehensible to the wider public. "Continuous Monitoring and Feedback Integration" signifies the commitment to staying attuned to public opinion. Through regular surveys and feedback mechanisms, the framework gains insights. These insights continuously shape and refine communication strategies, ensuring their on-going relevance and efficacy.

In its penultimate phase, the framework promotes a "Collaborative Approach with Experts and Influencers." This strategy advocates forming partnerships to bolster credibility and extend reach. Collaborations with experts and influencers impart authority to messages, making them resonate more profoundly with specific communities. The final element, “Transparency and Accountability,” is pivotal. It involves clear communication of policy rationales, impacts, and limitations. Transparency is key to fostering public trust and mitigating skepticism. In essence, SECF presents a holistic approach. It weaves together diverse elements of effective communication. This integration ensures that public relations efforts in public upolicy advocacy are not just inclusive and engaging but also deeply impactful.

4.7. Chapter Summary

The chapter provided an in-depth analysis of the qualitative data obtained from study participants. It examined the Ministry’s public relations strategies, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. The chapter delved into the complexities of communicating policy initiatives, managing public opinion, and navigating the intricate landscape of digital and traditional media. By integrating expert insights with theoretical perspectives, this chapter shed light on the nature of public relations in the context of public policy advocacy.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.0. Introduction

This chapter serves as the culmination of the study, synthesizing key findings and drawing conclusions from the data analysis presented in the preceding chapters. This chapter succinctly summarizes the major insights gathered from the study. It also offers thoughtfully crafted recommendations, aimed at enhancing the Ministry's public relations endeavors. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the implications of the study for future PR practices and policy-making processes within the Ministry.

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

The study aimed to evaluate the public relations strategies of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, particularly in their role in public policy advocacy. This evaluation was structured around three key objectives: assessing the Ministry's PR strategies for gaining stakeholder support, identifying challenges in deploying PR for policy advocacy, and gathering expert perspectives on past and on-going advocacy efforts. The first objective revealed that the Ministry's PR strategies involve a combination of traditional and digital channels. However, there is a noticeable reliance on conventional methods. The messaging often lacks the simplicity and reliability necessary to connect with a broader audience. Effective communication, as evidenced in the campaigns, hinges on translating complex policies into accessible narratives that resonate with everyday experiences. Yet, this translation is not consistently achieved across the Ministry's communications.

In addressing the second objective, the study found that internal structural and cultural barriers within the Ministry impede effective PR deployment. These include bureaucratic hierarchies leading to delayed messaging and a culture that sometimes prioritizes internal politics over clear, cohesive communication strategies. Externally, the Ministry's PR strategies are significantly shaped by the prevailing political and social dynamics, often resulting in reactive and defensive messaging. It was found that expert perspectives, central to the third objective, underscored the importance of adopting more innovative and engaging communication methods. They suggested a shift towards a more conversational tone and greater use of digital platforms to enhance interactivity and engagement. Experts also emphasized the need for continuous feedback mechanisms and a proactive approach to managing public opinion.

In sum, the study highlights the need for the Ministry to adopt a more nuanced and adaptable approach to public relations. This approach should prioritize simplicity and clarity in communication, proactive and continuous stakeholder engagement, and the effective use of digital platforms to resonate with diverse audiences. The findings suggest that by integrating these strategies, the Ministry can enhance its effectiveness in public policy advocacy, fostering a deeper connection with the public and ensuring that policies are both understood and supported by a wider range of stakeholders.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, three key recommendations emerge, each linked to the study's objectives:

Firstly, the Ministry should focus on simplifying its communication. Complex policy details need translation into language that is accessible to a broader audience. This involves using layman's terms and real-life examples. Such a strategy will bridge the gap between technical policy formulation and public understanding. It will make policies more relatable and easier to grasp.

In addition, to address the challenges in deploying PR for policy advocacy, the Ministry should shift from a reactive to a proactive communication stance. This involves regular interaction with stakeholders and the public. Continuous dialogue will not only foster trust but also enable the Ministry to anticipate and address concerns promptly. A proactive approach ensures that the Ministry stays ahead of emerging issues and public sentiment.

Further, the Ministry should intensively use digital platforms for public engagement. Social media and other digital channels offer opportunities for real-time interaction. Incorporating these tools into their PR strategy will enhance the Ministry's ability to engage with diverse audiences. It will allow for more dynamic and immediate feedback, essential in today's fast-paced information landscape.

5.3. Conclusion

Public policy advocacy encompasses an endeavour involving concerted efforts to influence governmental policies and decisions. At its core, it aims to align public policies with the interests and needs of specific groups or the broader society. Diverse stakeholders, ranging from individuals to large organizations, engage in this practice. They utilize a plethora of strategies, including lobbying, public campaigns, and research dissemination. Public relations, in this context, play a pivotal role. It acts as a bridge, effectively communicating the goals and perspectives of advocacy groups to the public and policymakers. This communication is not merely about dissemination; it is a strategic endeavour that shapes public opinion and garners support.

Public relations thus amplify the impact of advocacy efforts, ensuring that voices are heard and potentially swaying policy decisions. The essence of public policy advocacy lies in its capacity to democratize policy-making, giving a platform to diverse voices and fostering more inclusive, representative, and responsive governance. This study thus had an overarching objective of exploring the relationship between public policy advocacy and public relations within Ghana's unique socio-political landscape. Public policy advocacy, integral to democratic governance, serves as a tool for societal actors to influence and shape government decisions. Its essence lies in empowering voices, fostering dialogue, and promoting changes conformed with the public interest. The study's focal point, developing a public relations framework for this advocacy, addresses a critical gap. In Ghana, where diverse socio-cultural dynamics intersect with political processes, effective communication strategies are paramount. This framework aims to enhance the efficacy of advocacy efforts, utilizing public relations to bridge the gap between policy influencers and decision-makers.

The implications for public relations practice are substantial. This framework offers a blueprint for practitioners to navigate the complexities of influencing public policy in a way that is culturally resonant and politically astute. It underscores the role of strategic communication in advocacy, enhancing the potential for policy impact. In the Ghanaian context, where democratic institutions are evolving amidst a vibrant civic landscape, this study is particularly salient. It provides insights into harnessing public relations as a tool for meaningful policy engagement, contributing to the development of more responsive and inclusive governance. This research, therefore, is not just an academic exercise; it is a step towards strengthening the fabric of Ghana's democratic processes through informed, effective public policy advocacy.

5.4. Areas for Future Research

The study's findings open several avenues for future research, each vital to deepening the understanding of public relations in the context of public policy advocacy. One area of interest is the exploration of the impact of digital communication strategies on policy advocacy effectiveness. Future research could examine how different digital platforms influence stakeholder engagement and policy acceptance, especially among younger, tech-savvy demographics. Another promising area for research is the in-depth analysis of stakeholder segmentation and tailored communication strategies. Investigating how varying approaches resonate with different demographic and psychographic segments could provide valuable insights into more effective stakeholder engagement. This research could involve case studies or comparative analysis across different ministries or governmental departments.

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APPENDIX

UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION (UniMAC)
INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM (IJ)
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SoGSaR)

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PUBLICS RELATIONS OFFICERS FROM THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC PLANNING AND THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

Dear Participant,

I am carrying out this interview to solicit information to aid me complete my Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Thesis on the subject**: "Developing a Public Relations Framework for Public Policy Advocacy in Ghana: A Case of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning",** to be submitted to School of Graduate Studies and Research, Institute of Journalism, University of Media, Arts and Communication in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Master of Philosophy degree in Strategic Public Relations Management. I assure you of confidentiality of all information provided, and I pledge myself to ensure the anonymity of all participants. Thank you for your willingness to grant me the opportunity to interview you.

PROFILE

Name:………………………………………………………………………………………..

Place of Work…………………………………………….……………….…………………

Department/Unit…………………………………………………………………………….

Number of Year(s) of Experience…………………………………………..………………..

Interview Venue……………………………………………………………….……………..

Date……………………………………..   Time……………………….……………………

Participant Code……………………………………………………………..……………….

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

THEME 1: ***PR strategies employ by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning to gain stakeholder support for public policies.***

1. Could you kindly share with me, your knowledge about the public relations strategies that the Ministry employs to communicate to its stakeholders during a public policy advocacy?

2. In your estimation, do you think the Ministry employs public relations strategies that meet the needs of various stakeholder groups?

3. Could you please share with me, your knowledge on whether messages for a public policy advocacy by the Ministry are tailored to various stakeholder groups?

4. Could you please share with me how the Ministry measures the effectiveness of public relations strategies it employs for a public policy advocacy?

THEME 2: C*hallenges encounter by the ministry in deploying PR for public policy advocacy initiatives.*

1. From your experience, what are the most significant challenges that the ministry faces in employing public relations to gain support for public policy?

2. Could you please share with me, why you think these challenges arise?

3. Could you also share with me, your knowledge on how the challenges could be addressed?

4. Could you please share with me any suggestion(s) for improvement and for future policy directions?

5. Would you recommend any form of research, and if so, which area(s) do you think needs further research for future policy consideration and operations?

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Date…………………………………….. Time……………………….…………………

Participant Code……………………………………………………………..……………….

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

THEME 1: ***Perspectives of PR/Public Policy experts on past and on-going public policy advocacy efforts of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.***

1. Do you think the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning has effectively advocated for stakeholder support for its recent public policies?

2. Could you please share with me, your thoughts on the ministry's approach to communicating with its stakeholder groups during public policy advocacy initiatives?

3. In your opinion, do you think the ministry’s strategies for communicating public policies to its stakeholder groups have always been effective?

4. Kindly share with me your opinion on the ministry's approach to managing public opinion and feedback on its public policy advocacy initiatives.

5. Could you please share with me any suggestion(s) for improvement on future public policy initiatives?

6. Would you recommend any form of research on this subject, and if so, which specific area(s) do you think need(s) further research for future policy consideration and operations?

THEME 2: C*hallenges encounter by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning in deploying PR for public policy advocacy.*

1. From your perspective, are there any challenges the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning faces in deploying PR for policy advocacy?

2. How do you view the effectiveness of information dissemination methods of the PR department of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning during a public policy advocacy?

3. In your opinion, are there some internal limitations that hinder the effective deployment of PR by the Ministry for public policy advocacy?

4. Could you kindly share with me, any experiences regarding the role of external factors that shape the Ministry's PR strategies for public policy advocacy?